

3. Athabasca

Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The Ukrainian settlement in the Athabasca area began in 1912. However, the organization of Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church only commenced after World War I, following a significant influx of settlers. By the late 1940s, Father W. Seneshen had begun visiting the community, conducting liturgies in a log chapel that was initially used by Athabasca's Anglican congregation. On June 24, 1951, an inaugural meeting was held after a church service. Members contributed six dollars each to support the priest and cover chapel rental costs. An executive committee was formed, and membership fees were set at \$1.50. Later that year, on November 1, the parish resolved to acquire land for building a church. A building fund was initiated, and each family was asked for a five-dollar voluntary donation.

By July 1952, the congregation had grown to 23 families and 17 individual members. They purchased three adjoining lots from the Town of Athabasca. Construction began in 1953 with the acquisition of materials. Henry Koffler was hired to build the basement for \$609.50. That same year, the congregation formally affiliated with the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada. The basement was completed in 1954. It was first used on August 1 for the wedding of Olia Kowalchuk and Peter Marchuk. Over the next decade, the basement served as the primary place of worship.

In 1957, the congregation requested to be included in the Lac La Biche parish district for convenience. However, this request was denied, and Athabasca remained under the care of clergy from Westlock. Despite this, the congregation contributed \$1,200 to build a manse in Westlock through installment payments over two years. By this time, the parish consisted of 15 families and 35 paid members.





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Encouraged by Father H. Udod in 1961, the congregation began constructing the upper sanctuary. Walter Gasiorek won the contract to frame the church for \$900. After completing the exterior, he received an additional \$400 to build the domes and commence interior work. Three domes were erected: two smaller ones flanking the façade and a larger central dome over the entrance. Volunteers played a key role in finishing the sanctuary, making gradual progress over five years. The exterior walls were stuccoed in 1964. By 1965, the upper-level subfloor and electrical work were completed.

In 1967, the congregation committed to completing the church's interior. Walter Gasiorek was contracted to build an ikonostas for \$90 plus materials. Women of the parish painted and decorated it. Additional work included installing ductwork, paneling, and ceiling tiles, with total costs reaching \$1,133.67. Volunteers, coordinated by Paul Krawec, installed pews purchased from the Roman Catholic Church for \$200. The sanctuary was consecrated on June 1, 1967, during a special Vespers service. The tabernacle and sacred items were transferred from the basement. The first Divine Liturgy in the upper sanctuary was celebrated on July 16, 1967, marking the Feast Day of Saints Peter and Paul, with over 70 people in attendance.

The congregation incorporated under the *Societies Act* in 1969. Documentation under the *Religious Societies Lands Act* was received in October 1971. In 1974, running water was installed in the basement, which was transformed into a multi-purpose hall with a kitchen and bathrooms. On July 12, 1975, Archbishop Andrew consecrated the church during a well-attended visitation. This also marked the final service of Father Kubin before his reassignment.

Membership remained stable through the 1970s but declined from 37 members in 1976

to 30 by 1980. In the late 1980s, the congregation undertook major renovations to commemorate the Millennium of Ukrainian Christianity. Improvements included re-shingling and repainting the church, insulating the structure, refinishing windows, and remodeling the choir loft. A new red carpet was laid, the pews were repainted, and the ikonostas was restored. These efforts culminated in 1989. That year, 14 liturgies were celebrated, and membership grew to 45 in 1990.

In 1990, the congregation marked the 100th anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada with further renovations to the basement hall. Despite delays caused by local opposition, the project was completed by fall 1991. It featured a new kitchen, bathrooms, and a northeast entrance. The church was re-stuccoed. A telephone and sound system were installed, donated in memory of Arsen Rys. Funding for these improvements came from a combination of Alberta government grants and member contributions.

To celebrate the Ukrainian Canadian Centennial in 1992, the congregation partnered with the Ukrainian Catholic Church to erect a memorial cairn at the site of the Immigration Hall. Over 500 people attended the dedication ceremony, that included a prayer service, dinner, and concert. Additional enhancements followed, including commissioning Marvin Dzenkiw in 1993 to paint icons of the twelve apostles for the ikonostas. Further improvements to the sanctuary and hall continued throughout the decade, supported by ongoing fundraising efforts.

By 1999, the congregation's membership had declined to 22 due to an aging population and smaller family sizes. Nevertheless, the parish remained dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the church. Projects included adding processional icon stands, constructing an oblation table, and installing extra pews.

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Priests

W. Senishen (1950–1955)
H. Wasyliv (1955–1957)
P. Blazuk (1957–1959)
H. Udod (1959–1960)
D. Denesiuk (1960–1962)
P. Zubrytsky (May–August 1962)
E. Stefaniuk (1962–1967)
S. Hredil (1967–1970)
L. Kubin (1970–1975, 1981–1982)
L. Diachina (1975–August 1979)
D. Maceluch (1979–1981)
S. Soroka (1982–1986)
H. Fil' (1986–2000)

Location and Feast Day

On the east side of the town of Athabasca, south of Secondary Highway 55, on the southwest corner of 43rd Street and 50th Avenue (approx. 4919-43 Street). *GPS Coordinates:* 54.721180, -113.273174 | Their *Feast Day* is July 12.

Founding Members

M. Fotty
M. Kowalchuk
P. Kowalchuk
W. Masciuch
G. Rosychuk
A. Wasylyk
K. Zaskewich

Notable Contributors

Fred Chrusch: Choir director and cantor (1966–1986)

Volodymyr Masciuch: Treasurer and secretary from the church's inception to 1986

Konrad Radomsky: Hospodar and cantor (1951–1962)



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