

33. Lac La Biche

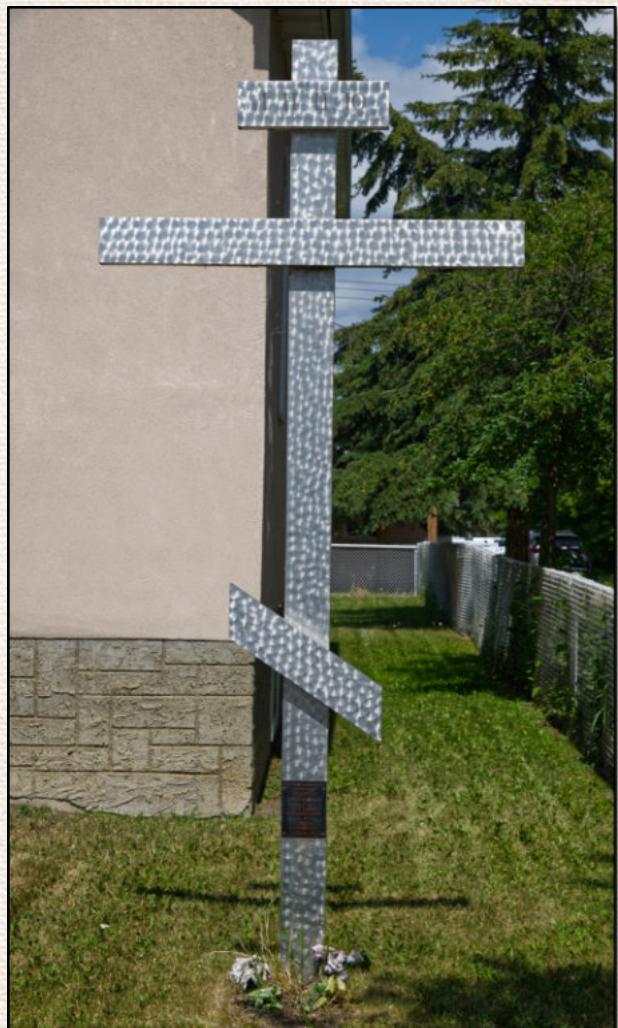
All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Ukrainian Orthodox priests first visited the Lac La Biche area in the early 1930s, with Fr. Semen Sawchuk conducting services as early as August 1939. During the 1940s, a few services were held in Lac La Biche at the local Anglican Church, which was rented for \$8 to host a Divine Liturgy celebrated by Fr. H. Wasyliv on September 2, 1951. It was during this time that the idea of building a church in the town likely took root.

A pivotal role in mobilizing the Orthodox community was played by the establishment of a branch of the Ukrainian Women's Association, initiated by Alice Gordichuk (originally from Willingdon) on October 13, 1951. On March 2, 1952, the loosely formed congregation elected its founding executive, comprising William Gordichuk, Fred Warawa, and Eli Tkachuk. The group then began recruiting additional members, initially gathering ten families to form the parish.

These early efforts gained momentum with the assignment of Fr. Petro Zubrytsky to serve north-central Alberta in 1952. It was decided that Fr. Zubrytsky would make his home in Lac La Biche while also tending to parishes in Craigend, Boyle, Noral, Sarrail, and Wandering River. Although there were initial plans to establish Boyle as the pastoral base, a meeting held in Lac La Biche on August 3, 1952, resulted in a resolution favoring Lac La Biche due to its better location and water system—a resource Boyle lacked.

A house on two acres of land was purchased for \$1,900 to serve as the manse, but the lack of water forced Fr. Zubrytsky to carry it by hand, even in extreme winter temperatures. Three years later, due to poor insulation and high maintenance costs, the house was sold at a \$200 profit. The parish district, established in 1952, purchased a second, more suitable house, which served as the manse until 1986.



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Building the Church

In 1954, Fr. Zubrytsky celebrated eleven services at the Lac La Biche Anglican Church, as the congregation did not yet have its own sanctuary. A committee had been formed in March 1953 to find an affordable lot for the church, and in early 1955, land was purchased from T. Cummings for \$1,200. A sod-turning ceremony took place on June 9, and construction began shortly after with the excavation of a full basement.

At a meeting on April 7, 1955, the congregation voted to incorporate under the charter of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC), officially joining three weeks later. The church was initially dedicated to St. Andrew, whose feast day is commemorated on December 13.

Construction progressed through the summer and fall, with Mike Petrowsky and John Seminowich serving as the main carpenters, supported by volunteers and hired labor. Building materials were both purchased and donated, and funds were raised through various means to cover expenses. The first liturgy was celebrated in the partially completed church in late November 1955, and it was used again for a funeral on December 2.

By February 1957, the interior was being finished with fir veneer, poplar plywood, and sky-blue ceiling paint. By the following year, St. Andrew's Church was essentially completed inside and out. Monthly liturgies were celebrated, and the congregation grew to about twenty families, though only a dozen paid memberships.

Community Growth & Rededication

Thanks to the generosity of the Women's Association, a chandelier, epistle books, and service books were acquired in April 1961. In 1962, sixty-five wooden chairs were purchased for over \$370, and the furnace was

converted from oil to natural gas. Mike Tkachuk of Edmonton built royal doors for the iconostasis for \$200, and in 1963, the Women's Auxiliary funded the acquisition of a Holy Shroud and marriage crowns.

The church was consecrated by Archbishop Andrew on June 9, 1963, exactly eight years after the sod-turning ceremony. Four priests participated in the hierarchical Divine Liturgy, accompanied by St. John's Cathedral choir from Edmonton. The celebration continued with lunch and a program at the old Town Hall.

Earlier that year, on January 2, 1963, the congregation voted to request Metropolitan Ilarion's permission to rededicate the church as All Saints. The change was motivated by the desire to hold the feast day during the early summer months when the weather was more favorable than in December.

By 1964, All Saints congregation had twenty-one members. As with many rural congregations, a dedicated core formed the backbone of the parish, while some families, though not official members, turned to the church for weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

Challenges and Renovations

The challenges faced by All Saints and other congregations in the Lac La Biche district intensified in the mid-1960s due to a shortage of priests. Fr. Stefaniuk, assigned to Lac La Biche, was also responsible for the Bonnyville Parish District. Although Bonnyville's vacancy was filled a year later, Fr. Stefaniuk was subsequently tasked with tending congregations in the Peace River area, requiring extensive travel on mostly gravel roads—sometimes exceeding 85,000 miles a year.

Despite these demands, progress continued in Lac La Biche. In 1965, Fr. Stefaniuk painted the church dome, and colored glass was

installed in the windows. Over the years, further improvements included stuccoing and painting the exterior, re-shingling the roof, and installing eaves and drainpipes. Electrical and heating systems were also upgraded.

During this time, Fr. Lorne Kubin wrote numerous icons for the church, while angels were painted on the ceiling, and a mosaic of Christ was hung over the main doors. Although the church basement had served as a parish hall since 1961, plumbing was only installed in 1968, and it was fully finished by 1972.

The availability of funds dictated the pace of these projects, but the Lac La Biche community continually pressed forward with the resources they could raise from members and sympathizers. In 1972, sixteen services were held at All Saints, making it the most active congregation in the Lac La Biche parish district. However, the district still struggled to meet financial commitments, a problem that worsened as the decade progressed.

Finding a capable and physically strong priest to meet the needs of the many congregations in the district was increasingly difficult. A significant blow came with the

untimely death of Fr. Danylo Maceluch during surgery, just a year after his assignment to Lac La Biche.

Later Years and Present Day

By the 1980s, All Saints, like most rural congregations, began to experience the effects of an aging and declining membership, along with a reduction in those fluent in the Ukrainian language. A letter to the Consistory in 1982 reported additional challenges, including frequent requests from Fort McMurray for their priest to celebrate Divine Liturgies there.

Despite these pressures, All Saints congregation found the means to repaint and re-varnish the church interior during the 1980s, largely due to the fundraising efforts of the Women's Association.

In 1994, All Saints reported twenty-seven members, comprising eleven families and five individuals. By this time, only the Women's Association maintained an active presence, but the faithful members of the congregation continued to support and care for their place of worship.



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Priests

P. Melnychuk (1942–1949?)
W. Melnychuk (1948–1951?)
H. Wasyliv (1951)
P. Zubrytsky (1952–1956)
A. Terenko (1956–1957)
H. Kryshtanowich (1957–1958)
M. Chomenko (Apr–Jun 1958)
M. Stetzenko (Jul 1958–Aug 1960)
M. Chomenko (1960–1961)
P. Zubrytsky (1961–1962)
E. Stefaniuk (1962–1967)
S. Hredil (1967–1970)
L. Kubin (1970–1975)
L. Diachina (1975–1979)
D. Maceluch (1979–1981)
L. Kubin (1981–1982)
S. Soroka (1982–1986)
H. Fil' (1986–2000)
M. Domaradz (2000–present)

Cemetery

The congregation uses a community cemetery for burials. Four acres of land were donated east of town in 1950 for a cemetery, but it has never been consecrated or used as an Orthodox cemetery. However, there are some older graves at this site. Some members of the congregation also use the St. Demetrious Cemetery in Craigend for family interments.



Location and Feast Day

In the Hamlet of Lac La Biche, at the northeast corner of 103 Street and 103 Avenue, Lac La Biche County. GPS Coordinates: 53.997944, -111.299021 Their *Feast Day* is celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost.

Founding Members

P. & Z. Ewanchuk	H. & A. Lobay
S. Ewanchuk	S. & A. Pawliuk
W. & Z. Gordichuk	B. & M. Salahub
B. & J. Greku	E. & D. Tkachuk
J. & P. Howirko	F. & M. Warawa

