

37. Musidora

Dormition of Saint Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The first attempts to organize a religious community in Musidora occurred between 1916 and 1920. Several meetings were held to establish a congregation, but activities remained informal, with services occasionally conducted at the homes of Safat Bikevich and Stefan Chanasyk. Local residents were divided in their loyalties—some preferred the Basilian Fathers based in Mundare, while others wanted clergy from the Russian Orthodox Mission.

On the initiative of Reverend Kryzanowski, a Catholic church was built on the farm of John Kolisniak. However, the majority of the Musidora faithful decided to sell this structure and pursue membership in the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church. Following this split, services were held at the residence of Wasyl Kolisniak or in the local National Hall, officiated by Reverend I. Kusey during occasional visits in 1926.

In 1928-1929, a sanctuary was finally constructed by volunteers working under the supervision of a carpenter, providing a permanent place of worship for the Orthodox faithful. Consecrated in the name of St. Mary, the church was initially served by Reverend Ivan Mayba. In early 1931, a request was made to the Consistory for incorporation under the UGOC charter. However, controversy erupted when some members insisted the parish remain independent due to lingering fears that the church might revert to Catholic control. Another concern was the ownership of the cemetery established in 1906 and blessed by Fr. Tymochko of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, which the congregation wanted to acquire legally.

It took more than four decades to resolve the incorporation issue. While the cemetery continued to be shared by Orthodox and Catholic believers, title ultimately passed to St. Mary's congregation.





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Struggles and Stabilization

From the mid-1930s to the outbreak of World War II, there were difficulties securing clergy to provide pastoral care. The construction of All Saints Greek Catholic Church in nearby Morecambe heightened concerns about losing members to the Ukrainian Catholics, emphasizing the need for a regular priest. Although the situation stabilized by 1940, new tensions arose in the late 1940s due to proselytizing efforts by the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1948, some Musidora members submitted another request to the Consistory for incorporation under the UGOC to ensure the church's allegiance. However, the petition was deemed unrepresentative as it indicated that most adherents were sympathetic to the Russian Orthodox Church. Despite this, UGOC priests faithfully served the congregation, officiating twelve liturgies in 1949.

By 1951, the Musidora congregation had eighteen members, and fifteen Divine Liturgies were celebrated at St. Mary's in 1952. Although the Myrnam district constructed a manse around this time, complications involving clergy assignments made 1952 somewhat unsettled. On July 20, 1953, St. Mary's hosted an evening prayer service with Metropolitan Ilarion, followed by a reception at the National Hall where the community was addressed by Fr. Ie. Hrycyna, head of the Consistory.

In spring 1954, relationships were strained by the executive's decision to charge one dollar per Divine Liturgy from each member, regardless of attendance. Members argued that the priest was being paid \$25 per visit, with no annual contributions collected for the Diocesan Fund or Consistory. Though not a formal membership fee, the levy was seen by eight adherents as arbitrary, prompting threats to join the church in Two Hills.

However, this misunderstanding appears to have resolved without serious consequences, as the congregation still reported nineteen members in 1955.

Between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, Musidora experienced a high point in its history, with membership peaking at 28 families. Reflecting this optimism, in 1959, the artist Wadym Dobrolige was commissioned to produce original icons for the iconostasis and decorate the church interior.

Decline and Attempts at Revival

Shortly afterward, the Musidora area experienced a population decline, naturally affecting St. Mary's. By 1970, the congregation reported just five member families and informed the Consistory that it had lost eight families to the Polish Roman Catholic Church due to the absence of a regular priest in the Myrnam district for much of the previous decade.

In 1974, two liturgies and a feast day service were celebrated at St. Mary's, but it was becoming increasingly clear that the church was no longer viable. The following year, Fr. P. Zubrytsky informed the Consistory that the congregation had ceased functioning, with members dispersing to Two Hills, Vegreville, and Edmonton. The ethnic composition of the rural population was also changing, as retiring Ukrainian farmers sold their land to non-Ukrainians, with their children showing little interest in agricultural careers.

In early 1976, a representative of the Musidora Chamber of Commerce inquired about purchasing the Ivan Kotliarewsky National Home, owned by St. Mary's parish. The few remaining members considered \$6,500 a fair price for the stone building, constructed from materials hauled by church members from surrounding farms. Concerns were

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expressed that the Chamber intended to acquire the hall for little or no money, having contributed nothing to either the church or the Kotliarewsky Society. The Consistory advised against rushing into a sale, suggesting that there was still a possibility the congregation could be revived.

However, on February 2, 1978, the Consistory was notified that a special meeting held on January 17 resolved to sell the church property for \$1,800. The proceeds were to be divided equally between the Consistory, St. Andrew's College, and the Two Hills Church, with \$300 set aside for cemetery upkeep. This decision was made due to the deteriorating

condition of the church, including a leaking roof and broken windows that allowed birds to nest and die inside the unused sanctuary.

These developments displeased the Consistory and galvanized support among local residents and former inhabitants now living in Two Hills and neighboring communities. Several dozen individuals signed a petition objecting to the sale of the church property to a private individual. Although Dobrolige's icons were preserved, his interior decorations were subsequently covered when the damaged church interior was renovated.



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Priests

I. Kusey (1926-1928)
I. Mayba (1928-1932)
T. Horbay (1932-1933)
D. Stratychuk (1933-1938)
I. Hykawy (1938-1940)
S. Symchych (1940-1943)
L. Diachina (1942-1946)
E. Shwetz (1946-1951)
M. Flak (1951-1952)
T. Horbay (1952)
S. Hredil (1952-1958)
M. Kryschuk (1958-1961)
A. Chrustawka (1961-)
D. Denesiuk (1966)
H. Wasyliw (?)
P. Hnatiw (1971-1972)
P. Zubrytsky (1972-)
No priests (1977-1981)
M. Sawchenko (1985-1994)
W. Sapiha (1994-present)

Cemetery

The church shares a cemetery with local Ukrainian Catholics, established southwest of the town site in 1907 at NW/SW 20-54-11 W4. The Alberta Genealogical Society identifies it as belonging to the Orthodox. *Cemetery Coordinates:* 53.67943, -111.59861



Location and Feast Day

East of Two Hills, on the west side of Musidora and north of Highway 45, at SE 29-54-11 W4, County of Two Hills. *GPS Coordinates:* 53.688421, -111.582769 Their *Feast Day* is August 28. The congregation also owns a community hall, managed by the Ukrainian Educational Society of Ivan Kotliarewsky of Musidora.

Founding Members

Ivan Bohaichuk
Fedir Humeniuk
Andrii Ilkiw
Ivan Ilkiw
Vasyl Kolisniak
Fedir Lyzanchuk



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