

40. Noral

Saint Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Ukrainian settlement in the Noral area began in 1933-1934, and by 1937, the need for a local cemetery became apparent. In December of that year, a meeting of area residents led to the formation of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Cemetery Corporation, with 18 members each contributing five cents toward purchasing land. Nick Koshman was elected president, and George Gordey served as secretary. In July 1938, a 1.6-acre parcel of land was generously donated by Mrs. Annie Krumpic. Fundraising efforts among 35 farming families raised \$39.15 to establish the cemetery, and many of these families became founding members of what would be officially designated as the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Mission of St. Mary the Protectress.

In 1939, while applying to register their cemetery with the Department of Lands and Mines, the congregation discovered the need to affiliate with a legally recognized church. A meeting held on December 5, 1938, resolved to adopt the charter and bylaws of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC), officially gaining admission in March 1939. The government then issued legal title to the cemetery property.

On August 4-5, 1939, Fr. Semen Sawchuk, head of the Consistory, visited the community along with Ivan Danylchuk of the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League. A Divine Liturgy was celebrated, followed by a luncheon where Mr. Danylchuk spoke on community matters. Fr. Sawchuk noted that the congregation, comprised of ten families, faced challenges including limited resources and some local residents with communist views. Despite these challenges, the congregation remained committed to developing their cemetery and establishing a place of worship.





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Establishment and Growth

In October 1939, it was discovered that the first burials had mistakenly occurred outside the legal cemetery boundaries. The congregation acquired an additional 0.4 acres in August 1940, bringing their total holdings to two acres. At the 1941 annual meeting, the congregation, with \$2.45 in cash on hand, resolved to charge \$5 for non-member burials and to build a small log church measuring 14' x 18' with a mudded and whitewashed interior. The surrounding grounds were ploughed and seeded with grass.

On September 11, 1944, Fr. H. Wasyliw baptized nine children following a Divine Liturgy held at the local school, as the log church was still under construction. By January 1945, members had donated lumber for the church ceiling, and laborers were paid 50 cents an hour for installation. Those unable to afford the \$5 annual membership fee could work off their dues through construction or cemetery maintenance. The completed sanctuary, resembling a pioneer cabin, was blessed at a Divine Liturgy on August 19, 1945, followed by a congregational dinner.

Over the next decade, the congregation beautified the humble church dedicated to St. Mary the Protectress. Anna Wolansky and Katie Kovaluk created banners and embroidered decorations, while fundraising efforts enabled the purchase of a cross for the church. The cemetery grounds were fenced, and railings were installed to hitch horses, still a common form of transportation.

Expansion and Changes

By 1955, it became clear that the congregation had outgrown their small church. Membership fees were increased to \$2 per family, and a new constitution was developed. In March 1957, the congregation decided to build a new sanctuary. At that time,

there were 17 members, but only four had paid their dues in full. Six services were celebrated at St. Mary's in 1957, increasing to eight in 1958. In preparation for the new church, building materials were gathered, and the women of the parish spearheaded fundraising efforts.

In 1958, the congregation wrote to the Consistory to inquire about changing the church's patron from St. Mary the Protectress to St. John the Baptist, whose feast day is on July 7. Throughout the 1960s to 1980s, correspondence referred to the church as St. John's, though the name reverted to St. Mary's around 1992.

Due to the centralization of rural school districts in the 1950s, the Noral school building—which had been used for early services—became available. Rather than build a new church, the congregation purchased and relocated the school to the church property in 1959. The first service in the new sanctuary was the funeral of Eli Cherniwchan. The teacherage was also moved to the cemetery for use as a parish hall, though this led to a court case requiring each member to contribute \$20 toward legal fees.

Despite legal challenges, the congregation continued improving their facilities. In 1960, members resolved to paint the church and finish the interior. While the exterior of the former schoolhouse remained largely unchanged, arched windows and a three-barred cross on the roof reflected its new role as a place of worship.

Modern Era and Challenges

In 1964, the congregation grew modestly, reporting a dozen members. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, they engaged in various activities, such as raising funds for the Bishop's residence in Edmonton and hosting bingo events for the Crippled Children's Fund.

However, the number of services declined, with only three liturgies requested by 1970. Despite the shrinking population, Christmas carolling and the annual feast day remained popular events.

Maintenance and renovation needs persisted. By 1972, the church floor required repairs, and by 1974, both the church and hall needed painting. The ladies of the congregation funded the paint, while volunteers tackled the project—despite being stung by bees nesting in the sanctuary's attic. This persistent bee problem earned Noral the reputation as the "sweetest little church" in the Lac La Biche Parish District.

The 1980 annual meeting saw membership fees rise to \$10 per family, and

the cost of burial plots for non-members set at \$100. The church required new heaters, ceiling repairs, chimney replacement, and additional cemetery fence work. By 1990, services were reduced to the Khram and provody, and burial fees for non-members increased to \$300. Around this time, the congregation resumed using the name St. Mary the Protectress.

In 1994, the congregation reported just two families and two individual members. Membership fees were raised to \$20 per family in 1995 to cover escalating insurance and maintenance costs. Despite these challenges, the small but dedicated membership of St. Mary the Protectress remains committed to maintaining their church, cemetery, and Ukrainian Orthodox traditions.



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Priests

H. Wasyliw (1937-1940, 1941-1945)
M. Fyk (1940-1942)
P. Melnychuk (1942-1949?)
W. Melnychuk (1948-1951?)
P. Zubrytsky (1952-1956, 1961-1962)
A. Teterenko (1956-1957)
H. Kryshtanowich (1957-1958)
M. Chomenko (April-June 1958, 1960-1961)
M. Stetzenko (1958-1960)
E. Stefaniuk (1962-1967)
S. Hredil' (1967-1970)
L. Kubin (1970-1975, 1981-1982)
L. Diachina (1975-1979)
D. Maceluch (1979-December 1981)
S. Soroka (1982-1986)
H. Fil' (1986-2000)
M. Domaradz (2000-present)

Cemetery

Established in 1937 at SW 18-65-16 W4. The first two burials of infants, occurred that year. As of 1998, there were 54 interments. *Cemetery coordinates:* 54.617192, -112.424790

Location and Feast Day

Southwest of Lac La Biche, between Venice and Caslan, near the junction of Secondary Highways 855 and 663, at SW 18-65-16 W4, Lac La Biche County. *GPS coordinates:* 54.617176, -112.424069
Their *Feast Day* is October 14.

Founding Members

A. & A. Cherniwchan
A. Danyluk
J. Gereliuk
M. Gursky
J. & M. Holosh
F. & K. Kadiuk
G. Kniazky
H. Kironda
P. & K. Korchawski
J. & M. Koshman
N. & V. Koshman
A. Kovaluk
B. & M. Krawchuk
V. & A. Krumpic
M. & J. Popovich
J. & K. Rosa
J. & M. Shelest
W. & M. Skoreyko



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