

61. Vegreville

Saint Vladimir Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Initially, supporters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Vegreville attended services at the Dormition of St. Mary Church in the Sich-Kolomea district, eight miles northeast of Mundare and nine miles northwest of Vegreville. However, the inconvenience of travel, particularly during harsh weather conditions, led to discussions about establishing a Ukrainian Orthodox congregation in Vegreville.

Although a Russo-Orthodox Church dedicated to St. John the Baptist was constructed in 1922-23, it failed to attract Ukrainian Orthodox adherents due to its Russophile orientation and Russian affiliation. Consequently, a meeting was held on March 8, 1928, at the home of William and Anna Pidruchney, where it was decided to form an Orthodox congregation in Vegreville. An interim executive was established, with Peter Svarich as President, William Pidruchney as Secretary, and William Kieryluk as Treasurer.

The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Rev. Ivan Mayba on March 31, 1928, at the Vegreville National Home (5146-51 Avenue). A formal general meeting followed on October 13, 1929, attended by thirty-four individuals, leading to the official establishment of the parish. Thirty-four members and eighteen families paid a \$5 membership fee, and fundraising began for the construction of a church.

Construction of the First Church (1935)

Two architectural designs were considered for the church. One was developed by Harry Osiecki, a renowned carpenter known for his mastery in crafting onion-shaped domes. He had previously worked on St. Mary's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Szypenitz (1913, 1917) and Holy Ascension Ukrainian Catholic Church in New Kiew (1918-19). However, Osiecki's struggles

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with alcoholism led to his eventual financial decline and, by his death in 1946, he was destitute.

The second design was created by John Svarich, an engineering graduate from the University of Alberta and brother of Peter Svarich. The congregation ultimately selected John Svarich's design due to lower costs, though Osiecki was initially contracted to oversee the construction. However, his alcohol dependency interfered with progress, and he was replaced by Stanley Bellegay, a former business partner familiar with Osiecki's craftsmanship.

Completed in 1935 at the southeast corner of 52 Street and 49 Avenue, the total cost amounted to \$3,582.68—a significant sum during the Great Depression. The ikonostasis was carved by Ivan Tkach of Smoky Lake.

In 1956, the church underwent expansion, with the nave width doubling and the apse being moved back 18 feet to accommodate a growing congregation.

Construction of the New Church (1973)

As Vegreville expanded in the 1960s, an influx of Ukrainian families from rural areas increased the Orthodox population. It was decided to build a larger, modern sanctuary immediately south of the original church, at 5146-48 Avenue. After a site blessing in 1972, construction began the following year.

On October 21, 1973, the final service was held at the old St. Vladimir's Church. In a solemn procession, parishioners carried banners, crosses, and sacred objects from the old sanctuary to the new one, with the priest bearing the chalice.

Not everyone agreed with the decision to move. Anna Pidruchney, a long-time member, expressed her disappointment in a 1977 letter to the Consistory, lamenting that the old church was being abandoned. She proposed purchasing and revitalizing the old church with a new congregation focused on preserving traditional values. However, the building remained unused until 1983, when it was relocated to the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village and restored to its pre-expansion dimensions. Today, it serves as a venue for weddings and special events.

Artistic Enhancements and the Ikonostasis

In the early 2000s, the congregation commissioned Polytako of Chernivtsi, Ukraine, to carve a new ikonostasis. His son, Deacon Nazar Polytako of Winnipeg, later adorned it with hand-painted icons.

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Priests

- I. Mayba (1928–1932)
- D. Stratychuk (1932–1938)
- L. Berezitsky (1938–1941)
- A. Sarmatiuk (1941–1942)
- A. Chrustawka (1943–1949)
- E. Ulan (1949–1952)
- M. Flak (1952–1955)
- S. Hrebeniuk (1955–1961)
- M. Kryschuk (1961–1969)
- G. Turzansky (1969–1978)
- J. Puk (1978–)
- E. Maximiuk

Location and Feast Day

5146-48 Avenue, Town of Vegreville, County of Minburn. *GPS Coordinates: 53.495498, -112.059188 | Their Feast Day is July 28.*

Founding Members

- W. Kieryluk
- W. Pidruchney
- A. Svarich
- P. Svarich
- W. Zaruby
- E. Zasybida

Cemetery

Located half a mile south of Highway 16, four miles west of Vegreville, at SW 32-52-15 W4. The congregation also maintains a section of the municipal cemetery.

Cemetery coordinates: 53.52804, -112.18853





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