Project Report for 2024-25

Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



By: Russell Sawchuk

Pioneer Churches on the Prairies | Steppingstones Partnership Inc. *Musica Ukraina*: Ukrainian Music Museum

> Edmonton, Alberta February 15, 2025

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1. Introduction

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing initiative to record, document and share information about the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The earliest immigrants arrived in the late 1890s, and continued to settle for decades afterwards. Due to declining rural populations, fewer members, and increasing costs, many of these parishes are closing. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these historic churches that played such an important role in the lives of these pioneers.

The long-term project objectives are to:

- 1. Capture, record and preserve high-quality, high-dynamic-range photographs and videos of these historic churches and their cemeteries. This is being done using the advanced technology of DJI drones and a Nikon camera. All images are shot in RAW for best quality and ease of processing. For each photo, the drones and cameras record data such as GPS location, date, time, camera settings etc.
- Research, record and preserve available historical information about each parish and its cemetery. In
 addition to providing photographs and videos of cemeteries, we are collaborating with
 https://findagrave.com to post our photos on their website. We also provide a link to the cemetery listed
 on *Find a Grave* website for data about all the people that are buried there.
- Find, digitize and share music and other audio relevant to this project. We have developed a
 sophisticated process to digitize and re-master old recordings of sacred, festive, and traditional Ukrainian
 music. The sacred music is being used as a background for each of the church videos.
- 4. Share, promote and inform the general public and our members about these important historic churches. This is being done by a dedicated website https://pioneerchurches.ca that has extensive photographs, videos, histories, cemetery information and a music library. We have also produced over 50 museum-quality canvas photographs of the churches. High-quality smaller photographs and church cards have been printed and are being offered to various organizations that have gift shops.
- 5. Ensure that this history of our pioneer churches is not forgotten, and will continue to be available for future generations. ALL of the resources developed by this project, including all of the images (original and edited), videos, histories and music are being made freely available, and without any restrictions, to sustainable organizations/institutions to preserve and share them in the future. Discussions are underway with various non-profit, religious, university and government organizations.



2. Project Components

2.1 Pioneer Churches website

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* website is the primary method for recording and sharing the images and histories of these historic churches. This site consists of the following components:

- Welcome page with a bulletin board and subscription form for our mailing list.
- A page for each church consisting of: (for a total of 118 churches)
 - o A video or photograph of that church (103 videos)
 - A short (or longer) history of the parish
 - Photograph of the cemetery (if applicable)
 - Link to the cemetery page on the Findagrave.com website
 - o Audio recordings of the appropriate Memory Eternal chant
 - Live GPS links to Google maps for the church and cemetery locations
 - o The affiliation of the church (UOC, UCC, OCA, RGO, Other).
- Photo galleries for each church categorized by denomination (3,675 photos).
- Some general video church tours (9 videos).
- Resources section containing: a) articles on parish security, disaster planning and more;
 b) clergy lists and contact information; c) links to other related websites and resources;
 and d) credits including audio recordings of music used for the videos.
- Contact form for inquires, comments and suggestions.
- Sections on About Us, Our Purpose, Terms of Use, Technology Tools and a link to our videos on Vimeo.

2.2 Musica Ukraina website

The Music Library was moved in 2024 from Pioneer Churches its own website at Musica-Ukraina.ca. (The following domain names have also been redirected to this site — MusicaUkraina.ca, UkrainianMusic.ca, and Ukrainian-Music.ca). This site consists of the following components:

- Welcome page with information about the website.
- Tabs for the different types of music and other resources:
 - Sacred and religious (25 albums)
 - Festive and seasonal (7 albums)
 - o Traditional Ukrainian (23 albums)
 - o Contemporary Ukrainian (29 albums)
 - Oldies Early Ukrainian Records
 - Other collections of Ukrainian music
 - o Resources Links to other Ukrainian music websites and resources
- Received donation of approximately 100 "priceless" Ukrainian 78s records (1913 to 1952)



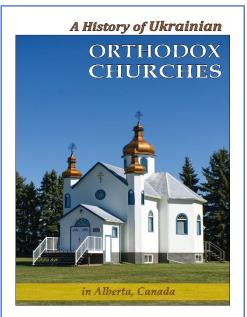
- Purchased and received donations of Ukrainian LPs and tape cassettes; have about 600 LP records and over 100 cassettes available for digitization.
- Invested in professional recording/playback devices, ultrasonic cleaning equipment, and software to enable best quality digitization and restoration.

2.3 History of Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in Alberta book

This component was added to ensure that the detailed histories of UOC parishes in Alberta are preserved and made available for future generations.

This "book" consists of the following components:

- Detailed histories of 70 Alberta Ukrainian
 Orthodox churches researched and documented
 by Jars Balan
- Multiple color photographs from the Pioneer Churches collection and images provided by other photographers for each church/cemetery
- Supplementary information (if available) about the founding members, clergy that served, cemetery information and location descriptions.
- The "book" will be available as an interactive PDF document, an eBook and/or printed versions (if funding is available).
- A few of the churches in this book still need to have drone photos taken.



The PDF and eBooks should be available by the end of March 2026. A sample of the eBook version is available at https://pioneerchurches.ca/book

2.4 Canvas prints

ecause the digital images are taken at high-resolution and high-dynamic-range (HDR), the printed photographs show exceptional detail and exhibit vibrant colors. We print many of the historic church photographs on large (24 x 36 inch) and medium (16 x24 inch) format canvas prints.

Once the canvas prints are received, they are further enhanced by adding a black foam core back. The prints are then treated with 2 to 3 coats of archival preservative that should extend their lifetime to about 200 years.

A label indicating the name of the church, when it was founded, the date the photograph was taken, the name of the photographer, and the GPS co-ordinates of the location, is affixed to the back of the print.

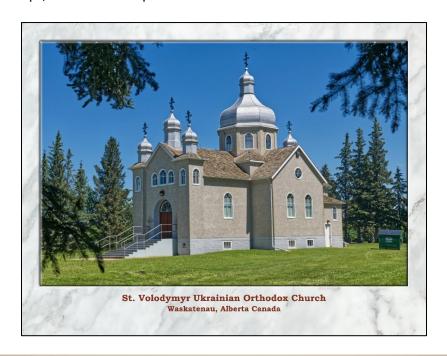
These photographs are used in our exhibits; are donated to clergy, parishes and museums; and sold to interested individuals.

2.5 Photographs

ot everyone wants, or has room for, the large canvas prints. Therefore, we print 8.5 x 11-inch photographs of many of the historic churches on vinyl photographic paper. These are attached to 9 x 12-inch black foam core board. A label with all of the same information as the canvas prints, is affixed to the back. These are packaged in a clear envelope for further protection.

In addition to individual photos, these images are also used to create poster boards with six photographs. Usually, posters contain churches from the same denomination. (See poster below).

These individual photos and the poster boards are used in our exhibits; are donated to parish and museum gift shops; and sold to the public.





2.6 Cards

The *Pioneer Churches* photos are used to create individual cards of the various churches. These cards contain a high-quality photograph of the church on the front, and the appropriate information on the back.

These cards are used in our exhibits; are donated to parishes and museum gift shops; and sold individually, or as a package.

Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Kahwin, Alberta CANADA Founded in 1932 Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada GPS Co-ordinates: 53.983992,-112.281533 PioneerChurches.ca



St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Egremont, Alberta CANADA Founded in 1939 Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada GPS Co-ordinates: 54.071060,-113.150709 PioneerChurches.ca





3. Churches Photographed in 2024

Some twenty (20) historic churches were photographed in 2024. All of these were added to the *Pioneer Churches* website. Videos were created for most of these churches and posted on the website, along with their histories and links to their cemeteries. Some 20 to 50 photographs of each church were added to their respective Photo Galleries.

The following seven (7) Ukrainian Orthodox churches were photographed in this phase of the project:

- Boyle Descent of the Holy Spirit Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Grassland Holy Transfiguration Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Onoway Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Radway Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church (100th anniversary, photo shown at right)
- Sarrail Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Thorhild Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Westlock St. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church



The following Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, while not yet photographed by us, were added to the website because their histories, along with a photo, were available:

- Athabasca Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Craigend St. Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Lac La Biche All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Newbrook St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Noral St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Richmond Park Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Sandy Rapids All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Slawa (North) All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Wandering River St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The following eight (8) *Ukrainian Catholic* Churches were photographed and added to the website.

- Borshchiw St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Cherhill Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Frains Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Holden Descent of the Holy Spirit Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Holden (Farms) St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Kopernick Ascension of our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Prosterity Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Tudor St. Michael Ukrainian Catholic Church (shown at right)



The following three (3) Russian Orthodox churches were photographed and added to the website.

- Boyle Holy Resurrection Russo Orthodox Church
- Thorsby Holy Trinity Whitsuntide Russo-Greek Orthodox Church
- Wildwood St. George Russian Orthodox Church

The following two (2) other churches were photographed and added to the website.

- Haight St. Anthony Roman Catholic Church
- Polska St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church (Polish)

4. Exhibits

Selected large canvas prints, posters and cards of historic churches in our collection were exhibited at the following events.

July 5-7, 2024	Ukrainian Pysanka Festival at Vegreville, Alberta					
Oct. 5, 2024	Ukrainian Showcase at Smoky Lake Ukrainian National Hall (Pumpkin Festival)					
Oct. 26/27 2024	Western Eparchy AGM and Sunday Liturgy at St. John's Cathedral (Edmonton)					
Jan. 9, 2025	Opening of exhibit and reception at <i>Ukrainian Council for Ukrainian Arts</i> (ACUA) gallery in Edmonton (see photo below).					
Feb. 7, 2025	Multimedia presentation at ACUA regarding project					
Feb. 22, 2025	End of Pioneer Churches Exhibit at ACUA					

For most of 2024, the Pioneer Churches canvas prints were on exhibit at St. Anthony's Church in the basement for viewing during Sunday fellowship, meetings, work bees, pyrohy dinners and bake sales.



5. Marketing and Promotion

The following activities and events were undertaken to make stakeholders, interested parties, and the general public aware of the *Pioneer Churches* and *Musica Ukraina* websites, exhibits, photographs and cards.

- **Ads** Purchased a full-page ad for one year about *Pioneer Churches* in *Promin* Magazine; purchased a one-page color ad for the Winter 2024-2025 edition of the *ACUAVITAE* magazine.
- **Canadian Orthodox History Project** This website has parish-submitted listings, descriptions and histories of Orthodox Churches in Canada. We noticed that some of our *Pioneer Churches* photos have been added to several of the parishes on that website.
- **Cards** Had free church cards available at all of our exhibits and events; several hundred cards have been distributed.
- **Donations** Cards, photos and canvas prints were donated to Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Radway for their 100th Anniversary celebration and for their fundraising. Donations and sales were made to St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Church to raise funds to rebuild their church that burned in June 2023. Canvas prints were donated to several other parishes.
- **Find a Grave website** The *Findagrave.com* website is a comprehensive world-wide database of cemeteries. This website has information and burials lists for all of the parishes on the *Pioneer Churches* website. We have links to *Findagrave.com*. We also contribute 3 to 4 of our church/cemetery photos to each of their cemetery listings.
- **Flyers** Prepared a one page-flyer on the *Pioneer Churches* project. These have been posted and are available at *St. Anthony's Parish*, *St. John's Parish*, and *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch). Flyers are also available at the Western Eparchy AGM meetings and at all of our exhibits.
- Links The following websites have links to our *PioneerChurches.ca* website: *Alberta Family Histories Society*, various *Facebook* pages, *County of Lamont, Storyphile*, *Ukrainian Canadian Genealogy*, *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch), and *Ukrainian Musicians Association*.



- **Logo** We held an international contest to create a logo for our new *Musica Ukraina* website. We got many excellent submissions and selected the best one.
- **Mailouts** We continue to sent out short updates on the *Pioneer Churches* project to two lists. The first was to the *Alberta Museums Association* members list (approximately 1,000). The second mailing was to our own compiled mailing list of about 130 individuals. These included clergy, members from various parishes, artists, photographers, government officials and selected museums.
- **Memberships** We are paid-up members of *Alberta Museums Association* (AMA), *Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts* (ACUA), *Ukrainian Museum of Canada*, and the *Drone Pilots Association of Canada* (DPAC).
- Merchandise Cards, photos and canvas prints are available to purchase at St. Anthony's Parish Gift Shop, the Ukrainian Museum of Canada (Alberta Branch), and the Romanian Orthodox Parish at Boian (for fundraising to replace their church that burned on June 6, 2023). These items are also available at ACUA.
- **Museums** Permanent display of several Pioneer Church photos are at the *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch) in Edmonton Alberta. Smaller photographs of Ukrainian Catholic churches were donated to the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League Museum in Edmonton.
- **SUCH** (Sustainable Ukrainian Canadian Heritage). SUCH is a multifaceted research and education program of the Kule Folklore Centre (University of Alberta) supported by the Peter Arabchuk Endowment Fund. SUCH has added all of the Pioneer Churches photos to their collections database.

Vimeo – All of our videos are hosted on our account with Vimeo (similar to YouTube, but NO ads). The videos are public, thereby allowing anyone to view our collection of historic church videos.

Websites – Our most powerful and successful marketing and promotional tool are our websites and its growing number of visitors. See Stats below.

Pioneer Churches

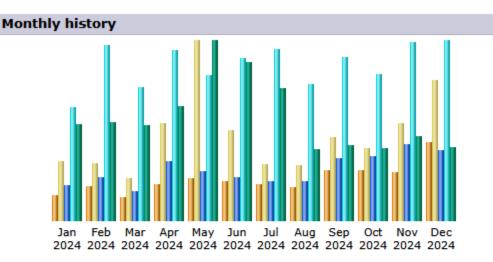
- 2023: Visitors=9,800 | visits=15,000 | pages=222,000
- 2024: Visitors=33,600 | visits=70,000 | pages=301,000
- 2025: Visitors=4,400 | visits=9,400 | pages=35,300 (January only)

Musica Ukraina

• Jun-Dec 2024: Visitors=6,100 | visits=8,700 | pages=86,800

All of the *Pioneer Churches* photographs and videos are indexed by Google in their images database, e.g. https://google.ca/images

A Google search for "pioneer churches" has our website in the first top 3 positions out of 9.5 million results. A search for any of the parishes listed on the *Pioneer Churches* website will generally be listed on the first page of Google results.



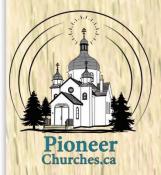
Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2024	1,696	4,008	17,452	55,482	11.48 GB
Feb 2024	2,355	3,870	21,218	85,959	11.71 GB
Mar 2024	1,553	2,829	14,437	65,355	11.34 GB
Apr 2024	2,436	6,539	29,126	83,657	13.59 GB
May 2024	2,876	12,118	24,373	71,297	21.42 GB
Jun 2024	2,684	6,121	21,132	79,446	18.89 GB
Jul 2024	2,428	3,774	19,490	84,274	15.82 GB
Aug 2024	2,262	3,727	19,273	66,904	8.51 GB
Sep 2024	3,405	5,622	30,500	80,183	9.04 GB
Oct 2024	3,397	4,900	31,587	72,037	8.67 GB
Nov 2024	3,257	6,531	37,673	87,264	10.01 GB
Dec 2024	5,299	9,436	34,719	88,224	8.77 GB
Total	33,648	69,475	300,980	920,082	149.23 GB

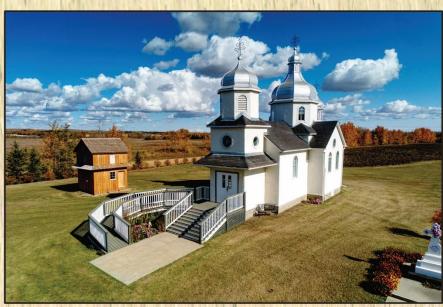
6. Appendices

6.1 Pioneer Churches Flyer / Brochure



Pioneer Churches on the Prairies





The Pioneer Churches on the Prairies is an ongoing project to record and document the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The first immigrants arrived in the late 1890s and continued to settle for decades afterwards.

So far, the project has recorded 118 churches and their cemeteries from six different denominations. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these beautiful and historic churches. Our dedicated project *Pioneer Churches* website has:

- Drone and regular high-resolution photographs of the churches and cemeteries
- Short descriptions and histories of the parishes and cemeteries
- Links to a cemetery website with listings of burials and information on the deceased
- Photo galleries with 3,675 images of 100 different churches and cemeteries
- Over 100 videos and video tours of most of the historic churches
- Digitized sacred, festive, traditional and folk Ukrainian music at Musica-Ukraina.ca
- Large canvas prints, framed photographs and cards of these churches are available.



Visit: PioneerChurches.ca

Financial support provided by: St. John's Legacy Foundation and SUS Foundation of Canada



Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



Churches.ca

The Pioneer Churches on the Prairies is an ongoing project to record and document the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The first immigrants arrived in the late 1890s and continued to settle for decades afterwards. So far, the project has recorded 92 churches and their cemeteries from six different denominations. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these beautiful historic churches.

Our dedicated project website has: High-resolution photos of each church and cemetery; descriptions and histories of the parishes and their cemeteries; photo galleries with over 3,000 images of 80 different churches and cemeteries; and, over 85 videos and video tours of most of the historic churches.

Visit our website, or join our mailing list, for the latest information on new additions and upcoming exhibits.







Musica Ukraina: Ukrainian Music Museum

Music was an important and integral part of the culture and lives of Ukrainian Canadian pioneers. The last century has seen the formation of hundreds of choirs and smaller vocal groups, dance and polka bands, and countless solo performers. Our digitized recordings are made for the historical preservation of the rich musical heritage of Ukrainian settlers in Canada during the period of 1891 to 2001. This is the music that they performed, wrote, danced and listened to. This music, and information about the many talented performers, must be preserved and made available / accessible to their descendants and future generations. All music tracks were digitally cleaned and enhanced to ensure best possible audio quality. Enjoy listening to this music on our clean, ads-free website.



Visit: MusicaUkraina.ca

St. John's Legacy Foundation and SUS Foundation of Canada



6.3 Mailouts

Pioneer Churches Update and Exhibition – Dec. 2024



From Pioneer Churches on the Prairies <russ@pioneerchurches.ca> on 2024-12-18 16:52



Details 🚯 Headers 📃 Plain text

Hi Rocky Sawbuck,

Project Updates

In 2024 we were able to get drone and regular photographs of an additional 18 churches and their cemeteries. These images and histories have been added to the Pioneer Churches website. We now have pages for a total of 118 churches. Our photo galleries consist of 3,675 images for 98 parishes. (We have not yet added any more videos; these will be done in early 2025). Please check out the new churches.



Photography Exhibit and Reception

Churches.ca Our Pioneer Churches photographs will be on exhibit at the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) Gallery from Jan. 9 to Feb. 22, 2025. The exhibition will consist of some 50 large canvas prints (24 x 36 inches) and about 60 framed photographs (12 x 15 inches). Small cards of all the churches will be available as well.

Join us for our opening reception at 6:00 pm on Thursday January 9, 2025. There will be a short presentation and entertainment.



Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church - Cherhill

Multimedia Presentation

Do you want to learn more about the Pioneer Churches on the Prairies project? There will be a lecture, demonstration and tour of our two websites - PioneerChurches.ca and Musica-Ukraina.ca on Friday, February 7, 2025 at 7:00 pm. The lecture is free, but registration is required. Both events will be held at ACUA at the following location.

Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts (ACUA)

10554 110 St NW Unit 100 Edmonton, AB T5H 3C5

780-488-8558 | Toll Free: 1-855-488-8558 info@acuarts.ca | https://acuarts.ca/

Ukrainian Carols

If you are longing to hear some great Ukrainian Christmas carols from the choirs of the past, go to Festive tab at our Musica Ukraina website. The music is free, clean with no ads.

We would like to wish you and your families a Merry blessed Christmas and a healthy, happy and successful 2025.

I look forward to seeing you at our exhibits and lecture. Thank you.

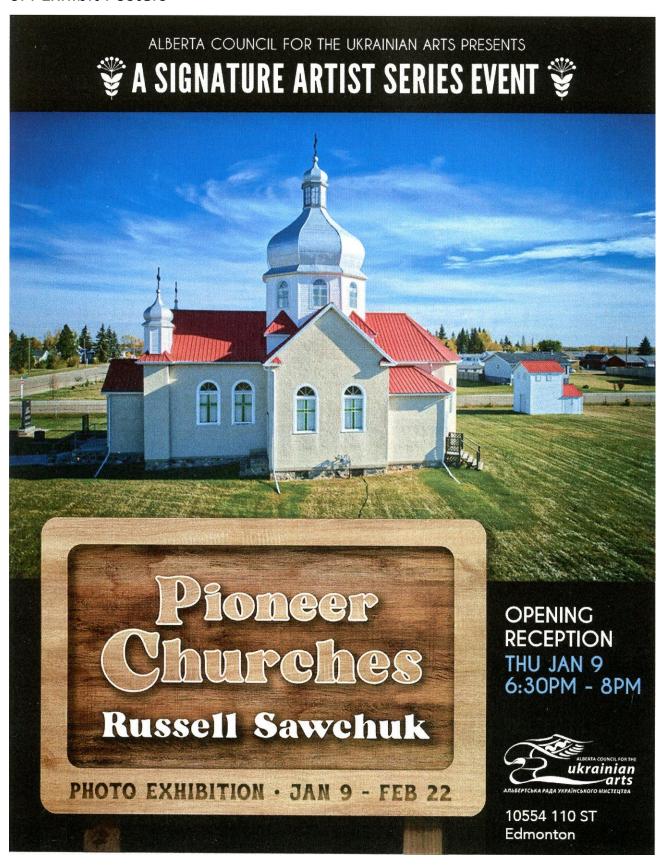
Russell Sawchuk

Pioneerchurches.ca | Steppingstones.ca | Musica-Ukraina.ca

Phone: 780-430-8245 | 800-267-9997 (Toll-free Canada and USA)

4111 - 149 ST NW | Edmonton. AB T6H 5L8





6.5 Photos of Exhibits

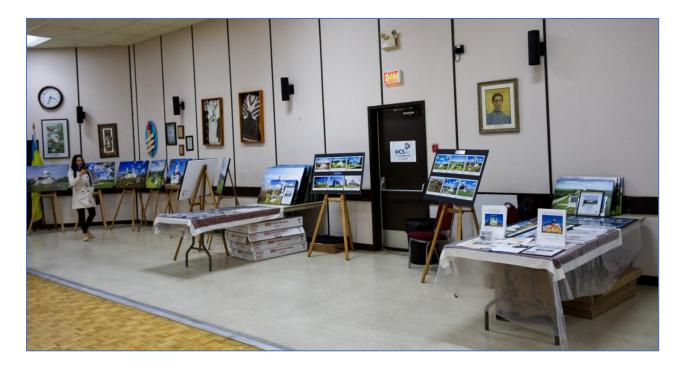
Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church at Radway 100th Celebration on July 28, 2024 (Reception in Redwater Hall following Hierarchical Divine Liturgy).





Ukrainian Showcase at the Smoky Lake Ukrainian National Hall on October 5, 2024 (during the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Festival).





Western Eparchy AGM and Sunday Liturgy at St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (Edmonton) on October 26/27, 2024.





Western Eparchy AGM and Sunday Liturgy at St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (Edmonton) on October 26/27, 2024.





Ukrainian Council for Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) opening reception for Pioneer Churches exhibit January 9, 2025.





Ukrainian Council for Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) opening reception for Pioneer Churches exhibit January 9, 2025.



