

# 26. Grassland

## Holy Transfiguration Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The area north of Boyle was settled by Ukrainian immigrants in the late 1920s. Among them supporters of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC). The first recorded Divine Liturgy in Grassland was celebrated by Rev. Petro Sametz, one of the founding fathers of the UGOC, on December 4, 1936. The next service took place on January 24, 1937, officiated by Fr. I. Hykawy. The third service was held on July 6, 1937, by Fr. D. Kisiliuk. However, there is little documented information on UGOC missionary activity in the area for the next fourteen years.

During this period, records indicate that Fathers H. Wasyliv, M. Fyk, and W. Melnychuk provided pastoral care to the faithful in Grassland, administering sacraments and celebrating occasional liturgies. In 1951, Fr. H. Wasyliv held a service on Holy Transfiguration Sunday, during which Fred Yakowchuk, a long-time activist and future parish president, began advocating for the construction of a church.

A significant event took place on August 19, 1952, when Metropolitan Ilarion officiated a Hierarchical Liturgy at Grassland's Anglican Church, followed by a dinner and program at a local hall. Divine Liturgies continued to be celebrated on the Feast of the Transfiguration, including one in 1952 led by Fr. P. Zubrytsky, who later provided eight services in the community in 1954. Other documented services were held on September 23, 1956 (Fr. A. Teterenko), September 21, 1957 (Fr. Kryshtanowych), and April 13, 1958 (Fr. M. Chomenko). During this time, the loosely organized congregation—part of the Lac La Biche parish district—gathered for services at private homes, Green Pine School, Spruce Valley Hall, or, when available, the Anglican Church.



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## Establishing the Church

Finally, with encouragement from Fr. Stetzenko, a founding meeting was held on November 12, 1958. At this meeting, an executive committee was formally elected to oversee the construction of a church. At the time, the congregation had just \$95.03 in its bank account. A decision was made to request permission from educational authorities to build a sanctuary on land west of the Grassland school.

On January 18, 1959, the annual meeting established building and financial committees, moving the project forward. By July 15, an acre of land was purchased from Mike Duniec for \$125. Official approval of the church plans was granted on August 11. The sanctuary, modeled after Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Thorhild (built in 1947), was designed to measure 50' by 28'.

Initially, construction encountered a setback when the foundation footings were mistakenly oriented north-south. Upon realizing that the altar should face east, the trenches were quickly re-dug before work continued. By July 19, the foundation was poured, and materials were assembled. Volunteers, under the supervision of chief carpenter Joe Romanyshyn, constructed the main structure. While construction progressed, fundraising efforts intensified, with women leading initiatives such as bingos, bazaars, catering events, special programs, and Christmas caroling.

## Completion and Dedication

In April 1960, the congregation reported having twelve families as members, totaling 46 people. Six additional families identified as sympathizers. Correspondence with the Consistory confirms that the church was dedicated to the Holy Transfiguration, likely inspired by the earlier pivotal services. By the

summer of 1960, the church was sufficiently completed for use. The first wedding held there on July 22. However, it took several more years of fundraising and skilled labor to fully finish the interior and exterior.

The church's façade was adorned with three domes—one large dome over the entryway and two smaller domes on corner columns. By 1964, the congregation had declined to nine members. Yet they remained dedicated to improving and beautifying their place of worship. Walter Gasiorek of Athabasca was commissioned to construct the iconostasis and three domes. They were added to a newly designed façade featuring two flanking towers and a central dome over the entrance.

Fr. Stefaniuk assisted with finishing details, while Fr. Kubin contributed his painting skills to the iconostasis. Additional improvements followed, including the installation of electricity, a gas furnace, and other modernizations. A legal mix-up in registering church property ownership was eventually resolved in 1973. By 1972, Grassland had become a key component of the Lac La Biche parish district, hosting eleven services per year.

During a visit by Archbishop Andrew on the parish feast day in 1973, Holy Transfiguration Church was formally consecrated with the assistance of Fathers L. Kubin, E. Stefaniuk, I. Kutash, and A. Chomiak. Another milestone was the June 18, 1988, commemoration of the Millennium of Christianity in Ukraine, marked by a hierarchical service celebrated by Metropolitan Wasyly and Rev. H. Fil'.

## Renovations and Maintenance

Over the years, numerous renovations have enhanced the church. Improvements include the installation of carpeting, the construction of a covered porch over the main entrance, and re-shingling of the roof. Rows of

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spruce trees were planted around the property, and gravel was spread in the churchyard to mitigate flooding issues.

In June 1995, a hailstorm damaged the newly installed vinyl siding, necessitating repairs. More recent upgrades include fencing around the churchyard, paving the area in front of the

church for year-round parking, and installing an open bell-stand near the entryway stairs. The front of the church is now marked by an outdoor cross on one side and an arched sign on the other. These reflect the congregation's continued care and dedication to their sacred space.

## Priests

P. Sametz (1936)  
I. Hykawy and D. Kisiliuk (1937)  
H. Wasyliv (1937–40)  
M. Fyk (c. 1940–1942)  
W. Melnychuk (1948–52)  
H. Wasyliv (1951)  
P. Zubrytsky (1952–56)  
A. Teterenko (1956–57)  
H. Krystanowich (1957–58)  
M. Chomenko (1958, 1960–61)  
M. Stetzenko (1958–60)  
E. Stefaniuk (1962–67)  
S. Hredil (1967–70)  
L. Kubin (1970–75, 1981–82)  
L. Diachina (1975–79)  
D. Maceluch (1979–81)  
S. Soroka (1982–86)  
H. Fil' (1986–2000)  
M. Domaradz (2000 –)

## Cemetery

Grassland Cemetery, north side of Highway 63, west of the church. Coordinates: 54.82046, -112.69755



## Location and Feast Day

**S**outh side of Highway 63 (Main Avenue), on the western approach to Grassland's commercial strip, County of Athabasca. *GPS Coordinates: 54.819872, -112.693623* Their *Feast Day* is August 19.

## Founding Members

The congregation was formally established in 1958 with the participation of the following individuals:

J. & E. Chromiak  
S. & O. Diatel  
M. & A. Dutchak  
A. & M. Hula  
J. & J. Kononchuk  
A. & S. Kopin  
A. O. Luchka  
O. Luchka  
M. & M. Medwid  
J. & V. Onischuk  
J. & M. Pretula  
W. & A. Pysyk  
J. & M. Romanyshyn  
D. A. Sadownik  
D. & M. Semeniuk  
J. & A. Shapka  
A. Swityk  
M. & P. Swityk  
P. & J. Sworin  
F. & A. Yakowchuk

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