

28. Innisfree

Saint John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The establishment of a parish in Innisfree was first discussed by area residents in November 1947. Congregational life was formally initiated on May 23, 1948, during a general meeting attended by Reverend A. Chrustawka, Mrs. A. Pidruchny, and lawyer John Decore, who was later elected as a Liberal Member of Parliament for the Vegreville constituency.

By September 1948, a lot was acquired for the church on the west side of the town center. Initially, the property was registered under the name of a parishioner until the congregation received official incorporation on November 27, 1948. With eighteen members, the congregation optimistically planned to begin construction the following year. In the meantime, services were held in private homes as fundraising efforts continued to finance the sanctuary.

Construction began in earnest in 1952. The members themselves undertook much of the labor, led by P. Harasym and the elderly I. Velychko. The first service was held in the partially completed sanctuary on the feast day of St. John the Baptist in 1953, with Rev. M. Flak officiating. The event drew many guests from neighboring communities, including Myrnam, Morecambe, Musidora, Two Hills, and Vegreville. The day was marked by tears of joy from the hardworking members of St. John's.

Growth and Challenges

In 1954, the congregation reported fourteen members and five sympathizers, hosting eleven liturgies. By the following year, membership had grown to eighteen, with eight sympathizers. However, the number of Divine Liturgies dropped to seven due to a shortage of priests. In 1956, a reorganization of rural districts assigned Innisfree

to the Vegreville parish, promising the restoration of monthly services.

The sanctuary was fully completed in 1962. At that time, the congregation had seventeen members and enjoyed monthly liturgies. For several years, the parish remained stable. However, by 1966, the congregation began experiencing difficulties in maintaining membership. The situation worsened, and by 1969, the parish had only nine paid members. Although the figure rose to fourteen members within two years, the long-term prospects remained uncertain due to the steady decline of rural communities.

Despite these challenges, the faithful members of St. John's persevered in keeping their parish alive. However, by the late 1980s, the congregation could no longer afford to pay its annual levy to the Consistory, as the small number of members struggled to meet the mounting costs of maintaining the church.



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Priests

- A. Chrustawka (1948)
- M. Flak (1951–1952)
- D. Seneta (dates unknown)
- D. Stratychuk (dates unknown)
- E. Ulan (dates unknown)
- E. Shwetz (1946–1948, dates uncertain)
- S. Hrebeniuk (1959–1961)
- M. Kryschuk (1962–1969)
- Y. Puk (1978–1988)
- E. Maximiuk (1997 –)

Location and Feast Day

In the town of Innisfree, on Highway 16, County of Minburn. *GPS Coordinates: 53.381473, -111.531492 | Their Feast Day is July 7.*

Founding Members

- P. Harasym
- M. Chanasiuk (or Khanasiuk)
- I. Bohaichuk
- I. Tanasichuk
- M. Wasyliw
- I. Velychko
- I. Harasym

