

29. Ispas

Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church

In 1903, a significant number of settlers from Ispas, Bukovyna, established homesteads in the hilly terrain northwest of present-day Two Hills. In 1906, a cemetery was founded on the site that would later host the Ispas church. Two years later, residents formally registered their parish as the “Orthodox Greek Catholic Congregation of Holy Ascension.” Father Jacob Korchinsky of the Russian Orthodox Church blessed the property, and initial services were held in the homes of parishioners.

Construction of a modest log church, later covered with siding, was completed in 1912. The sanctuary was consecrated under the name Holy Ascension. Furnishings were either donated by members or purchased with contributions.

For several decades, priests from the Russo Orthodox Mission served the church. However, on September 11, 1924, Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich celebrated a Divine Liturgy in the Ispas district during a visit to east-central Alberta. Subsequently, Ukrainian Orthodox priests provided pastoral care, including Rev. T. Horbay between 1933 and 1938. Members of the congregation also contributed to re-establishing the Holy Ghost parish in Brinsley after its original sanctuary was destroyed by fire in 1920 and rebuilt in 1924.

The Ispas congregation’s confessional identity was influenced by its diverse members, some of whom identified as Romanian. By the early 1940s, the church became predominantly served by Ukrainian Orthodox clergy, especially after Fr. A. Chrustawka joined the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC). The congregation formally ended its relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1960 and officially joined the UGOC in 1962.



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As the community grew, an addition was built to the original sanctuary, followed by a porch, evolving the structure into its current tripartite form. The sanctuary features a choir loft, an iconostasis adorned with holy images, and three domes on octagonal bases: one central dome and two smaller ones over the narthex and sanctuary. In 1930, artist Peter Lipinski created eight icons, seven of which are on the iconostasis.

The congregation's fortunes varied over the years. In 1965, active membership dwindled to

just five members. However, in 1967, the congregation purchased the former Ispas school and its three-acre property for \$250 to use as a parish hall. Renovations to the sanctuary occurred after 1972. By the late 1980s, membership increased to over twenty, despite many early settlers leaving the district. As of 2014, the church had ten members, with records of burials in the cemetery dating back to 1917 maintained by the current president, Morris Ewanchuk.

Priests

A. Pohrebniaik (ROC, 1916)
L. Gherman (ROC, 1918)
Gregory Soroka (ROC, 1918–1921)
Alexander Peza (ROC, 1921–1928)
I. Kusey (UGOC, 1924–1928)
Antonni Zimenoff (ROC, 1928–1936)
T. Horbay (UGOC, 1933–1938)
Ivan Kowalchuk (ROC, 1936–1960)
A. Chrustawka (1943–1949)
S. Symchych (1940–1944)
H. Wasyliv (1945–1951)
W. Melnychuk, H. Kryshtanowych, O. Ewanchuk, A. Teterenko (1957–1965)
P. Zubritsky (1965–1985)
M. Sawchenko (1985–1994)
W. Sapiha (1994 –)

Cemetery

Established in 1906 at NE 34-56-13 W4 (on the church property). The first burial was Gora Werstiuk.



Location and Feast Day

Northwest of Two Hills, at the northeast corner of the junction of Range Road 132 and Township Road 570 (NE 34-56-13 W4), County of Two Hills. *GPS Coordinates: 53.889293, -111.837428* Their *Feast Day* is celebrated on the Thursday of the fifth week after Easter.

Founding Members

Jura C. and Wasylyna Buzak
H. Buzak
H. Ewanchuk
N. Hawaleshka
Ivan Holowaychuk
Nick Holowaychuk
Prokip Klym
Jakiw Mynzak
Dmytro Pawliuk
Nikolai Pawluk
Mykhailo Severyn
Mykyta Severyn
Mikhailo Trufyn
Oleksa Yusep

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