

31. Kahwin

Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The origins of the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox congregation trace back to the late 1920s, stemming from a conflict within the Russian Greek Orthodox Church of Holy Trinity at nearby Sunland. Established in 1912, the Sunland church was built on ten acres of land purchased at NW 1-58-16 W4. Ivan (John) Mnoholitny, a local farmer and skilled carpenter, played a key role in its construction. In 1920, he was commissioned to build a hall and bell tower for \$350 and was later elected as the congregation's secretary in 1922.

By 1927-1928, a significant number of Sunland adherents sought to join the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada, which was attracting nationally conscious Orthodox believers uncomfortable with the pro-Russian orientation of their existing church. This division fractured the Bukovynian and Galician farmers who had homesteaded the area north of Andrew in the early 20th century, eventually leading to legal disputes over the ownership and affiliation of the Sunland church. The court ruled in favor of those loyal to Russian Orthodoxy. In response, the pro-Ukrainian group formed a Brotherhood in 1929, composed of nationally aware farmers from the Kahwin district.

The majority of the Holy Trinity congregation sided with the breakaway group. By 1928, membership in the Sunland church had fallen to eighteen from eighty-seven in 1920. The Brotherhood's first goal was to establish a new place of worship. Until then, services were held in private homes and rented community halls.

Establishment and Growth

In 1931, several acres of land were purchased for a cemetery and church, located one and a half miles southwest of the Sunland Holy Trinity





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Church. The graveyard had previously been established by the Presbyterian-backed Independent Church, which had an active congregation in the Kahwin district during the 1910s. There were also Independent groups in nearby Sniatyn, with the pastor based in Andrew.

At the time of the land acquisition, the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox congregation comprised twenty paid family members, totaling ninety-eight individuals. One of the church's founders was the twenty-year-old Ivan (John) Decore, who later served as a Liberal Member of Parliament for Vegreville in 1949 and 1953, and as Chief Judge of the District Court of Northern Alberta from 1965 to 1979. (Justice Decore was the father of the late Edmonton mayor and provincial Liberal leader, Laurence Decore.)

Construction of the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church began on June 7, 1932, under the direction of John Mnoholitny. The exterior was completed by July 26 of the same year. On August 21, 1932 (some sources cite September), Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich blessed the new church during his visitation to the community.

Tragically, the church was destroyed by a mysterious fire the following year, forcing the fledgling parish to rebuild. Undeterred, members began constructing a new church on July 21, 1934, again under the supervision of Ivan Mnoholitny. The second Holy Trinity Church was a cruciform structure topped by a central dome, with two cupolas flanking the facade. Its original exterior walls were covered with clapboard. Mnoholitny, who was responsible for building nineteen churches, was buried in Evergreen Cemetery following his death in 1962.

In 1938, a church choir was established under the leadership of N. Melnyk, who served as conductor for many years. The choir often

sang at services in neighboring churches, including Andrew, Sachava and Zawale.

Challenges and Resilience

In 1947 and 1948, the Kahwin congregation reported eleven registered family members and celebrated five liturgies in 1948. However, in April 1950, the church secretary wrote to the Consistory, expressing frustration that no services had taken place during Lent, and the priest had failed to perform the ritual blessing of Easter baskets as promised. Some parishioners sought the blessing from a Russian Orthodox priest, while others consumed their Easter meal without proper sanctification.

Despite these challenges, the congregation grew to fourteen families in 1951 and added two more the following year. In 1952, the church hosted eleven services. By 1955, seven liturgies and three feast day commemorations were held, with the congregation counting twenty-two paid members and approximately fifteen sympathizers. An article submitted to Winnipeg in the mid-1950s claimed that about seventy Orthodox families lived near the Kahwin sanctuary, indicating potential for further growth despite the general decline in rural population.

By the late 1950s, the church was hosting eight to ten services annually, with membership stable at nineteen. However, a shortage of priests meant that Kahwin, like many small congregations, struggled to arrange services regularly. In 1960, when the Willingdon-based priest could not celebrate the annual feast day, parishioners expressed their dissatisfaction to the Consistory, noting that some members had turned to the Russian cleric at Sunland for weddings and baptisms. These tensions eased when Ihumen Alexander Shcherban was assigned as the congregation's new pastor.

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Later Years and Decline

Under Father Shcherban's leadership, the congregation experienced several harmonious and productive years. In 1965, the congregation legally incorporated, further solidifying its presence. However, like many rural parishes, Holy Trinity faced declining membership as the population aged and young people moved to urban areas. By 1981, the church reported thirty individual members, but only six were active. By 1994, just six families remained, all in their seventies and eighties, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the church. Like many other rural churches in Alberta, Holy Trinity faces dim prospects for long-term survival.

Over the years, Holy Trinity underwent several renovations. During Andrew Andriuk's leadership, a basement was dug under the church, the exterior was stuccoed, and new asphalt shingles were installed on the roof. A storm porch was also added, enhancing the church's appearance. In 1960, the interior was remodeled, and a new iconostasis, crafted by William Sawchuk of Edmonton, was installed. The exterior was painted, and the roof reshingled. On August 20, 1972, Archbishop Andrew helped celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Kahwin Church.



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Priests

T. M. Kisiliuk (1929-1933)
T. Horbay (1933-1935)
I. Mayba (1935-1936)
D. Stratychuk (1936-1938)
I. Hykawy (1938-1940)
S. Symchych (1940-1944)
M. Fyk (1944-1945)
H. Wasyliw (1945-1950)
I. Triska (1950-1954)
D. Luchak (1954-1957)
S. Stolarchuk (1957-1960)
A. Shcherban (1960-1966)
I. Hykawy (1966-1969)
O. Olekshy (1969-1971)
P. Hnatiw (1971-1974)
S. Semotiuk (1974-1980)
S. Soroka (1980-1981)
P. Bodnar (1981-1982)
M. Bawa (1982-1984)
O. Hudema (1985-1987)
J. Puk (1988-1994)
B. Ambrosie (2003-present)

Cemetery

The cemetery is located on the same parcel of land as the church. The earliest burials date back to 1910. A notable controversy arose in 1947 when family members of two children buried in the cemetery sought to erect non-Christian monuments on their graves, sparking opposition from parishioners. The church executive consulted the Consistory, which advised seeking legal counsel on the matter. The final resolution of this conflict remains unknown.

Location and Feast Day

Two miles east and six miles north of the Village of Andrew, at SW 2-58-16 W4, County of Lamont. *GPS Coordinates:* 53.983992, -112.281533 | Their *Feast Day* is celebrated on Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter.

Founding Members

Ivan Decore
M. Krawchuk
Vasylyna Hushka
Dmytro Wasylyshyn
Akhtemii Melnychuk
Petro Shul'ko
Georgi Voliansky
P. Melnyk
Ivan Mnoholitny
Mikola Bidniak
Il'o Lopatka
A. Kulina
B. Mihai Shkraba
M. Ferbey
N. Voliansky
T. Voichuk
I. Kytso
T. Matichuk
V. Perepelytsky
Paraska Hunka
I. Ferbey



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