

34. Luzan

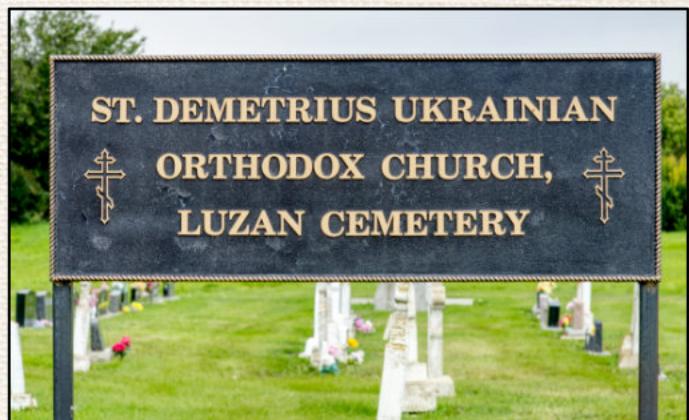
Saint Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Saint Demetrius (Dymytria) Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Luzan, originally identified as Soda Lake, traces its roots to the early Ukrainian settlers from Luzhany in Bukovyna. Early references to the church sometimes use the name “Old Pruth” to distinguish it from the nearby “New Pruth” Church, built in 1932. The Pruth (Prut) River, originating in the Carpathian Mountains, flows through Bukovyna, connecting the settlers to their homeland.

An organizational meeting was held in late 1904. By December of that year, a request, accompanied by a ten-dollar registration fee, was submitted to the federal government for a land grant to build a church and cemetery. Initially, in June 1905, the request was recommended for denial due to multiple submissions from the same area. However, on July 5, 1905, the Commissioner of Dominion Lands formally approved the grant, and petitioners Wasyl Makowichuk and Ivan Topechka were notified on July 18. The congregation began raising funds and hauling rocks and timber to the forty-acre site.

Construction of the log church, measuring 24 by 32 feet, began in 1906, with congregation members providing the labor. The cruciform structure featured a small dome over the sanctuary and an entryway on the south side, possibly added later. By 1908, doors and windows were installed, and the interior was partially completed, allowing the inaugural service to be held with Rev. L. Zubach of the Russian Orthodox Mission officiating.

The congregation applied for provincial incorporation on May 7, 1910, which was approved on May 18 under the name “The Ruthenian Greek Orthodox Church of Saint



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Dymytria" at Soda Lake. Between 1911 and 1912, a log belfry was constructed, siding was applied to the exterior, and additional interior improvements were made. As funds allowed, the church was painted inside, and an iconostasis was installed.

Religious Division and the Rise of Ukrainian Orthodoxy

Initially, the congregation was served by itinerant Russian Orthodox priests, but this arrangement became increasingly unsatisfactory for some members of St. Dymytria Church. In July 1920, Rev. D. Stratychuk, newly arrived from Saskatoon, was invited to celebrate a liturgy at St. Dymytria. His presence upset certain members who announced that no more Ukrainian services would be allowed, signaling a growing rift between those loyal to the Russian Orthodox Mission and those desiring affiliation with the newly created Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC).

The Russian clergy exacerbated tensions by denouncing the spread of Ukrainian national sentiment among Bukovynian settlers and criticizing Ukrainian institutions and the patriotic intelligentsia. Despite this, a general meeting was called, and a new executive was elected, resolving to obtain a Ukrainian priest. On February 12, 1921, Fr. Lazar Gherman and Fr. I. Kusey arrived to celebrate the Feast Day of the Three Saints. However, they were met at the sanctuary by a hostile group of Russophile parishioners who physically barred them from entering. The UGOC supporters, undeterred, held their liturgy at the local Soda Lake school.

Following this confrontation, the community's nationally conscious Ukrainian farmers formed the Yuri Fedkovych Society, dedicated to raising national awareness among Bukovynian settlers. The society built a hall one mile west of St. Dymytria Church, serving as a hub for cultural activities and a

temporary worship space for UGOC supporters until the Holy Ascension Church was built a decade later.

The elders of St. Dymytria responded by locking the church and prohibiting any further use by Ukrainian priests. Russian Orthodox clerics called a meeting to elect new trustees loyal to their mission. Fr. Kusey continued to visit the community, holding services in the homes of UGOC supporters. When Russophile members realized the Ukrainians were not openly challenging them, they reclaimed the sanctuary by breaking the lock while the head elder was away.

A final confrontation occurred on April 24, 1921, when Fr. P. Dovheiko, after celebrating Palm Sunday at the church, was confronted by UGOC supporters demanding that Fr. Kusey be allowed to serve. Fr. Dovheiko, a physically imposing former Kyiv police detective, managed to maintain control, celebrating Easter at the church the following week. Despite occasional acts of vandalism and continued tension, the Russian Orthodox maintained control over St. Dymytria Church.

In 1924, UGOC sympathizers pursued legal action to claim St. Dymytria but lost their case in a Vegreville court. By 1931, the Ukrainophile faction formally broke away, building Holy Ascension Church, known locally as the "New Pruth" Church, while St. Dymytria remained the "Old Pruth" Church.

Reconciliation and Growth

Over time, the rift in the community began to heal. In 1941, Rev. Ambrose Chrustawka's switch to the UGOC prompted many St. Dymytria parishioners to reconsider their allegiance. After considerable debate, the congregation requested that the UGOC's Rev. S. Symchych, based in Willingdon, provide pastoral care. The Consistory agreed, provided they would not be held responsible for any

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conflicts arising from the arrangement. This decision marked the gradual integration of St. Dymytria into the Ukrainian Orthodox fold.

By 1960, the congregation reported 66 families, totaling 211 individuals. Tragedy struck on December 5, 1961, when the original St. Dymytria Church was destroyed by fire. Undeterred, the congregation began rebuilding the following summer. A new, larger three-domed structure with a stucco exterior was completed on the same site and consecrated by Archbishop Andrew and Fr. O. Olekshy on November 8, 1970, the parish's feast day.

In 1966, the congregation officially became part of the Willingdon Parochial District, and the church's name was changed from the Ruthenian Greek Orthodox Church of St. Dymytria to St. Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Luzan).

Ongoing Development and Legacy

Over the years, various improvements were made to the church and its property. The old Pruth School was relocated to the site in the mid-1960s to serve as a parish hall. A new fence, entry gateway, and cemetery signage were installed, and the cemetery itself was landscaped. On June 26, 2005, a commemorative cairn and an unmarked graves marker were dedicated in the churchyard by Archbishop John in honor of Alberta's centennial.

A unique feature of the area was a small chapel or shrine on the southeast corner of the Wasyl Zelenko family farm, just east of the church. Built before 1920, the chapel was roughly 4' x 4' in size and 10' high, with a dome on top. It contained candles and icons and was reportedly still standing into the 1960s. Some of its remnants were later seen in a St. Albert museum.



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Founding Members

George & Zoyitsa Alexandriuk
Metro & Marafeta Alexandriuk
Petro & Domka Basaraba
John & Anna Boychuk
Nickolai & Raifta Chrapko
George & Lisavetta Demchuk
Michael & Lisavetta Demchuk
John & Anastasia Duger
Wasyl & Oliana Eliuk
Safron Eurchuk
John & Elena Ewaniuk
Simeon & Alaxani Ewaniuk
John & Anastasia Gordey
Ostafy & Anna Gordichuk
Ilia & Anna Hunka
John & Wasylyna Kalancha
Mafty & Annie Kalancha
Safroni & Maria Kozak
John & Staccia Kozniuk
Wasyl & Marafeta Kryklewetz
Wasyl & Paraskevia Labatiuk
John & Gafitza Lakusta
Michael & Warwara Lakusta
Semeon & Gafitza Lakusta
Nickolai & Maria Lazariuk
John E. & Domka Makowichuk
John J. & Warwara Makowichuk
Kost & Makrina Makowichuk
Wasyl & Eugenia Makowichuk
George & Likeria Melnychuk
Michael & Pasyna Mohyliuk
Tymofy & Elena Mohyliuk
John & Domka Oleniuk
Petro & Domka Olinek
Hryhory & Paraska Onyschuk
George & Ellina Popowich
John & Maria Ropchan
John & Marea Rubanski
Metro & Mary Sidor
Wasyl & Eudokia Sidor
Stefan & Domka Smilar
Stefan & Katerina Sorochan
Elias & Marafeta Tkachuk
Olexa & Nastasia Tkachuk
John & Saftena Topechka
John & Katerina Topilnisky
Wasyl & Eustenia Werenka
Metro & Irene Woroschuk

Location and Feast Day

Six and a half miles south of Willingdon, Sat SE 14-55-15 W4, County of Two Hills. *GPS Coordinates: 53.745932, -112.120832* Their *Feast Day* is Nov. 8.

Priests

ROC: L. Zubach (1908)
Fabion (1910)
P. Bozyk (1911–1916)
Dovheiko (1921)
Antonni Zimenoff (–1927)
A. Chrustawka (1927–1941)
UGOC: S. Symchych (1942 –1944)
M. Fyk (1944 –1945)
H. Wasyliw (1945 –1951)
I. Triska (1950 –1955)
D. Luchak (1955 –1957)
S. Stoliarchuk (1957 –1963)
M. Kolenych, I. Hykawy (1963 –1968)
O. Olekshy (1969 –1971)
P. Hnatiw (1971 –1974)
S. Semotiuk (1974 –1977)
S. Soroka (1977 –1980)
P. Bodnar (1980 –1982)
P. Zubrytsky, M. Bowa (1982 –1984)
O. Hudema (1984 –1988)
Y. Puk (1988 –1994)
J. Plewa (1995 – 2003)
B. Ambrosie (2003 – 2024)
E. Panchuk (2024 –)

Cemetery

The cemetery is located on a two-acre plot adjacent to the church.

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