

42. Oyen

Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The countryside around Oyen was settled by a diverse mix of Ukrainian immigrants from Bukovyna, Galicia, and Volhynia, who lived among other dryland farmers of various nationalities. The idea of establishing an Orthodox church in Oyen first surfaced in late 1948 when local Ukrainians informed Fr. Ivan Mayba of their intentions. A preliminary meeting took place on April 3, 1949, during which Mike Hanewich wrote to Winnipeg requesting documents from the Consistory to register a congregation and obtain a plan for building a church.

The formal organizational meeting was held on August 27, 1949, and a declaration of incorporation was notarized and filed with the Province of Alberta on October 14. The Certificate of Incorporation was issued on November 17, 1949. In a letter dated September 20, 1949, the church secretary, Mike Faichuk, informed the Consistory that the new congregation had 14 members and had dedicated their sanctuary to Saints Peter and Paul. About half of the members resided in town, while the rest were farmers from the surrounding district. That same year, the Ukrainian Catholics in Oyen also secured land for their place of worship on 5th Avenue, relocating and adapting a Roman Catholic church from Richdale.

By late fall of 1949, construction of the Orthodox church began on a lot donated by Mike Hanewich, a pioneer who settled in the Oyen district in 1912 and served as the congregation's first president. The Consistory had hoped that Fr. A. Novitsky would provide Paschal services to Oyen during Easter visitations to nearby Prelate and Eatonia in April 1950. However, the congregation responded that the church was not yet ready, and members traveled to neighboring

communities in Saskatchewan to have their baskets blessed.

A local history notes that the first service at Saints Peter and Paul was celebrated by Fr. I. Mayba (then living in Arran, Saskatchewan) on August 6, 1950. The first wedding held in the new church was that of Staffania Faichuk and Alex Hanewich on November 14, 1950. However, correspondence with the Consistory suggests that the "official" opening of the church, with Fr. Mayba performing the blessing, was scheduled for September 1950 but had to be postponed due to a polio outbreak in Oyen, Eatonia, and Kindersley.

By December 8, 1950, Mike Faichuk reported that two Divine Liturgies had been celebrated, though work on the sanctuary remained incomplete. Despite visits from Fr. Tarnaweczy from Kindersley, Saskatchewan in early 1951, the church was still not fully heated, prompting a request to postpone further services until spring.

Struggles for Pastoral Care

Although Fr. O. Flak was designated to provide pastoral care to Oyen in January 1952, his commitments to Calgary and Lethbridge meant his visits were irregular and mid-week. The congregation expressed dissatisfaction and pressed the Consistory for a priest who could offer at least one Sunday liturgy each month. In June 1952, Mike Faichuk warned that members might join the Ukrainian Catholic Church if better pastoral care wasn't provided. The Consistory pledged to address the issue but struggled due to a clergy shortage.

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On February 27, 1954, Philip Drewniak of Lanfine wrote to the Consistory, emphasizing the need for regular Sunday services to prevent the congregation from losing its youth and vitality. The Consistory suggested that Oyen partner with other Saskatchewan congregations to secure housing for a priest, but logistical and financial difficulties made this challenging.

By 1954, Fr. Michael Tarnowetsky, based in Saskatoon, began serving Oyen, increasing the number of liturgies. However, by March 1957, Mike Faichuk once again wrote to the Consistory requesting more dedicated pastoral care as the congregation continued to decline. Despite efforts to improve the situation, including proposals for housing priests in nearby towns, the congregation remained reliant on occasional visits from priests like Fr. Flak and Fr. Tarnowetsky.

Revival and Decline

In 1958, Fr. W. Senishen took over pastoral duties for Oyen while serving as rector of St. John's Institute in Edmonton. That year, he celebrated eight Divine Liturgies, and the energized congregation grew to 13 members. By 1959, Oyen hosted 11 services and contributed \$132 toward building an Episcopal residence in Edmonton.

However, in January 1960, the Consistory transferred Oyen back to the Saskatoon parish district due to Fr. Senishen's other commitments. Rev. E.T. Prystupa assumed pastoral duties in February 1960, reporting 14 member families and ten "sympathizers." Services remained steady for a time, but by 1963, Fr. I. Mayba's declining health caused disruptions. Membership halved by 1964, and the congregation faced difficulties securing consistent clergy.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, various priests, including Fr. O. Krawchenko and Fr. O. Olekshy, served Oyen intermittently. Despite the Consistory's efforts to provide pastoral care, the congregation struggled with an aging membership and declining attendance.

In 1974, the congregation considered disbanding or merging with Kindersley but ultimately rejected the idea due to travel difficulties. By 1976, Calgary had assumed responsibility for Oyen's pastoral care, maintaining occasional services.

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Priests

I. Mayba (1950)
M. Tarnowetsky (1951)
O. Flak (1952-1954)
M. Tarnowetsky (1954 -1957)
W. Senishen (1958 -1959)
E.T. Prystupa (1960 -1961)
M. Krytiuk (1961-1962?)
I. Mayba (1962 -1963)
P. Zmiyiwsky (1964)
M. Fyk (1964 -1966)
O. Krawchenko (1967 - 1971)
O. Olekshy (1971 - 1972)
H. Lakusta (1983 -1993)
T. Krochak (1993 - Oct 2001)
P. Powalinsky (Nov. 2001 -)

Location and Feast Day

Situated in the town of Oyen, on the southeast corner of 2nd Street East and 4th Avenue East, immediately west of the hospital, Municipal District of Acadia No. 34. *GPS coordinates: 51.351177, -110.480957* Their *Feast Day* is June 29.

Founding Members

M. Hanewich
J. Hanewich
M. Faichuk
H. Prysiazny

Cemetery

The first funeral service held in the church was for Stephen Kulyk of Cappon.

Cemetery coordinates: 51.351177, -110.480957

