

47. Richmond Park

Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a wave of Ukrainian immigrants from Volhynia and Galicia settled in the Richmond Park area north of the Athabasca River. Within a few years, these settlers recognized the urgent need for spiritual and cultural institutions. Infants required baptism, and the community sought to preserve Ukrainian traditions and values.

Among the pioneers was Fedor (Fred) Chrusch, a nationally conscious individual who spearheaded the establishment of a *Prosvita* enlightenment society in 1930. This organization included a choir and an amateur drama group. At the time, the community had about 20 Orthodox families, eight of whom supported the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church (UGOC), while the others aligned with the Russian Orthodox tradition. Ukrainian Catholics also resided in the area.

In 1931, Mr. Chrusch wrote to the UGOC Consistory requesting a priest for this remote settlement. His request was directed to Fr. Peter Sametz in Edmonton, who then dispatched Fr. Ivan Dmytriw to Richmond Park, as he was already tending to congregations in outlying districts around the provincial capital. On July 12, 1931, Fr. Dmytriw celebrated the first Divine Liturgy in Richmond Park in honor of the Feast Day of Saints Peter and Paul. He also christened several children, leaving a strong impression on the attendees. He returned twice more, but his transfer to Saskatchewan the following summer left the community without Orthodox leadership.

Competing Religious Influences

In 1932, Fr. Josaphat Tymochko from the Basilian Fathers Monastery in Mundare was invited to Richmond Park to celebrate a liturgy and baptize infants. His visit, either by invitation or personal initiative, sought to integrate

Orthodox families into the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Around the same time, Russian Orthodox priest Fr. Andrew Kokolsky filed a homestead claim in nearby Laura Park, making periodic visits to serve Orthodox adherents. He continued ministering in the area until the late 1940s, conducting services in Richmond Park School until 1937, when the community built the non-denominational *Narodnyi Dim*, largely due to the efforts of Fedor Chrusch.

The Great Depression exacerbated the difficulty of establishing an Orthodox church. The UGOC congregation was small, priests were scarce, and financial constraints were severe. While Fr. Kokolsky managed to establish a shared Orthodox-Catholic cemetery, he was unable to mobilize his followers to build a separate place of worship.

In 1950, Fred Chrusch reigned Orthodox efforts by inviting Fr. Wasyl Melnychuk to serve Richmond Park from Boyle. The following year, Fr. Wasyl Senishen, rector of St. John's Institute, began officiating services more regularly. On February 8, 1953, after a Divine Liturgy, he convened a meeting to formally organize the congregation under the UGOC. Paul Krawec was elected president, and Fedor Chrusch became secretary-treasurer. Membership dues were set at \$2, and the congregation agreed to pay Fr. Senishen a \$20 honorarium per service.

By 1953, eight liturgies had been celebrated, decreasing to five in 1954 but rising again to six in 1955 under the pastoral care of Fr. Zubrytsky (Lac La Biche) and Fr. Blazuk (Westlock). Recognizing the inadequacy of the *Narodnyi Dim* for religious functions, the congregation began considering building a dedicated church.

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Construction of Holy Trinity Church

At a general meeting on November 11, 1956, members discussed the feasibility of building a church, despite limited funds. Within weeks, negotiations commenced for land donations from the *Prosvita* Association and a purchase from Mike Bodnar. On February 20, 1957, the congregation resolved to proceed, obtaining a timber permit from the government. The following month, volunteers harvested wood, sawed it at local mills, and hauled it to the building site.

On April 15, 1957, *Prosvita* transferred one acre of land to the church, while another was purchased from Mike Bodnar for \$10. Construction began in June 1957 and continued through 1958, with voluntary labor and donations funding progress. Materials from Holy Trinity Church in Calmar, including windows, doors, a furnace, and a dome cross, were incorporated into the new structure.

In August 1958, Walter Klak was hired to construct the large central dome, which volunteers later sheathed and topped with the salvaged Calmar cross. Over the winter of 1959, wood was cut for finishing touches, and the dome was clad by John Shalapay for \$1.50 per hour. Fundraising efforts included barn dances at Alex and Millie Krawec's farm.

By 1960, the roof was shingled, windows and doors installed, and the exterior wrapped in stucco. Services continued in the *Narodnyi Dim* until 1962, when the first Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the completed Holy Trinity Church on August 12. The following year, the congregation marked their first *khram* in the new sanctuary. Walter Gasiorek was commissioned to build an iconostasis, which was installed in 1964, along with plywood flooring.

In late 1965, Walter Burak was contracted to paint icons for the iconostasis for \$800, but

after numerous delays, he completed only four pieces. In 1967, another artist, Mr. Bartoschuk from Winnipeg, was hired to complete 18 additional icons for \$600. The final interior beautification efforts culminated in the church's official consecration on June 17, 1967, during a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy officiated by Bishop Andrew.

Later Years and Decline

In November 1966, Holy Trinity was transferred from the Westlock Parish District to the Lac La Biche Parish District. Although initially met with some resistance, the congregation adapted to the change. Services remained consistent, averaging 7–8 annually until 1987. However, as older members moved to town and youth became scarce, sustaining the church became increasingly difficult.

By 1988, it was decided to wind down operations and place Holy Trinity under the care of Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Athabasca, where many former members had relocated. Though occasional services continue at Richmond Park, the congregation effectively merged with the Athabasca parish.



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Priests

- I. Dmytriw (1931)
- J. Tymochko (1932)
- A. Kokolsky (1933-1950)
- W. Melnychuk (1950)
- W. Senishen (1951-1955)
- P. Zubrytsky (1955)
- P. Blazuk (1955-1959)
- H. Wasyliv (1956)
- M. Stetzenko (1959)
- H. Udod (1959-1960)
- D. Denesiuk (1960-1962)
- S. Sass (1962)
- I. Melnyk (1962-1963)
- W. Melnychuk (1963-1966)
- E. Stefaniuk (1966-1967)
- S. Hredil (1967-1970)
- I. Stus (1970-1972)
- L. Kubin (1973-1975)
- L. Diachina (1975-1978)
- V. Lakusta (1979)
- D. Maceliuch (1979-1981)
- S. Soroka (1982-1986)
- H. Fil (1986-2000)
- M. Domaradz (2000-)



Location and Feast Day

Richmond Park, north of Athabasca, east of Secondary Highway 813, County of Athabasca. *GPS Coordinates: 54.907273, -113.207698* | Their *Feast Day* is on Pentecost, fifty days after Easter.

Founding Members

- M. Babie Sr.
- F. Chrusch
- A. Krawec
- P. Krawec
- J. Shalapay
- V. Wolanuk
- A. Wolchansky



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