



6. Bonnyville

Saint Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church

In 1959, members of St. John the Baptist Church in Big Meadow, along with residents from Bonnyville and surrounding communities, began planning to establish a new Ukrainian Orthodox congregation in Bonnyville. As the farming population in rural areas declined and urban centers grew, Bonnyville emerged as a regional hub, reflecting broader changes in rural Alberta.

Initial discussions led to a founding meeting at the Huren family home in Bonnyville. Father P. Dorosh-Zmiyivsky and members of the Big Meadow congregation attended. They formed an executive and a building committee to guide the establishment of a new church. At an annual meeting in Big Meadow on December 4, 1959, the St. John's executive allocated funds raised from Christmas caroling to the Bonnyville project. They believed the older, smaller church at Big Meadow had limited prospects for growth.

However, this decision proved controversial. On January 17, 1960, an extraordinary meeting replaced the original St. John's executive with new members. The incoming group accused their predecessors of neglecting their duties by trying to serve two congregations simultaneously. Allegations arose that funds from caroling and hall rentals had been used for Bonnyville without proper approval. Despite these disputes, the Bonnyville group separated from Big Meadow and chose St. Elias as the patron saint of their new congregation.

On February 7, 1960, the newly formed Bonnyville parish purchased a two-acre parcel of land. Later that year, they celebrated their first feast day service. At the time, the St. Elias congregation had 14 members, many of whom were also members of St. John's Church. To register their land with provincial authorities, the



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congregation incorporated under the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC) charter on August 5, 1961. They were officially admitted in November of that year.

Construction of a two-domed sanctuary began in the spring of 1961. By April 30, 1962, the church was ready to be blessed and became a regular place of worship. Although tensions between Bonnyville and Big Meadow persisted for years, the two congregations, sharing clergy and a district, eventually found ways to cooperate. Over time, these early conflicts faded into memory.

By 1964, Bonnyville replaced Glendon as the preferred base for clergy serving the northeast Alberta congregations. A new manse was built in Bonnyville with funds raised from all the district's congregations. In 1965, the Bonnyville parish district secured a ten-year lease on a church camp property at Moose Lake. This reflected a growing optimism among Ukrainian Orthodox adherents in the region.

The church experienced stability during the late 1960s. However, in 1970, unsettled pastoral leadership created challenges. For two years, the district was served from Smoky Lake

by Father Kubin, while the Bonnyville manse was rented out. Improvements came with Father Semotiuk's appointment in 1972. However, district reorganization added new congregations, increasing administrative complexity. By the end of 1973, the district's combined membership was approximately 60, making it difficult to sustain a resident clergy.

Despite these challenges, St. Elias and its sister congregations—Big Meadow, Gifford, Glendon, Sandy Rapids, and St. Paul—formed a viable district by 1978. Membership at Bonnyville grew to 16 by 1984. However, financial difficulties persisted, as many parishioners were pensioners on fixed incomes. In 1988, the Bonnyville and District Council sold the parish manse for \$69,000. The funds were redirected to build a residence in St. Paul for Father Hohol. This marked Bonnyville's transition from district seat, a role it had assumed two decades earlier.

Despite this change, St. Elias continued to thrive. By 1994, the congregation reported 40 members—15 families and 10 individuals. This growth reflected its resilience and ability to adapt to changing circumstances.



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Priests

P. Dorosh-Zmiyiwsky (1959–1961)
J. Vitenko (1961–1962)
P. Zubrytsky (1962–1963)
E. Stefaniuk (1963–1964)
O. Sorochuk (1964–1970)
L. Kubin (1970–1972)
S. Semotiuk (1972–1974)
S. Shcherban (1972–1975)
A. Chrustawka (1975–1978)
L. Kubin (1978–1979)
M. Sawchenko (1979–1985)
D. Hohol (1985–1994)
J. Lipinski (1994–present)

Cemetery

GPS Coordinates: 54.32647, -110.48105

Location and Feast Day

Town of Bonnyville, 4801-46 Street,
Municipal District of Bonnyville. *GPS*
Coordinates: 54.266138, -110.729885 | Their
Feast Day is August 2.

Founding Members

M. Boychuk
I. Chubey
M. Fediuk
K. Hordynsky
Y. Hodskal
Volodymyr Hudyma
Wasył Hudyma
A. Kril
K. Lakhovetsky
M. Lutsiw
O. Moskaliuk
I. Nykula
M. Ogrydiuk
N. Ulanysky

