

Annual Project Report: 2023

Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



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[Pioneer Churches on the Prairies](#) | [Steppingstones Partnership Inc.](#)

Edmonton, Alberta

May 1, 2024

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1. Introduction

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing initiative to record, document and share information about the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The earliest immigrants arrived in the late 1890s, and continued to settle for decades afterwards. Due to declining rural populations, fewer members, and increasing costs, many of these parishes are closing. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these historic churches that played such an important role in the lives of our ancestors.

The long-term project objectives are to:

1. Capture, record and preserve high-quality, high-dynamic-range (HDR) photographs and videos of these historic churches and their cemeteries. This is being done using the advanced technology of DJI drones and a Nikon camera. All images are shot in RAW for best quality and ease of processing. For each photo, the drones and cameras record data such as GPS location, date, time, camera settings etc.
2. Research, record and preserve available historical information about each parish and its cemetery. In addition to providing photographs and videos of cemeteries, we are collaborating with <https://findagrave.com> to post our photos on their website. We also provide a link to the cemetery listed on *Find a Grave* website for data about the people that are buried there.
3. Find, digitize and share music and other audio relevant to this project. We have developed a sophisticated process to digitize and re-master old recordings of sacred, festive, and traditional Ukrainian music. The sacred music is being used as a background for each of the church videos.
4. Share, promote and inform the general public and our members about these important historic churches. This is being done by a dedicated website – <https://pioneerchurches.ca> that has extensive photographs, videos, histories, cemetery information and a music library. We have also produced several dozen museum-quality canvas photographs of the churches. High-quality smaller photographs and church cards have been printed and are being offered to various organizations, parishes and individuals.
5. Ensure that this history of our pioneer churches is not forgotten, and will continue to be available for future generations. ALL of the resources developed by this project, including all of the images (original and edited), videos, histories and music are being made freely available, and without any restrictions, to sustainable organizations/institutions to preserve and share them in the future. Discussions are continuing with various non-profit, religious, university and government organizations.



2. Project Components

2.1 Website

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is the primary method for recording and sharing the images and histories of these historic churches. The website consists of the following components:

- Welcome page with a bulletin board and subscription form for our mailing list.
- A page for each church consisting of: (for a total of 92 churches)
 - A video or photograph of that church (85 videos)
 - A short (or longer) history of the parish
 - Photographs of the cemetery (if applicable)
 - Link to the cemetery page on the *Findagrave.com* website
 - Audio recordings of the appropriate *Memory Eternal* chant
 - Live GPS links to Google maps for the church and cemetery locations
 - The affiliation of the church (UOC, UCC, OCA, RGO, Other).
- Photo galleries for each church and its cemetery categorized by denomination (3,000+ photos).
- Some general video church tours (9 videos).
- A Music Library consisting of digitized sacred (23 albums), festive (8 albums), traditional Ukrainian music (22 albums) and Ukrainian bands (29 albums).
- Resources section containing: a) articles on parish security, disaster planning and more; b) clergy lists and contact information; c) links to other related websites and resources; and d) credits including audio recordings of music used for the videos.
- Contact form for inquires, comments and suggestions.
- Sections on *About Us*, *Our Purpose*, *Terms of Use*, *Technology Tools* and a link to our videos on Vimeo.

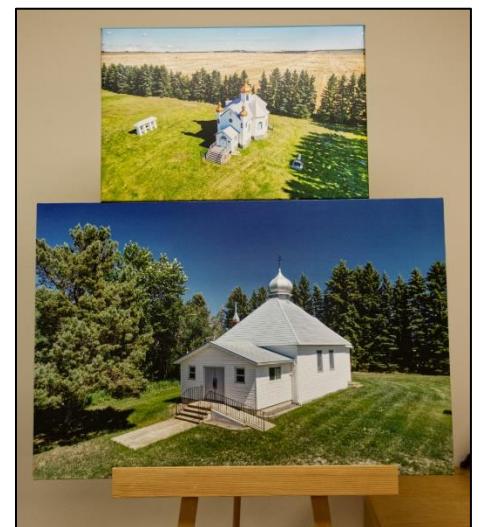
2.2 Canvas prints

Because the digital images are taken in high-resolution and high-dynamic-range (HDR), the printed photographs show exceptional detail and exhibit very vibrant colors. We print many of the historic church photographs on large (24 x 36 inch) and medium (16 x 24 inch) format canvas prints.

Once the canvas prints are received, they are further enhanced by adding a black foam core back. The prints are then treated with 2 to 3 coats of archival preservative that should extend their lifetime to about 200 years.

A label indicating the name of the church, when it was founded, the date the photograph was taken, the name of the photographer, and the GPS co-ordinates of its location, is affixed to the back of the print.

These photographs are used in our exhibits; are donated to clergy and museums; and sold to interested individuals.

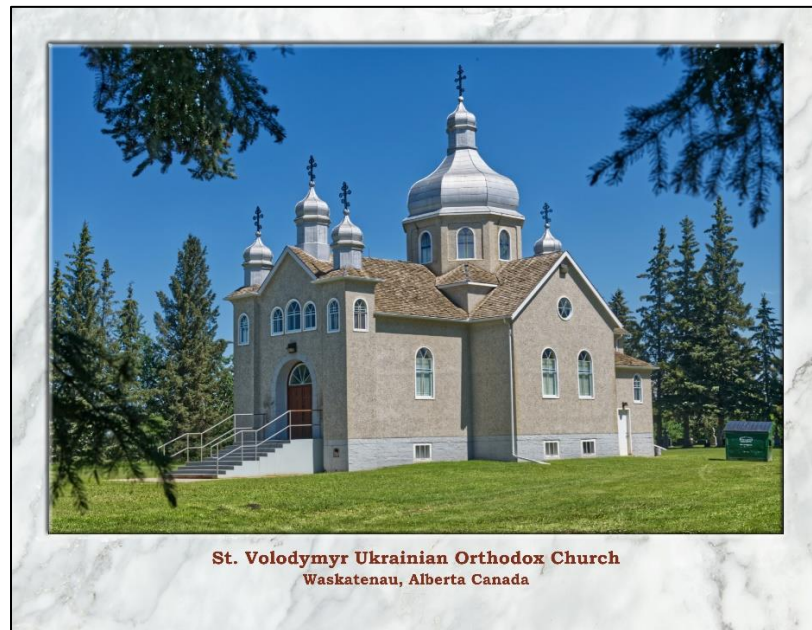


2.3 Photographs

Not everyone wants, or has room for, the large canvas prints. Therefore, we print 8.5 x 11-inch photographs of many of the historic churches on vinyl photographic paper. These are attached to 9 x 12-inch black foam core board. A label with all of the same information as the canvas prints, is affixed to the back. These are packaged in a clear envelope for further protection.

In addition to individual photos, these images are also used to create poster boards with six photographs. Usually, posters contain churches from the same denomination. (*See poster below*).

These individual photos and the poster boards are used in our exhibits; are donated to parishes and museum gift shops; and sold to the public.



2.4 Cards

The *Pioneer Churches* photos are used to create individual cards of the various churches. These cards contain a high-quality photograph of the church on the front, and the appropriate information on the back.

These cards are used in our exhibits; are donated to parishes and museum gift shops; and sold individually, or as a package.

Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Kahwin, Alberta CANADA
Founded in 1932
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada
GPS Co-ordinates: 53.983992, -112.281533
PioneerChurches.ca



St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Egremont, Alberta CANADA
Founded in 1939
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada
GPS Co-ordinates: 54.071060, -113.150709
PioneerChurches.ca



3. New Churches Photographed

Some fifteen (15) historic churches were photographed in 2023. All of these were added to the *Pioneer Churches* website. Videos were created for all of these churches (except for *Holy Ascension* in Smoky Lake) and posted on the website, along with their histories and links to their cemeteries. Some 20 to 50 photographs of each church were posted in their respective Photo Galleries.

The following eleven *Ukrainian Orthodox* churches were added in this phase of the project:

- Boriwtzi – St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church (*see photo on right*)
- Brinsley – Holy Spirit Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Brosseau (Mamaestie) – Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Kaleland – Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Luzan Toporiwtzi – St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Morecambe – St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Musidora – Dormition of St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Myrnam – Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Slawa (South) – Holy Assumption of St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Smoky Lake – Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Szypenitz – St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church



The following two *Ukrainian Catholic* Churches were added:

- Myrnam – Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church
- Smoky Lake (North) – St. Paraskevia Ukrainian Catholic Church



The following two *OCA* churches were added:

- North Bank – Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church
- Pakan – St. Elias Orthodox Church (*see photo on left*)

4. Exhibits

Selected large canvas prints and posters of historic churches in our collection were exhibited at the following events.

- Oct. 13, 2023 AUSRL / UWAC meeting at St. Anthony's Parish (Edmonton)
- Oct. 20, 2023 Pyrohy dinner at St. Anthony's Parish (Edmonton)
- Oct. 28/29 2023 UOCC Western Eparchy AGM and Sunday Liturgy at St. John's Cathedral (Edmonton)
(See photo below).
- Nov. 17, 2023 Pyrohy dinner at St. Anthony's Parish (Edmonton)
- Nov. 26, 2023 St. Michael's Parish Khram – exhibit and multimedia presentation (Edmonton)
- Dec. 1 & 2, 2023 St. Anthony's Parish Christmas Bake Sale (Edmonton)
- Feb. 16, 2024 Pyrohy dinner at St. Anthony's Parish (Edmonton)

Exhibits for 2024 are scheduled for the Ukrainian Council for Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) in Edmonton, Pysanka Festival in Vegreville, UOCC Western Eparchy AGM, and Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy fund-raising event.



5. Marketing and Promotion

The following activities and events were undertaken to make stakeholders, interested parties, and the general public aware of the *Pioneer Churches* project, website, exhibits, photographs and cards.

Ads – Purchased two quarter-page ads for one year about *Pioneer Churches* in *Promin Magazine*.

Articles – Wrote and published two articles in *Promin Magazine* regarding our Music Library.

Canadian Orthodox History Project – This website has parish-submitted listings, descriptions and histories of Orthodox Churches in Canada. We noticed that some of our *Pioneer Churches* photos have been added to several of the parishes on that website.

Cards – Provided packages of cards to Metropolitan Ilarion (UOCC), Bishop David (Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Edmonton), Basilian Brothers Museum in Mundare, Alberta and several clergy serving in rural areas.

Donations – Cards, photos and canvas prints were donated to St. John's Cathedral for their 100th Anniversary celebration and for their fundraising and to St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Church to raise funds to rebuild their church that burned in June 2023.

Find a Grave website – The *Findagrave.com* website is a comprehensive world-wide database of cemeteries. This website has information and burial lists for all of the parishes on the *Pioneer Churches* website. We have links to *Findagrave.com*. We also contribute 3 to 4 of our church/cemetery photos to each of their cemetery listings.

Flyers – Prepared a one page-flyer on the *Pioneer Churches* project. These have been posted and are available at *St. Anthony's Parish*, *St. John's Parish*, and *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch). Flyers are also available at the Western Eparchy AGM meetings and at all of our exhibits.

Links – The following websites have links to our *PioneerChurches.ca* website: *Alberta Family Histories Society*, various *Facebook* pages, *County of Lamont*, *Storyphile*, *Ukrainian Canadian Genealogy*, *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch), and *Ukrainian Musicians Association*.

Logo – We held an international contest to create a logo for our *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* project and components. Out of the 450 entries, we selected one that was based on our photograph of Saint John's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Egremont Alberta.

Mailouts – We recently sent out a short update on the *Pioneer Churches* project to two lists. The first was to the *Alberta Museums Association* members list (approximately 1,000). The second mailing was to our own compiled mailing list of about 130 individuals. These included clergy, members from various parishes, artists, photographers, government officials and selected museums.



Memberships – We are paid-up members of *Alberta Museums Association* (AMA), *Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts* (ACUA) and the *Drone Pilots Association of Canada* (DPAC).

Merchandise – Cards, photos and canvas prints are available to purchase at *St. Anthony's Parish Gift Shop*, the *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch), and the *Romanian Orthodox Parish at Boian* (for fundraising to replace their church that burned on June 6, 2023). These are also directly available from *Steppingstones / Pioneer Churches*.

Vimeo – All the videos are hosted on our account with Vimeo (similar to YouTube, but NO ads). The videos are public, thereby allowing anyone to view our collection of historic church videos.

Website – Our most powerful and successful marketing and promotion tool is our website and its growing number of visitors. In 2023, the *Pioneer Churches* website had approximately 10,000 unique visitors, 15,000 visits with 221,000 pages viewed.

The traffic stats for the first four months of 2024 (Jan. 1 to April 30) are: 8,400 unique visitors, 18,050 visits and 83,700 viewed pages.

A Google search for “pioneer churches” has our website in the first top 3 positions out of 9.5 million results. A search for any of the parishes listed on the *Pioneer Churches* website will generally be listed on the first page of Google results.

6. About Us

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* project is being undertaken by Steppingstones Partnership Inc. Steppingstones was established in 1989 by Russell Sawchuk as business and Internet consulting company. Over the last 35 years, the Company has been involved in a wide range of projects with private, government and non-profit organizations.



The last decade has mostly focused on providing online training and educational courses to registered health professionals. This includes researching, developing, programming and, in some cases, hosting interactive, multi-media educational courses. Steppingstones' *Learning Nurse* educational website is being used by thousands of nursing programs and students world-wide.

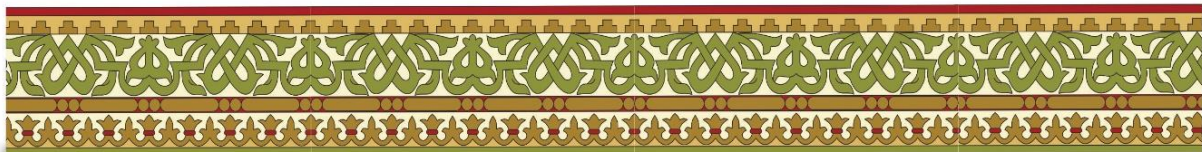
Russell has been a photographer for over 50 years. He recently expanded his range of photographic tools and expertise to become a certified drone pilot. Photographs taken by his drones constitute a significant portion of the images on the *Pioneer Churches* website.

In addition, Russell has developed, maintains and hosts websites for *St. Anthony Ukrainian Orthodox Parish* in Edmonton, *St. Anthony's Parish online store*, *St. Stephen Cemetery*, the *Western Eparchy* (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada) and the *Ukrainian Museum of Canada* (Alberta Branch).


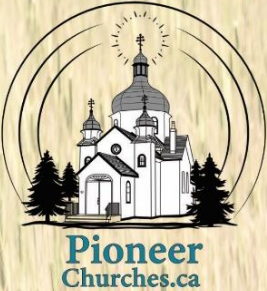
For more information on Steppingstones Partnership, their current projects and their clients, please visit their website at <https://steppingstones.ca>.

7. Appendices

7.1 Pioneer Churches Flyer / Brochure



Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing project to record and document the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The first immigrants arrived in the late 1890s and continued to settle for decades afterwards. So far, the project has recorded 92 churches and their cemeteries from six different denominations. Due to declining rural populations, fewer members, and increasing costs, many of these parishes are closing. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these beautiful historic churches. Our dedicated project website has:

- Drone and regular high-resolution photographs of each church and its cemetery
- Short descriptions and histories of the parishes and their cemeteries
- Links to a cemetery website with listings of burials and information on deceased
- Photo galleries with 3,000 images of 80 different churches and cemeteries
- Over 85 videos and video tours of most of the historic churches
- Digitized sacred, festive, traditional and folk Ukrainian music
- Large canvas prints, postcards and cards of these churches are available
- Clean website – no ads, registrations or popups.

Visit: PioneerChurches.ca

Financial support provided by: *SUS Foundation of Canada*

7.2 Pioneer Churches Promin Ads

Pioneer Churches on the Prairies

This is an ongoing project to photograph and document the historic churches and their cemeteries established by the early settlers in northeastern Alberta, Canada. Time is running out to preserve the memories of these heritage churches and resting places of our pioneers.

Our ad-free, dedicated website has:

- Drone and camera high-resolution photos of churches and their cemeteries
- Short description and history of each parish
- Photo galleries with over 3,000 images
- Videos and video tours of historic churches
- Library of digitized sacred, festive, traditional and folk Ukrainian music
- Canvas prints, photographs and cards of most of these churches available for sale.

Visit: *PioneerChurches.ca*

Ukrainian Canadian Music Library

The purpose of this project is to digitize, preserve and share the rich musical heritage of the Ukrainian music produced in Canada from about 1910 to 2000.

The *Music Library* on our *Pioneer Churches* website currently has over 80 albums of sacred, festive, traditional and folk/country Ukrainian music. This music is digitized and can be listened to online. Additional information on the artists, musicians and music is provided.

If you have any media with historic Ukrainian music you are planning to discard, please contact us first to see if we can add it to our Library. We are especially interested in lesser known choirs, bands and singers that may have only produced a few cassettes, LPs or CDs.

Listen at: *PioneerChurches.ca/music*

For more information, contact:

Russell Sawchuk

russ@pioneerchurches.ca | 1.800.267.9997

PROMIN SUBSCRIPTION FORM/ПЕРЕДПЛАТА НА ПРОМІНЬ

Canada \$30/year, USA \$60/year

New _____ Renewal _____ Gift _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____ PC/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Amount remitted: \$_____ for one year, or \$_____ for two years.

Any additional remittance will be considered a donation to the Press Fund; thank you!

If gift, indicate from whom _____

Donation to PROMIN Press Fund \$_____ In Memoriam Donation \$_____

In memory of _____

Submit cheque or money order to:

Promin/UWAC, c/o Dobr. Lesia Skyba, 592 King Street, Mount Brydges, ON N0L1W0.
Submit e-transfer to *treasurer.uwac.nat@gmail.com* and notify *prominlskyba@gmail.com*.

ПРОМІНЬ, ЛЮТИЙ - БЕРЕЗЕНЬ 2024 35

7.3 Mailouts

Pioneer Churches Project Update - Feb. 2024



From [Pioneer Churches on the Prairies <russ@pioneerchurches.ca>](mailto:russ@pioneerchurches.ca) on 2024-02-19 15:49

 Details  Headers  Plain text

Hi Rocky Sawbuck,

The [Pioneer Churches on the Prairies](https://pioneerchurches.ca) is an ongoing project to record, document and display the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The first immigrants arrived in the late 1890's and continued to settle for decades afterwards. Due to declining rural populations, fewer members, and increasing operational and maintenance costs, many of these parishes are closing. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these beautiful historic churches for future generations.



We have just updated our *Pioneer Churches* website with the drone photographs we took in 2023. Fifteen (15) more churches were added. So now we have photos and histories on 92 different churches and their cemeteries. Our photo galleries now consist of over 3,000 high-quality, downloadable images.

Using these photos, we have now created 85 videos of the churches. Each video has the appropriate sacred hymns as a musical background. In 2024, we plan to continue to use our drones and cameras to record additional churches, post the images in the galleries, and create additional videos.

We have added a few new articles to our website (Resources --> [Articles](#)) about enhancing the security at remote churches / historical sites, and how to create a disaster preparedness plan. *[Alberta religious organizations are eligible to apply for up to \$35,000 funding to enhance the security of their church building and grounds. For more information see [Alberta Security Infrastructure Program](#) (ASIP)].*

New hymns were identified and digitized to provide the background music for the new videos. You can see (and listen) to them in (Resources --> [Credits](#)). Several new digitized albums have also added to our Music Library.

As a result of having accumulated a large number of large canvas-prints of these churches, we have been having photo exhibits at various parishes. If you would like to have a *Pioneer Churches* exhibit and presentation during a special event (e.g., Saint's Day, anniversary) at your parish, please email or phone me.

Please check out our updated website and enjoy the videos, photos and music! Also make your parishioners, family, friends and neighbors aware of the *Pioneer Churches* website so that they can enjoy it as well.

Questions, comments, suggestions and feedback are always welcome.

Thank you.

Russell Sawchuk

[Pioneerchurches.ca](https://pioneerchurches.ca) | [Steppingstones.ca](https://steppingstones.ca)

Phone: 780-430-8245 | 800-267-9997 (Toll-free Canada and USA)

4111 - 149 ST NW

Edmonton, AB T6H 5L8



NOTE: This e-mail was sent to *Rocky Sawbuck* at info@steppingstones.ca. If you no longer wish to receive these very occasional e-

7.4 Exhibit Photos

Western Eparchy AGM and Sunday Liturgy at St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (Edmonton) on Oct. 28/29, 2023.



Western Eparchy AGM and Sunday Liturgy at St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (Edmonton) on Oct. 28/29, 2023.



St. Michael Ukrainian Orthodox Parish *Khram* (Edmonton) on Nov. 26, 2023.



St. Michael Ukrainian Orthodox Parish *Khram* (Edmonton) on Nov. 26, 2023.



St. Anthony Ukrainian Orthodox Parish (Edmonton) Pyrohy Dinners and Sunday Fellowship.



St. John Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (Edmonton) Centennial Banquet – Sales of donated canvas prints, photos and cards.



Banquet at St. John Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral on Nov. 18, 2023 to celebrate their 100th year anniversary.