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Oldest Ukrainian Catholic church in Canada celebrates 125 years

BY JANA SEMENIUK

Church members, their families, and friends, gathered at the Star-Peno Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church on Aug. 7 to celebrate 125 years as the oldest Ukrainian Catholic Parish in Canada.

The day included a visit from Bishop David Motiuk and Father Gabriel Haber, the Provincial Superior from Winnipeg; along with a banquet and dinner.

“Our people are celebrating their achievement, hard work and dedication. And I’m so proud to be with them, a part of this wonderful 125-year history,” said Father Gabriel.

He added that 10 years ago, he served the Star-Peno church as their pastor for seven years.

“It is like coming home,” he said smiling. “I consider this parish one of the nicest parishes. It’s wonderful to work with them.”

The Star-Peno Catholic Ukrainian Church’s history began in 1897 like most churches in the area. However, a split in the congregation in 1900 led to a dispute over ownership which erupted in 1901 when both groups, the Orthodox and the Ukrainian Catholic, wanted to use the church at the same time for their Easter celebrations.

According to reports, police were called to keep the peace and both groups held their celebrations outdoors. Peace was not kept for long, however, as subsequently five separate court proceedings from 1904 to 1907



Church lector Bill Skubleny holds a large gold cross in front of Bishop David Motiuk as they prepare to lead the procession into the church. Photo: Jana Semeniuk

ended with the ruling of ownership awarded to the Orthodox. The ruling was decided by a previous permit to cut logs for the original church which was filled out for a ‘Greek Orthodox Church’.

The Ukrainian Catholics appealed the latest ruling at a devastating cost; they not only lost the appeal but were also ordered to pay all costs of the appeal. Many people left the congregation to avoid paying their share of the court costs, leaving approximately half of the original members. It was reported that some remaining members sold their land to help pay their portion.

Current Star-Peno Church Treasurer Allan Borys reflected on what happened next.

“Mikola Tychkowsky (church member) donated a total of eight acres for another church to be built just a half mile south of here,” he said. “The sec-

ond church was built, and it burnt in 1922. The land that he had given for the second church, they gave back to Mr. Tychkowsky and he gave a little bit more land here where they built the third church. This is a third church built here.”

According to reports, many suspected arson in the destruction of the second church but there was never any evidence to support the claim. Its construction was completed in 1911 before being destroyed by the fire in 1922. Several items survived the fire however, including a dome cross. The cross is displayed in the present church which was constructed in 1927 and blessed by Bishop Basil Ladyka.

“The church was painted by Peter Lipinski. He was one of the renowned church painters. He painted quite a few churches in this area,” added Borys.

Some upgrades were added over the

years; a stone bell tower in 1949, a cross erected outside the entrance in 1954, and in 1970 the building was enlarged by extending the front porch, adding stairs and a choir loft.

Borys, 75, who grew up two miles north of the Star-Peno Church, said he has many wonderful memories of the church and feels proud of the church and its history.

“It’s an accomplishment that we were able to follow up on what our parents, grandparents, great grandpar-ents started and keep it up and keep it going until now,” he said. “It’s an accomplishment that we are still able to do it. And a lot of the people that are here are people whose parents and grandparents started the church, and they came back, lived in the area and are still part of the congregation.”



Father Gabriel Haber
Photo: Jana Semeniuk

