
A Brief History of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada*

The Beginnings of the UOCC

Ukrainian settlers began immigrating to the Canadian prairies at the end of the 19th century. At that time, most of them were Greek-Catholics from the western Ukrainian province of Halychyna (Galicia). A significantly smaller group immigrated from the province of Bukovyna, and these settlers were Orthodox.

The newly-arrived Greek-Catholic population was concerned that the Canadian Roman Catholic hierarchy was not supportive of their Eastern Christian heritage. The Orthodox Bukovynians, on the other hand, were being tended by the Russian Orthodox Mission which had arrived on Canadian soil via Alaska, and which was not very affirming of things Ukrainian.

To deal with this predicament, the more enlightened leadership of the Ukrainian settlers -- both Catholic and Orthodox -- sought a proactive solution. They concluded that it was time to organize their own Church, one that would reflect both the character and the spiritual needs and realities of these Ukrainian people who had now made Canada their new home.

During the summer of 1918, in the city of Saskatoon, a National Convention was convened, at which the decision was made to form the "Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church of Canada" (UGOC). Convention participants recognized that there can be no Church

without a bishop; therefore, as a first step, the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Brotherhood of Canada was organized, and given the mandate to find an Orthodox Bishop for the newly-formed Church.

The Brotherhood first approached Archbishop Alexander (Nemelovsky) of the Russian Orthodox Mission. Archbishop Alexander, a Ukrainian by origin, agreed to lead the UGOC. However, a short time later he changed his mind under the pressure of his superiors in Russia -- likely due to purely political motives. Therefore, the Brotherhood, was left to search for another Bishop to lead their Church. They found him in the person of Antiochian Orthodox Metropolitan Germanos (Shahedi). So it was that, at her inception, the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church of Canada found herself under the canonical jurisdiction of the Arabic Patriarchate of Antioch.

The situation would change during the mid-1920's when Archbishop John (Theodorovych) arrived in America from Ukraine. Learning of the presence in the U.S.A. of a Ukrainian bishop, the UGOC appealed to Archbishop John to head their fledgling Church. He agreed and, subsequently, Metropolitan Germanos released them from his jurisdiction. The new Church was administered in Canada by its Consistory, composed of both clergy and laity, and headed by a priest who held the position of Administrator or Vicar General. This priest was the one in charge in the absence of a bishop.

After World War Two

With the end of the Second World War came another -- third -- wave, of immigration into Canada. At this time the UGOC began the

process of finding a bishop that would oversee their Church locally, rather than from outside the country. Bishop Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) agreed to move to Canada to take on this responsibility. He became the first Bishop to carry the title "Archbishop of Winnipeg and all Canada."

Unfortunately, after just three years, Archbishop Mstyslav left the Canadian Church and moved to the United States. However brief, his stay was a catalyst for the subsequent hierarchical re-organization of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada. Archbishop Mstyslav's uncompromising stand on the proper interpretation of conciliar government and the role of hierarchy in the Church set the foundation for his successor: Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko), a Ukrainian bishop from the Orthodox Church of Poland.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Metropolia

A new era in the history of the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church of Canada began with the arrival of Metropolitan Ilarion in 1951. Our Church became a Metropolia, composed of three dioceses: the Central Diocese (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), headed by the Metropolitan himself; the Western Diocese (Alberta and BC) headed by the Bishop of Edmonton, and the Eastern Diocese (Ontario and Quebec) under the Bishop of Toronto.

After agreeing to become "Metropolitan of Winnipeg and All Canada", Metropolitan Ilarion painstakingly and methodically visited each and every parish in the country. In every location lectures were given, sermons were preached, lessons were taught. In a relatively short time, he became acquainted with every

priest, every parish and their individual needs and potential.

In addition to his archpastoral work Metropolitan Ilarion was involved in numerous other academic and ecclesiastical initiatives. His Ukrainian translation of the Bible, which was first published by the British Bible Society, is still the most popular Ukrainian Bible used by Ukrainian-speaking people throughout the world. Because of his tireless dedication to missionary work, Christian education and liturgical renewal, Metropolitan Ilarion has been called the “Peter Mohyla of Canada”.

After two decades of dedicated archpastoral work, Metropolitan Ilarion, fell asleep in the Lord on 29 March, 1972. His passing resulted in deep feelings of great loss. For a short period of time, the primacy of our Church was passed on to Archbishop-Metropolitan Michael (Khoroshy) of Toronto.

At the UGOC’s Sobor (All Canadian Church Council) of 1975, Archbishop Andrew (Metiuk) was elected to the position of Primate. A student and close co-worker of Metropolitan Ilarion, Metropolitan Andrew was Primate of the UGOC for ten years (1975-1985). He put the Church back on her foundations after the loss of Vladyka Ilarion, whose death had left a large void and caused some decline.

After the death of Metropolitan Andrew in 1985, His Eminence

Archbishop Wasyly (Fedak) was elected Primate of the Church. Though born in Ukraine, Metropolitan Wasyly was raised in Canada, his family coming here when he was only two years old. The 1980's also saw the Church consecrate its first Canadian-born bishops: His Eminence John (Stinka), Archbishop of Edmonton, and His Eminence Yuriy (Kalistchuk), Archbishop of Toronto.

1990 and Beyond

In 1990, the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada officially changed its name to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada (UOCC). At the same time, in an even more important move, the Church entered into Eucharistic Communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This historic move normalized the UOCC’s place in the sphere of canonical world Orthodoxy.

Currently, the UOCC has over 240 congregations and missions from British Columbia to Quebec, with 100 clergy. The Church's head office – the Office of the Consistory, and its seminary, St. Andrew's College, are both located in the city of Winnipeg.

**Information in this pamphlet is based on material from the article “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”, by the Rt. Rev. Protopresbyter Dr. Oleh Krawchenko.*

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

A Brief History



**Published by the
Office of Missions and Education,
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada**

Rev. Fr. Andrew Jarmus, Director