

HISTORY OF SAINT SOPHIE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX PARISH OF MONTREAL

An account of the history of our parish guides us on a journey into the past, to see the road travelled by our predecessors. The paths they walked were indeed long and often thorny. They managed to secure the development they foresaw, in faith, at the founding of our Saint Sophie Parish!

It is worth noting that the magnificent and ancient Cathedral of Holy Wisdom (“Sophia” in Greek) in Kyiv was the inspiration for our building our Church community here in Canada. It embodied stability and longevity, linking us to the time-honoured faith and traditions of our motherland, towards its Church.

On March 9, 1925, a group of dedicated believers and patriots founded the Saint Sophie Ukrainian Orthodox Brotherhood with the purpose of organizing a Ukrainian Orthodox Christian community in Montreal.

The Reverend Fr. Volodymyr Sluzar, a young and energetic priest from Bukovyna in Ukraine, along with his wife Leonia, both, arrived in Montreal one year later (in 1926). The couple launched the first Ukrainian Orthodox Parish in Montreal. Initially our community rented a church building for public worship from a local Syrian community. Later on (in 1929) having a desire to become church building owners, our community purchased a Baptist Church on Delorimier Street.

The arrival of the post-World War II wave of immigrants sharply raised the number of believers. The old church premises became unsuitable to accommodate the numerous worshippers, so the community decided to build a new church.

Thanks to the enormous spiritual efforts of Protopresbyter Volodymyr Sluzar, our community purchased a plot of land for construction of a new Temple in 1953. The construction commenced in 1960 and lasted two years.

The project was finished in 1962, and the new Church, named in honour of SOPHIA, the Wisdom of God, was consecrated by Metropolitan Ilarion Ohienko. The parish proclaims the Christian faith from that time to the present.

The first Rector, Fr. Protopresbyter Volodymyr Sluzar dedicated himself to ministry at the Saint Sophie parish for forty-eight years. Inasmuch as the number of parishioners was considerable at that time, he was assisted by Archpriest Fr. Dr. Ivan Stus, Archpriest Fr. Fedir Leheniuk, and Archpriest Fr. Stephen Symchych.

When it became difficult for Fr. Volodymyr Sluzar to continue celebrating Services, his assistant, Archpriest Fr. Ihor Kutash, a young and energetic priest, took over and dedicated himself to parish service for more than 30 years.

In 1999, when Fr. Ihor decided to dedicate himself to academic activities, he was succeeded by Archpriest Fr. Kouchnir, also from Bukovyna, who had been the Rector of Saint Michael Parish in Edmonton. Irena Gerych, Chair of the Church Council, arranged the relocation of the new Rector to Montreal.

During the 17-year pastoral service of Fr. Volodymyr the congregation realized two major projects and marked a memorable event.

Project 1: At the initiative of Victor Sidorenko, Chair of the Church Council, the iconography of the entire church interior was completed (the front part had been done earlier). Thanks to his conscientious efforts, the Cathedral iconography was fully completed using innovative technology.

Project 2: Construction of a chapel at Camp Saint Sophie. Serving as Director of Camp St. Sophie, Fr. Volodymyr undertook the building of a chapel at the site. The Right Rev. Yuriy, formerly Bishop of the Eastern Eparchy (now Metropolitan Yuriy, Primate of our Church) laid the cornerstone for the chapel in 2010. Present at the official stone-laying ceremony, besides Fr. Volodymyr, were Archpriest Fr. Ihor Kutash, Nicholai Michailuk Sr., Nick Michailuk Jr., Adrianna Zerebecky and Victor Sidorenko, of blessed memory.

God has blessed these good intentions in the construction of the chapel. The project was completed in 2013 and in July of that same year, the chapel was consecrated in the name of Equal-to-the-Apostles Great Kniaz' St. Volodymyr, and Blessed Knyahynia Olga, by Metropolitan Yuriy together with Right Rev. Andriy, Bishop of the Eastern Eparchy. The Chair of the Church Council at that time was Yoris Gella, who fostered and promoted this project. At the same time a bell tower was constructed in memory of parishioners, Illia and Raisa Temertey, parents of Constantine Temertey.

The list of major and generous sponsors for this project includes Mr. Constantine Tymertey, the Verdun Community "Prosvita", and the Saint Sophie Camp Committee, especially, Adrianna Zerebecky and Nick Michailuk who worked diligently from the onset until the completion of the project and assisted in its successful realization. It should be noted that Camp Saint Sophie is part of the Eastern Eparchy, and so received donations from it as well as from parishioners and friends of the Cathedral to assist in its construction.

Memorable Event: - The extraordinarily joyful and festive celebration of the 90th anniversary of our parish (October 1-2, 2016).

The first day, October 1, Saturday, began with a seminar conducted by the clergy (Archpriest Fr. Dr. Ihor Kutash, Fr. Ihor Okhrimchuk, and Archpriest Fr. Volodymyr Kouchnir) for the youth of our parish and of St. Demetrius Parish in Toronto under the leadership of Natalka Kovalenko and Khrystyna Kovalenko.

The seminar was followed by Vespers, which was celebrated by his Grace, Andriy, Bishop of the Eastern Eparchy. The service was attended by a great number of faithful including former parishioners, who traveled from Edmonton, Vancouver, Ottawa, London, and Toronto and Quebec City to be with us for this celebration.

After Vespers, our generous and hospitable parishioners invited everyone for a delicious dinner prepared by "The Daughters of Ukraine" women's auxiliary. The atmosphere was wonderful and extremely friendly. Hearts were filled with joy and a sincere wish to share memories of the past.

Sunday, October 2, commenced with a solemn liturgy led by Bishop Andriy and the participation of the local clergy: Archpriest Fr. Ihor Kutash of St. Mary the Protectress, Parish in Montreal, Quebec; Fr. Ihor Okhrimchouk of the Assumption of the

blessed Virgin Parish in Ottawa, Ontario; and Archpriest Fr. Gene Ruditch, of the St. George Parish in Lachine, Quebec. The Cathedral was filled with devoted faithful.

After Liturgy, a glorious banquet was held at Auberge Universel located on Sherbrooke Street. More than 300 guests attended this milestone event, including many guests from out of town. Hramota Awards were presented to a number of parishioners and scholarships also were awarded to five of our parishioners. To culminate the event, a wonderful concert was offered by members and former members of our parish.

The Anniversary Committee was composed of Archpriest Fr. Volodymyr, Maria Kachmar-Buciora, Alexandra Kindrat, Eugenia Kindrat (Chair of the Committee), Yoris Gella, Iryna Gerych, Vasyl Grosko, Olga Kowcz, Gregory Kowryha, Halyna Pylypchyk, Dan Stechysin and Adrianna Zerebecky.

As we go forward, we are entering a new one-hundred-year stage of our life, relying on the same inflexible faith which inspired our founders and led them to great heroic deeds. We, being their successors, continue with their efforts for the good of our Christian Church and our parish.

In our Parish, the Sunday school and Metropolitan Ilarion Ukrainian School teach our children the Ukrainian language and religion. "The Daughters of Ukraine" Women's Auxiliary founded by Mrs. Leonia Sluzar, has celebrated its 90th anniversary together with the entire community. Camp St. Sophie is also working hard and supporting the parish financially organizing camp for our youth. The Brotherhood Misericordia Christian arranges visits to shut-in parishioners at home, in hospitals and in senior residences. We also offer memorial services to pray for and preserve the memory of parishioners which have departed into eternal rest. Our church choir is an integral part of our Cathedral and continues to work to bring glorious music to our Liturgies; as do our altar servers who work diligently during services.

Notwithstanding the fact that growth of parish life in the XXI century is getting more challenging due to the greater concentration of people on material, rather than spiritual values, our Church as a religious institution seeks to observe the principles of evangelical doctrine and overcome all obstacles and challenges. Eugenia Kindrat now holds the position of Council Chair. She works faithfully to promote the development of our parish.

In closing, let me tell you a short story about a tree. One day a grandchild playing in the backyard noticed that his 80 year-old Grandpa was planting an apple tree and asked him: "Grandpa, do you expect to pick and eat apples from this tree?" Grandpa, leaning on the handle of his spade, answered gently:

"Surely not. I know that I will never eat apples from this tree. However, all my life I have enjoyed apples from apple trees which I never planted. By planting this tree I am trying to return kindness to those people who planted apple trees for me. This apple tree will remain after me, and others will eat its fruit."

...Each of us, within the fold of the Church and acting through observance of his/her Christian values and personal contributions to our parish life, is planting a tree which will remain long after we have gone, as a sign of gratitude for those who built such a beautiful Cathedral.

The fourth and latest wave of immigrants who arrive in Canada, is gradually becoming more and more closely involved into parish life. The Church reminds us that we are all children of God and that Our Lord has a desire to see us in His Heavenly Home. As a Ukrainian song says, 'Each of us enters this world to leave a trace...'

Archpriest Fr. Volodymyr Kouchnir, Dean, Saint Sophie Cathedral Parish