

# Orthodox Christians in Manitoba

## A Brief Overview\*

*Father Myrone Klysh*

According to the Canadian Census of 2001, there were 15,645 orthodox Christians in Manitoba. They were members of a Christian faith that began on the First Pentecost, and was brought to North America by Russian missionaries to Alaska in 1794. The early Orthodox immigrants to Manitoba were identified by their ethnic origin: Bukovynian, Ukrainian, Russian, Greek, Romanian, Serbian. More recent immigrants are of Egyptian (Coptic), Ethiopian, and Eritrean origins. However, during the past decades, through marriage and conversions, there are Orthodox Christians in Manitoba of many other ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, most Orthodox jurisdictions in Canada continue to maintain their ethnic identities in their official titles.

Unlike the bringing of the Orthodox faith to Alaska by Russian missionaries, Orthodox Christianity was brought to Manitoba by lay immigrants, who came seeking a better life for themselves, and their

---

\* A version of this overview appeared in *Encyclopedia of Manitoba* (Edited by Ingeborg Boyens), Winnipeg: Great Plains Publishing, 2007, pp. 850.

families. In the beginning, they were served by priests who at the request of the immigrants came for a short period of time, fulfilled the spiritual needs of the people, and left. The establishment of permanent parishes and jurisdictions took several years.

The following jurisdictions currently are represented in Manitoba: the Archdiocese of Canada (Orthodox Church in America), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, the Greek orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada), the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (Orthodox Church in America), the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America and Canada (the Patriarchate of Romania), the Serbian Orthodox Church in the US and Canada, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (the Patriarchate of Moscow), the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

### **Russian Orthodox**

Original Russian Orthodox Christians in Manitoba included people of various ethnic backgrounds: Bukovynian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Belorussian. This was due to the fact that the Russian Patriarchate of Moscow had jurisdiction over all these lands in Europe. Orthodox Bukovynians were the first to come to Manitoba, settling in the Stuartburn area in 1896. A year later, they built the first Orthodox church in the province – St. Michael's in Gardenton, which is currently designated as a historic site. Serving them were priests of the Russian Orthodox Mission in American. Holy Trinity Sobor on Manitoba Avenue was the first Orthodox church constructed in Winnipeg. In 1904, it was consecrated by Saint (Bishop) Tikhon, the future Patriarch of Moscow. From 1908 to 1910, the Russian Orthodox Mission in Canada was administered by Archimandrite Arseny Chahovtsov. Sixteen years later he returned to Winnipeg as Bishop of the diocese (1926-1936). His missionary efforts resulted in his venerating as the first Canadian

orthodox Saint – St. Archbishop Arseny. One of the areas where he was active, Sifton, MB, is the location of another historic site – Holy Resurrection Church. Saint Arseny Christian Theological Institute, which prepares readers and deacons for the Church, continues the work of its patron saint. In 1970, having been proclaimed as an autocephalous Church by the Patriarch of Moscow, the Russian Orthodox Church became the Orthodox Church in America, the first Church to delete the ethnic designation in order to become fully North American.

### **Greek Orthodox**

Greeks began arriving in Manitoba in 1898. Desiring to have a church of their own, in 1912, they formed an association under the name "Annunciation." After a number of years, a house was purchased in Winnipeg, which served as a church, school, and social hall. In 1955, the Greeks acquired a church building on the corner of Westminster and Furby, which was dedicated to St. Demetrios. Under the leadership of Father Anthony Mavromaras, from 1960 to 1982, the community purchased land for the present church building on the corner of Shaftesbury and Grant. In addition to St. Demetrios, which follows the new (Gregorian) calendar, there is an old (Julian) calendar church in Winnipeg, Holy Ascension, on Euclid Avenue.

### **Romanian Orthodox**

In 1901, four Romanian Orthodox families came to Lennard, MB, from Calder, Saskatchewan, to which they had immigrated in 1899 from the Bukovyna region of Eastern Europe. Having no church as a place of worship, they erected a cross in a field. Two years later, in cooperation with others, they built a sod church, which was dedicated to St. Elijah, in gratitude to the donor of the land, Elie Burla. In 1908, a more permanent church was constructed, which has been recognized as a

historic site, housing the original banners, crosses, icons, candelabra, and other artifacts. The present church in Lennard was built in 1952. There are 4 other Romanian Orthodox Churches in Manitoba. Unique among them is St. George Orthodox Church in Winnipeg, the first Orthodox church in Canada to offer the fullness of the Orthodox faith in English.

### **Serbian Orthodox**

In 1912, Serbs came to Flin Flon, MB, to work in the mines. Sixteen years later, Serbian immigrants came to Winnipeg. With the increase in their numbers following post-World War II migration they formed a parish, in 1972, and adapted a Protestant church building for Orthodox worship. Presently, they worship in a former Ukrainian Greek catholic church building on Talbot Avenue in Winnipeg, which they acquired in 1995.

### **Ukrainian Orthodox**

In 1918, some former Ukrainian Greek Catholics left that church and formed what is now the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, whose headquarters are located in Winnipeg. They were joined by Orthodox Ukrainians from the Bukovyna region in Eastern Europe. After World War II, their numbers increased due to the influx of displaced people from Ukraine. Over the years, the Orthodox Ukrainians have established parishes throughout Manitoba, the most important being the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Winnipeg. From 1951 to 1972, His Beatitude Metropolitan Hilarion ruled the Church. Among his many scholarly works and achievements was his translation of the Bible into Ukrainian. In 1962, the British and Foreign Bible Society published the Ukrainian Bible. In 1962, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church established St. Andrew's College on the campus of University of Manitoba in

Winnipeg. St. Andrew's College houses Faculty of Theology, and the Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies.

### **Coptic Orthodox (from Egypt)**

Coptic Orthodox Christians began arriving in Manitoba from Egypt in the 1970s. From then until 1995, they shared the facilities of St. George Orthodox Church in Winnipeg. In mid 1990s, with the growth of immigration from Egypt, a Protestant church was acquired and transformed into a Coptic Orthodox house of worship. Ten years later, the Coptic community purchased a Lutheran church on Pembina Highway, the present home of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church.

### **Ethiopian and Eritrean Coptic Orthodox**

Ethiopians and Eritreans started to come to Manitoba in numbers in the 1980s. They currently number over 1,000. In the beginning, they received spiritual care from various Orthodox churches in Winnipeg. Ethiopians formed a parish in 1994, and received a resident priest in 1997. In 2000, the parish acquired an existing church building on Mountain Avenue. The parish priest also provides services for a mission parish in Brandon, MB. Eritreans acquired their own church building in 2008.

*About the Author:* Very Reverend Father Myrone R. Klysh, MDiv, is pastor of the St George Orthodox Church in Winnipeg, MB. He also teaches Church History and Liturgics at the St Arseny Orthodox Christian Theological Institute, Faculty of Theology, University of Winnipeg.