



St. Stephen Protomartyr Ukrainian Catholic Church

views from the pews

How it all began . . .

December 16, 2018

50 YEARS at ST. STEPHEN'S – cherished memories by Joseph & Mildred Sakundiak

The history of our church is well documented in the St. Stephen church book – but here are some of the personal feelings and some very interesting contributions not addressed in the book. Like the older people used to say, “When did the years go by so fast (with a snap of their fingers)?” Now ... that is us!

We arrived in Calgary on September 6, 1963 as newlyweds from Winnipeg (July 27, 1963). Our first Sunday in Calgary we attended Divine Liturgy at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrated by Father Martynyk. Our children, Gail, Laurie, Darren and Jeffrey were all born and baptised in Calgary. St. Stephen's has been a part of our heart and soul from day one. Our greatest gratitude is the many volunteers who helped in many ways – even the pinching of two peroh!



DECISION to start a new parish ... an increase of Ukrainian Catholic families prompted a meeting with Bishop Neil Savaryn. Approval was granted for St. Stephen's Mission - there was much excitement and energy in starting such a wonderful mission! The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Fr. Phil Shinduke on June 5, 1967 in our rented facility, St. James Hall. Our first parish council was organized and St. Stephen's was granted full parish status in September 1968 with Fr. Martin Greschuk as our first pastor. We moved Fr. Greschuk to his apartment near the hall – “*Suite 16*”. Our children went to their First Communion classes there. Fr. Greschuk was so dedicated and big-hearted to have so many children in his apartment. We are quite certain they played a few pranks on him there, but he found it quite amusing (and probably quite hair-raising at times)! The kitchen served as a confessional.

After much discussion, a vote was passed to build our own hall in which to celebrate Divine Liturgy and hold our many other activities. Sod turning was on February 20, 1972. The hall opening and first Divine Liturgy was on July 2, 1972 and we began to develop a constitution for our parish. The first Divine Liturgy books were put together from scratch, type set, and printed on a printing press at Mr. Frank Gawlicki's basement. There were some mistakes, pages redone, but we ironed out these problems and completed the printing. The pages were bound together – this took approximately three weeks on evenings, all done by a few of us with full time jobs.

DIVINE LITURGIES ... from day one it was a gradual process – first the service was in Ukrainian, English homily, then Gospel and Epistle in English, then the whole service in English. The same with the hymns, Ukrainian then English. There was much fun in the hall that we rented, and then in our own hall (Divine Liturgies were held there). After any social the hall was spotlessly cleaned and the kneelers and chairs were set up before all those in charge

- with the help of many – went home. We sometimes played cards before going home to catch our 40 winks and getting up and going to church ... Don't know how we did it ... *"oh to be young again!"*

GENTLEMAN'S DINNER (stag) ... many, many thanks go out to the ladies of our parish for their contribution to this major fundraiser. The reason for the success of ticket sales is the delicious "all-you-can-eat" Ukrainian food, all prepared by the ladies of our parish! October 1968 marked the first event with Bill Zenuik and Orest Sachkiw as general managers. After 1971, I was the manager for the next 25 years and assisted for some years after. Many tickets were sold and I usually delivered them personally. It was a lot of work but we built up clientele, keeping a list from the previous year who were contacted first when selling tickets. Many thanks go out to others who personally sold tickets and to the many who volunteered to work at the event to make sure it ran smoothly. We never missed a year, even during tough economic times. The first ticket cost \$25 netting \$1200.00 and the cost gradually increased to today's \$300. The major prize is cash, along with a variety of other prizes, some of which are donated. In 1980 we had a car as the major prize!

CHINOOK BAZAAR ... another big thank you goes to the ladies and gentlemen of St. Stephen's for all the hard work preparing food for the bazaars that resulted in our huge successes. Everyone was so excited to support the bazaars; preparation, transporting and selling the food. Huge effort that really paid off! On one trip I remember transporting the food with Father Greschuk and he had put on the brakes abruptly and the mushroom gravy spilled onto the floor of his car! Quite a "perfume" and a big cleanup! We had a good laugh!

CASINO ... the first casino (1977) was a 2-day affair. After the first night it was our responsibility to guard the chips and the monies we made and to save money of course! Along with an RCMP officer I took the bundle of money to our hotel room in the same building and guarded it all night. A long night, not much sleep, and lots of laughs! However, this did not deter me from being general manager for several more casinos, making sure we had sufficient number of people (which included having background checks) for the various jobs. The casinos were a great source of monies helping us to pay for the many expenses we had building our parish.

JUNE 1978 ... mortgage for multi-functional parish centre retired; **MARCH 1981** ... approval to proceed for construction of new church at a cost of \$1,485,000; **SEPTEMBER 1982** ... blessing of new St. Stephen's Church; **SEPTEMBER 1986** ... St. Stephen's was awarded the Governor General's Medal for the achievement in architectural design as one of the 20th century's most notable Canadian architectural projects. These medals are presented every four years by the Architectural Institute. Father Bill Hupalo and I travelled to Vancouver for the presentation of this award. What a great honour for the architect and for St. Stephen's!

NEW HALL & RECTORY ... this was completed in June 1997 with many people contributing to the building of these structures – see previous VFTP's story by Ed Demchuk. Steve Fedkiw (our daughter Laurie's husband) did the electrical wiring in the entire residence and I helped him on the cold winter evenings as we both worked during the day.

OUR (Joseph & Mildred) – meaning – CHRISTIAN AND SPIRITUAL ... "Silent Night, Holy Night" At our age we have been to several other churches for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve but in our opinion the most beautiful one is Midnight Mass a few years ago at St. Stephen's. Tzymbali and violin playing softly, the choir singing Silent Night, I closed my eyes, it was so peaceful, beautiful, I (Millie) thought I'd died and gone to heaven! **SEPTEMBER 2018** ... our Praznyk day; it is a cool, rainy day but very cozy in the church. The inside of the church is so beautiful with a very spiritual feeling! I get goose bumps, fight back my tears, but having my cry! So much has happened here personally to our family – baptisms, first communions for our children and grandchildren, marriages, two celebrations and funeral masses for our children (our son Jeffrey and Steve Fedkiw our daughter Laurie's husband). We feel we have been to the most beautiful "farewell" Masses – the best of times and the worst of

times, the happiest and the saddest! But at the same time, feeling so fortunate that we had “our” St. Stephen’s and feeling indescribable gratitude to everyone who contributed in any way – but especially to my husband sitting next to me for his dedication and many years of volunteering his time since day one.

I, JOSEPH ... have been fortunate to be on the Building Committee, working with the architects, Hugh McMillan, Radoslav Zuk; stained glass architect Christopher Wallis; mosaic iconographer Boris Makarenko, his son Sviat and two of his children helping them when they did the installation of the icons. They were all so pleased to receive the St. Stephen Book which shows all of their beautiful, talented contributions to our church. We have enjoyed hosting the Makarenkos in our home and Sviat has stayed with us several times. He liked Mildred’s rice pudding so much her he said “let’s put the pot on the table and have some more”! Mildred contributed her time, when she was able to in many ways. Selling tickets, food preparation for many events, all time well spent enjoying the socialization too.

ST. STEPHEN HISTORY BOOK ... when some of the tasks at St. Stephen’s had slowed down a bit I took on the task of compiling the history book. It took nearly three years, roadblocks and problems along the way, but then all was completed. I worked with the photographer in taking pictures of every icon and stained glass window making certain that we used the best light conditions to obtain the best colours and hues often climbing a ladder to do so. The photos of the stained glass and icons and their meanings are well documented. Thank you to my wife for being at my side, for her encouragement, typing etc. and also for sometimes taking on the chores of grass cutting and snow shoveling!

Our family life has been the best of times and the worst of times as it has been for many in our church – our hearts go out to you. The Icon of Jesus at the back of the altar says to us “You are not alone, I am with you”! May we live our lives like we are always “Walking on Holy Ground”.

Our endeavour is to remember our past and to pass on the rich history of our traditions to future generations. Many thanks and much gratitude go out to everyone who volunteered their time to the many committees and charities at St. Stephen’s and to the pastors who were there for us.

With much gratitude, love and prayers,

Joseph and Mildred Sakundiak

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- ❖ Please continue to share your memories as they are important to our parish family.
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