



St. Stephen Protomartyr Ukrainian Catholic Church

views from the pews

How it all began

October 21, 2018

CULTURAL EDUCATION BEGINNINGS

Submitted by Annette Kozicki

Long ago but not far away, cultural education at St. Stephen's began in the early 1970s.

Pat Ochitwa was on Parish Council in 1972 and was assigned the task of forming a cultural education program. In her corner, she had Elsie Shyba who mentored with ideas and direction. Sharon Alexander needed to withdraw midterm in the 1973 - 1974 school year and I was asked to take over and so began a happy and fulfilling association of a fairly new parishioner with cultural education.

During the next ten plus years, Lesia Sachkiw and I alternated as Cultural & Education Director and always worked together in organizing, custom writing lessons in Ukrainian to fit the students who enrolled and just about anything we offered to the young in our parish. We offered language, song and dance, cultural traditions and some religion. As we received both provincial and federal grants and the Government of Alberta recognized that many multicultural activities were parochial based, we were allowed to use a small percentage of class time for religious content.

Lesia and I both taught and planned activities. We were assisted in language by quite a few parishioners such as Terry Stychyshyn and Don Prytula, by the Sister Servants of Mary Immaculate in religion and we had young people who were members of our parish, and of Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, teach Ukrainian dance. Elsie Shyba was our pianist in residence. We held concerts within our parish and also participated in Multicultural events within Calgary. We happily started the giving of flowers on Mother's Day for our parish moms when we held our annual Mother's Day concert.

As an example, our Cultural Classes group was asked to perform at the Nickle Art Museum for the opening of William Kurelek's art exhibit. We invited St. Stephen's Choir, newly under the direction of Linda Dudar who was quite new to our parish, to join our group for the event. We were very much appreciated. This was a happy time for all!

We began holding these classes in the old hall and rectory basement where the walls were just plain cement. To designate areas as a classroom, heavy wire was strung and old drapery hung to serve as wall dividers. Once during those early days, we had seventy one students enrolled. We were recognized as the Cultural School with the best attendance record of cultural schools in Alberta.

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We were able to use funds to construct real walls, storage, gather artifacts, to purchase a refurbished upright grand piano, books to form a library, cultural and traditional items for display and teaching. One year we arranged to pay rent to the parish to facilitate payment for the icons that are now in our parish hall. They had been first used as unfolding icons framing the stage in the "old hall" which also served as an altar. Under a Carling's community support grant, we were able to fund Ukrainian costumes for our students which were embroidered by and sewn by parents and supportive parishioners.

We organized additional and weekend classes to prepare children for First Communion, Pysanka writing, embroidery, Rizba carving and mandolin classes. I had been lucky to arrange a special agreement with St. Johns Music for mandolins which made them affordable to students and we had a large group of students under the direction of Peter Kaminski.

I was appointed principal in 1977 and remained active in that role until our family moved away for three years in 1984. It was a time of commitment on a large scale, a learning experience right along with the young people and a great experience which I know given an earlier timeframe, I would gladly do again.

"To those who helped in teaching, in organizing, donating of their time and contributions, support and commitment to the cause, I say thank you, thank you. We had many who believed in what we were doing. Some are mentioned; some are departed but remain in our thoughts with fondness and thankfulness." Annette Kozicki

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