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hat happens when a non-Ukrainian joins the Ukrainian Catholic Church? Meet nine such people. They are young, engaged in their church, and passionate about living a Christian lifestyle. In our busy and demanding modern world, these Ukrainian Catholics find inspiration, solace and community in this beautiful and profound Byzantine tradition.

“Legend has it that before his death during the arrival of the Soviets in 1944, Archbishop Sheptytsky prophesied horrific suffering for the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church followed by a period of radiant growth. The first part of the prophecy apparently ended in 1989. This book documents what is hopefully part of the second half of Sheptytsky’s prediction. It illustrates the self-evident but frequently forgotten truth that we at the Sheptytsky Institute have been repeating for decades: while rooted in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church is obviously a Church for people of all backgrounds. Otherwise it becomes just one more ethnic organization – with a religious veneer.”

—Fr. Andriy Chirovsky, SThD, Founder and First Director of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies

“The Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church is a vital part of the Catholic scene in Canada, but its long-term survival cannot depend on Ukraine being the kind of place that people want to leave. The Church which grew by immigration must now survive – and thrive – by evangelization. This fine collection of testimonies shows how it is done, and introduces you to ‘new Ukrainians’ who will help you become a better Catholic – Ukrainian, Latin or otherwise.”

—Father Raymond J. de Souza, editor-in-chief of Corvivium.ca

Christopher Guly is an Ottawa-based journalist and member of the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery. He was raised a Ukrainian Catholic in his hometown of Winnipeg.



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CHRISTOPHER GULY Strangers in a Strange Church? New Faces of Ukrainian Catholicism in Canada



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5

Andrew Bennett: Journeying from Public Service to Serving the Church



Andrew Bennett is presented for ordination to the diaconate by Protodeacon David Kennedy at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Shrine.



Bennett as Canada's Ambassador for Religious Freedom with Coptic Archbishop Angaelos, presently of London, UK, in St. Peter's Basilica during a conference on persecuted Christians called "Under Caesar's Sword."

Urbane and whip-smart, Andrew Bennett could have easily risen up the ranks of Canada's public service – or perhaps obtained a plum diplomatic posting – while remaining a Roman Catholic as he was raised in Toronto.

As Canada's first, and so far only, ambassador for religious freedom who has held senior positions in the federal government and who holds a Ph.D. in political science, Bennett boasts a star-quality CV that allows him to call the shots for future employment. He could have entered politics and run for office – and likely would have won, as a Liberal or a Conservative, and taken a seat in the House of Commons. But Bennett's past inclinations were to play a behind-the-scenes role in policy-making rather than serve as an elected politician involved in applying policy to government legislation.

His present inclinations are decidedly different. Bennett's notion of public service is now religious, not political – as a Ukrainian Catholic planning to serve his Church as a priest. "For this kind of WASP-y guy from Toronto, the Ukrainian Catholic Church is where the Holy Spirit has called me to be," he explains.

Born in Canada's largest city in 1972, Bennett attended Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, a Roman Catholic parish in Toronto's St. Clair–Mount Pleasant neighbourhood. His parents were married at Perpetual Help, and he was baptized and celebrated his Confirmation and First Communion there. Bennett's boyhood faith was emboldened by his deeply religious Irish-Catholic mom and Scottish-Catholic dad – and it made an impression on him. "I was a pretty churchy kid," he recalls. "I loved going to church and being involved in church-related things. Naturally, I was an altar boy."

There were early signs that a clerical vocation lay in his future. "At the age of seven or eight, I wanted to be a priest," says Bennett. "My cousins and I would take Wonder Bread and press it down into little hosts. But our 'Mass' lasted all of three minutes, after which we munched on our Wonder Bread hosts."

"I remember when I was nine going to visit my maternal grandparents who lived in the same part of Toronto as we did, and my

grandfather asking me, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' Without hesitation I said, 'a priest.' This call would come and go. I think our Lord is very patient and gave me opportunities to explore other areas of interest." He did, but there was always a religious underlay in his life.

However, Bennett was not schooled in the Catholic tradition. From grades five to 13, he attended an Anglican boys' private school – the prestigious Royal St. George's College – which required his wearing a uniform and his parents sacrificing much to pay the hefty tuition. "It was one of the greatest gifts they gave me," he says. The experience resulted in lifelong friendships and a focus for his higher education. At St. George's, Bennett excelled in French, Latin, music, history and political science, and pursued the humanities in university.

In 1995, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in history, with first-class honours, from Dalhousie University in Halifax. Two years later, Bennett graduated from Montreal's McGill University with a Master of Arts in history.

At that point, he considered going to law school. But after sharing that idea with one of his best friends, Bennett realized that he couldn't just study constitutional law – his true passion – but would have to immerse himself in much drier courses on contract law and torts as well. So, he opted for the doctoral route. Bennett crossed the Atlantic and headed for the land of his paternal forefathers to enroll at the University of Edinburgh. There, he worked on his thesis: "Nations of Distinction: Nationalist Attitudes to Constitutional Change in Scotland, Quebec and Catalunya."

Bennett sought to explain how federalist states, like Canada, attempt to accommodate claims for greater autonomy from, in its case, Quebec and its historic quest for nationhood within the confederation. His research resulted in a Ph.D. in politics, awarded to him in 2002, after he had landed an exciting job back home in Canada.

In May 2001, Bennett joined the Privy Council Office (PCO) in Ottawa, where he applied his academic work to political

parliamentary action. As a policy analyst, the former member of the Young Liberals of Canada conducted research on comparative constitutional models and federal systems to support the then-intergovernmental affairs minister, Stéphane Dion, following the passing into law of the *Clarity Act* regarding Quebec secession in June 2000.

However, the University of Edinburgh experience did not just lead Bennett into a public policy career. His time on the Scottish campus had also whetted his appetite for Eastern Christianity. "I was involved in the Catholic Students' Union, and there was a small Orthodox chaplaincy that I tried to do some ecumenical work with," says Bennett, who notes that his prayer life "matured and deepened" while he was in Edinburgh.

Contact with the Orthodox reminded him of his first taste of the Eastern Christian tradition when, as a teenager and his parents were away for the weekend, he decided to attend Sunday Divine Liturgy at Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church in downtown Toronto. "I knew it was Catholic, so I could receive Holy Communion," explains Bennett. "And something was awakened in me spiritually by the Byzantine liturgy."

In Ottawa, while working at the PCO, Bennett became a parishioner at Notre Dame Cathedral in Ottawa. He joined the choir and participated in a parish group for young professionals, through which he attended World Youth Day in July 2002 in his hometown, Toronto. Saint Pope John Paul II was there, too, and Bennett remembers feeling that he was in the presence of a "great and saintly man."

"It really had a profound impact on me, and I came away from World Youth Day with a love for our Lord, a love for the Church, and a love for the Holy Father, and realized that I needed to pursue my vocational discernment in a much more concerted fashion," Bennett explains. "John Paul II's infirmity laid bare that despite his physical limitations and suffering, he was a great witness to the dignity of the human person and the value of life in all forms."

Through the fall of 2002, Bennett met with Jesuit, Dominican and diocesan priests in Ottawa to discuss his interest in pursuing the priesthood. He gave himself one year to decide whether he would leave the PCO and enter the seminary. But Bennett abandoned the timeline before the year ended. His decision had nothing to do with his career in the government, which was moving along nicely; he was promoted to the position of senior policy analyst and research coordinator for Infrastructure Canada's then cities secretariat. Bennett put his plan for the priesthood on ice because of a crisis of faith. "In late 2002 and early 2003, I experienced what I would call a fairly deep spiritual malaise where my prayer life dried up," he recalls. "I wasn't praying daily; I wasn't even saying grace before meals. It wasn't a loss of faith. It was just that my spiritual life was very dry."

"I would go to Mass frustrated with why the priest was doing what he was doing, with the felt banners – and I felt that the choir really sucked. I didn't understand at the time why I was feeling this. I hadn't had an experience like that before. But in hindsight, I think our Lord was giving me a taste of spiritual suffering, of spiritual malaise – and was allowing me to experience that call to me to persevere. And I did. I continued to go to Mass."

Bennett's spiritual drought ended through a work connection. A female colleague of his at the PCO, with whom he was close, invited him to accompany her to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church that she attended in Ottawa. They went to the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy, and would continue to do so every week for several months. In the evening, Bennett would go to Blessed Sacrament, a Roman Catholic parish he belonged to at the time, for the Sunday evening Mass to receive the Eucharist. His friend was oblivious to the spiritual struggle he was experiencing.

"In early February 2003, I told her about this Ukrainian Catholic church I discovered where I could go to Communion and she could have her Byzantine liturgy," Bennett recalls. On the pre-Lent Cheesefare Sunday, the pair went to St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Shrine. "There were wonderful people, a wonderful liturgy

in English, wonderful singing, and I thought, wow, this is great," Bennett says. Reading the church bulletin, he noticed that the parish served the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts during Great Lent, and was intrigued. "I thought that sounded interesting and wanted to come back for that," continued Bennett, who returned to the Shrine for the liturgy.

Meanwhile, his friend moved to Toronto and pursued a relationship with another man, leaving Bennett heartbroken. But he continued going to St. John the Baptist, and quickly formed friendships with other non-Ukrainian parishioners, such as Harold and Rebecca Visser and Pascal Bastien – as Bennett described them, the "non-Uke super-Ukes" who have wholly embraced Ukrainian Catholicism as part of their lives.

Fr. Michael Winn, the rector of Holy Spirit Ukrainian Catholic Seminary – located in Ottawa at the time – gave him books to read on Byzantine spiritual and liturgical traditions. "After about four months, my spiritual malaise was gone," explains Bennett, who shortly thereafter enrolled at the Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies and studied theology part-time.

"I had acquired this strength in my prayer life and a greater love for the Eucharist – both the precious body and the blood of Christ – to the point where I was craving it." Bennett began regularly attending Saturday evening vespers and the Sunday morning English-language liturgy at St. John the Baptist. As he explains, his priestly vocation returned with "greater strength and greater clarity."

"There was always this knocking at the door of my heart, and our Lord was always there kind of saying, 'Will you now say yes to what I'm calling you to be?'"

First, Bennett needed to join the Ukrainian Catholic Church. In 2005, he petitioned Bishop Stephan Chmilar of the Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada to transfer his ascription from the Roman Catholic Church to the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The change of rite was approved; Bennett became a parishioner at St. John the Baptist Shrine and started to think seriously about his vocation.

By this time, Bennett had left the PCO and joined Export Development Canada (EDC), where he worked as a senior political risk analyst and managed the file for Europe and Central Asia, with a focus on Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In December 2009, he decided the time was right to pursue his vocation. He took a leave of absence from his job at EDC and entered Holy Spirit Seminary.

But Bennett was only there for six months. “I wasn’t prepared to be ordained a priest yet and had the sense that there was something else I was called to do,” he says. That something involved the establishment of a new diplomatic post by the federal government, and Bennett knew the man behind the idea.

In 2001, he had met Jason Kenney, the current premier of Alberta. At the time, Kenney was a member of Parliament with the Canadian Alliance, a former conservative party that served as the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. A decade later, Bennett attended the National Prayer Breakfast in Ottawa and ran into Kenney, who by then was in government, serving as the minister of citizenship and immigration with responsibility for multiculturalism. The two agreed to meet for coffee. Kenney asked Bennett his thoughts on the government’s plan, led by Kenney, to create an office of religious freedom. “I told him that to be totally honest, I hadn’t heard about it, but it sounded like a good idea,” recalls Bennett.

Later in the fall of 2011, the two men met up again, this time at a symposium at Saint Paul University on the future of Christianity in the Middle East. Kenney provided more detail on the proposed religious freedom office that would be run through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFAIT; it was renamed Global Affairs Canada in 2015). Bennett told the minister that he would be interested in getting involved in such an initiative.

More than a year passed before Bennett heard any news. But in December 2012 Kenney contacted him, telling him that the government was proceeding with launching the Office of Religious Freedom (ORF) in February 2013. “Jason said, ‘We’d like you to

be a part of it’ and I said, ‘In a policy capacity?’” recalls Bennett. “And he said, ‘No, Andrew, we’re putting your name forward to the prime minister to be appointed as the first ambassador.’ And I thought, wow!”

On February 19, 2013, Bennett was appointed Canada’s first ambassador for religious freedom and head of the ORF within DFAIT. He led a team of six public servants in an office with an annual budget of \$5 million, most of which was directed to a religious freedom fund that supported more than 20 international projects in 10 countries and regions, including Ukraine, to advance freedom of religion or belief.

Under Bennett’s watch, in June 2015, an international contact group on freedom of religion or belief was also established. It brought together the foreign ministries of 25 nations to champion actions aimed at improving global religious freedom. The office became “a centrepiece of foreign policy” for the federal Conservative government, but the opposition Liberal party was “allergic” to its purpose, according to Bennett.

When Justin Trudeau’s Liberals formed the government following the 2015 federal election, the Office of Religious Freedom’s days were numbered. In May 2016, Stéphane Dion, whom Trudeau named as his first foreign affairs minister and for whom Bennett had once worked, announced that the office would be replaced with a new Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion. It would operate with an annual budget of \$15 million, three times the amount the Harper government allocated for the ORF.

Bennett says the Liberal government’s decision to end the ORF’s mandate “demonstrated poor thinking” and a “fairly naïve view that you can advance the human rights of all at the same time.” That idea flows from a “philosophical view that doesn’t believe that religion should be discussed within foreign policy, let alone public policy.”

“Sometimes, you need to amplify a particular human right if there’s a need,” says Bennett, who two months prior to the ORF’s closing joined the faith-based think tank Cardus as a senior fellow. “You can have an office of religious freedom, because religious

persecution is a serious issue in much of the world. But that doesn't mean you don't talk about freedom of the press, or freedom of expression or women's rights. In Canada, we have long had a minister of state responsible for the status of women because there are still issues of pay equity and other issues."

Bennett, who describes himself on Wikipedia as a "public intellectual" and in conversation as a "Burkean conservative wrapped up in a 1950 European Christian Democrat," is nonetheless a non-partisan who has voted for every major party in Canada, including the Greens. He also acknowledges the separation between church and state. "If you think that a political party is there to advance the Gospel, that's really naïve. It's there to gain power and advance a political program," he says. "As the psalmist says, 'put not your trust in princes.' The role of Christians is to proclaim the Gospel to the world."

As the first and possibly last Canadian ambassador for religious freedom, Bennett continues the work he began in that role. He is a senior fellow with the Washington, D.C.-based Religious Freedom Institute (RFI), whose aim is to achieve broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right. He also plays a major role at Cardus' office in Ottawa, serving as both director of the Cardus Religious Freedom Institute – a Canadian offshoot of the American Religious Freedom Institute – and program director of Cardus Law, whose mandate is to "foster emerging scholarship, facilitate public discussion and engage legal processes without intervening to uphold the belief that the law serves society, thereby enabling human flourishing and the advancement of the common good."

Bennett deeply believes that everyone should have the freedom to worship in any faith and the right to not have any faith. He also deeply believes in his faith as he moves closer to the priesthood. In 2017, he was ordained to the diaconate at St. John the Baptist Shrine on November 30 – the feast day of St. Andrew, the apostle Bennett is named after, who is also the patron saint of Ukraine

and fishermen (Bennett likes to fly fish). Saint Andrew's Day is, of course, commemorated annually in Scotland as its national holiday.

As a Ukrainian Catholic deacon, Bennett has been leading the Saturday evening vespers at the church and assisting at the English-language Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings and feast days. Although his Ukrainian vocabulary is limited ("I cannot yet string together a conversation in Ukrainian"), he can read enough of the language to lead the congregation in prayer.

Bennett admits that when he started attending services at St. John the Baptist, his presence there piqued the curiosity of long-time parishioners. "I was asked, 'Why are you in this church?' and I would say I am here because the Holy Spirit has led me here. Someone like me, who is not ethnically Ukrainian but is part of the Church, has to have a love for its Kyivan-Galician Byzantine tradition." He says that love has only grown as he has learned more about the history of the Church, particularly during the 20th century, as it led its followers in Ukraine through the horrors of the Holodomor and the Second World War, and the Church's own suppression under decades of Soviet rule.

"Because the Church has been such a faithful witness, the key element of its mission in the world is union – to try to heal the divisions between East and West," explains Bennett. "Ukrainian Catholics have often been given the supposedly derogatory epithet as 'Uniates' – that somehow we're sellouts to Orthodoxy. But if a Uniate is someone desiring unity, then call me a Uniate! I'll wear the label proudly."

"The Church faces many struggles of not being understood by the West and its fellow Orthodox followers – and we are an orthodox Church. So we live in this in-between space, which I think is a wonderful place to be. It gives you a certain freedom," says Bennett, an avid reader of the Church Fathers, including Saints Maximus the Confessor and John Chrysostom. "We live out our Orthodox spirituality, but in union with the See of Rome; we can swim in a broader sea of the Western tradition and inform it by our Eastern

life, but also receive what is good from that tradition and understand it through an Eastern lens.”

Bennett, who taught a course on the history of Christianity at Augustine College – a private, non-denominational Christian, one-year liberal arts post-secondary institution in Ottawa – believes that while the Ukrainian Catholic Church has its roots in Kyivan Rus’ dating back to 988, when Vladimir the Great embraced Eastern Christianity, and has been geographically situated in what is now Ukraine for more than a millennium, it is “not a Church just for Ukrainians.”

“The Church can never be just for one people. The Church is for all people,” he says. “The Church is first and foremost evangelical – it is to be brought to all people. And what a wonderful gift it is to bring our Eastern Byzantine faith through the Ukrainian tradition to the world.”

“I am never going to be Ukrainian; I don’t want to be Ukrainian. I am who I am – although we have a common love of root vegetables,” he laughs. “I am proud to be a guy with a Scottish-Irish background.”

“If I were Ukrainian, I would think, wow, these non-Ukrainian people want to be in this Church that has suffered, that has been victimized and persecuted, and now the Holy Spirit is working in this way to lead these people to our Church. Wow, we must have something really amazing and really special!”

Bennett compares the Ukrainian Catholic Church to how followers of the early Christian Church in Jerusalem felt about Paul welcoming non-Jews (Greeks) into the fold. “I think we have to look at it through that light,” he says. “We’re not just the Church of ‘the Jews’ – or Ukrainians in this case – but the Church of ‘the gentiles’ – non-Ukrainians – too.”

“We are the Church of the Irish and Scottish, of French Canadians, and Koreans and the Dutch – all of these people who are coming to St. John the Baptist. It’s interesting that our Church, which came to Canada, now has all these people from different ethnic backgrounds who have found our Church. If that’s not the

work of the Holy Spirit, I don’t know what is.” Says Bennett: “It’s faith first, culture second.”

The next step in his faith journey will be to complete his theology degree and any time remaining in his seminary formation, and hopefully be ordained to the priesthood. Ordained to the diaconate as a single man, Bennett will have to remain celibate. “I always saw myself as a husband and as a dad, but there is this other calling,” says the handsome six-foot-three scholar and former envoy who sports designer glasses. “However, one of our priests once said to me, ‘Andrew, a man that can’t see himself as a husband and a father has no place in the celibate priesthood.’ You’re called to be a husband to Christ’s bride, the Church, and you’re also called to be a father to many people.”

For now, he bases his life around the diaconate and preaches the message of the evangelization occurring within the Ukrainian Catholic Church. “It’s like in the Gospel of John when John the Baptist sees Jesus and calls him the ‘Lamb of God,’ and two of John’s disciples follow Jesus and ask him where he is staying and Jesus says, ‘Come, and you will see.’ From an Eastern perspective, our Church says to people, ‘come and see the beauty of our liturgy and our spiritual life – the rhythm of feasting and fasting – and be drawn into a beautiful relationship with the holy Trinity,’” explains Bennett. “We always have to be invitational.”

He says that Ukrainian Catholicism has brought him a “greater appreciation of beauty.” “Beauty is something that God has given us, and the liturgy is the most beautiful thing possible in which God reveals himself. The Byzantine Christian world view is so shaped by beauty, so shaped by the importance of matter. Matter matters, where the unseen God becomes human.”

“What we do with matter – creating beautiful things like art and music with our voices – is really essential. The Byzantine tradition does this in a very full way and a very revelatory way that is sometimes lacking in other Christian traditions. I’m so happy where God has brought me.”