

Views from the Pews

St. Stephen
Protomartyr Ukrainian Catholic Church

January 27, 2019

AMBROSE & MARILYN COMCHI

Tribute. Firstly, Marilyn and Ambrose wish to extend a tribute to Joseph Sakundiak for his tireless efforts in the founding and functioning of St. Stephen's Church. As a parishioner once stated, "Without Joe there wouldn't be a St. Stephen's."

Ambrose Arrives in Calgary. In October, 1967, Ambrose left Ottawa for his native Alberta, after two years helping to implement the new Canada Pension Plan Act in Ottawa. He chose to live in Calgary, where his brother, Bob, worked as an engineer. Ambrose attended Assumption Church because it was near his rented apartment. In 1971, Bob and family got transferred out of Calgary, so Ambrose bought their house that was located near St. Stephen's new hall that functioned as a church and social facility. Ambrose became active in St. Stephen's activities, serving on Council as a Liturgical Director (twice), Secretary, Hospitality Director, Membership Director, and President (twice). He also became



active in the Knights of Columbus and volunteered at Church bingo's and other Church activities, such as, hosting the Calgary's homeless (Inn from the Cold) in the Church basement for nearly thirteen years. Lately, he has been spending time designing and selling tickets for various Church functions and is musing about designing tickets for purgatory and heaven.

Marilyn Arrives in Calgary. In 1967, Marilyn also arrived in Calgary from Ottawa, her home area. She had acquired a job to teach High School Latin and English. She did not meet Ambrose until several years later during Stampede. Father Andrew Muzyka married them in the St. Stephen's hall/church in 1977. After the marriage, Marilyn enrolled in Catholic instruction and eventually became a Catholic. She has been active in the Church choir, Plus 50 Club (secretary), UCWLC (president & secretary), and has also served on Council as Pastoral Care Director (twice) and Membership Director. She helps out at the pyrogy and cabbage roll making bees and other activities.

Being neither Ukrainian nor Catholic, Marilyn had a big adjustment to make. She always remembers fondly Mrs. Doris Krysak who taught her how to sing the Liturgy. Every Sunday Marilyn would try to get seated as close to Doris as possible, so that she could listen to her and learn. She also remembers her astonishment when parishioners got up from their seats, knelt down, and banged their heads on the floor. She later discovered this was the profound bow and learned how to do it and why it was done. Much of Marilyn's religious education has

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come through choir; prayerfully singing the psalms and hymns has been a very, very important part of her continuing conversion. She can well remember being a new-comer to the kitchen, not knowing a perogy from a holuptsi, and starting to give a long explanation about her lack of experience when someone asked very pointedly if she could peel carrots, and when she said she could, she was told to do that. That made everything so simple. They didn't care who she was or where she came from, she just had to get to work.

A beautiful memory that Marilyn treasures comes from helping out at Inn from the Cold for the homeless. One night an immigrant family, dad, mom, and 12-year-old daughter had found that a home had become available to them. Ambrose and Marilyn in the next weeks helped them get settled and thereafter were often invited to the home to celebrate the daughter's birthday with Ethiopian food. The daughter has kept in touch with Ambrose and just recently phoned to tell him that she has graduated from university.

Children. Marilyn and Ambrose encouraged their adopted children to participate in the Church functions. In 1983 they had adopted two brothers, TJ (4 years old) and Chris (6 years old). Both boys were baptised at St. Stephen's. Unfortunately, TJ succumbed to cancer a year later after nine months of treatment. Father Muzyka performed the funeral. Belonging to St. Stephen's provided the support for grieving parents. In 1997, Marilyn and Ambrose adopted two teens, Sandra (13 years old) and her brother, Andrew (14 years old), both of whom were baptised at St. Stephen's by Father Rendy Yackimec. Both teens were active in the youth group, Andrew serving as president one year. Andrew was married at St. Stephen's by Father Bo Nahachewsky.

New Church. Ambrose was president of Council when a decision was made to build a church next to the hall that had served many functions. There was some concern about the cost of the new building being about \$1.5 million. Anyhow, the church was constructed, won an award for the design, and was paid off by funds raised. Subsequently, a new hall was attached to the back of the new St. Stephen's Church – forming a magnificent structure. Unfortunately, the old hall had to be demolished, which concerned Ambrose because he thought that maybe that would invalidate his and Marilyn's marriage that had been performed in the old hall/church. As expected, some maintenance will always be required. Currently, the building is in need of new roof shingles, which are to be replaced by ones manufactured from recycled automobile tires. However, Ambrose is concerned that the new shingles may have to be replaced every year before winter, just like automobile summer tires get replaced by winter tires every fall.

Inspirational Church. The priests, choir, prayer shawls that are issued to ill people, aid for financially-strapped families, various social activities (like Praznyk & Malanka), Knights of Columbus, UCWLC, children and youth functions, special classes, sandwiches for the Drop-In Center, donations to local and international charities, and other special committees all contribute to a very supportive and inspirational family **environment**.

Editor's Note: Thank you to Ambrose and Marilyn for this article. I often think Ambrose is St. Stephen's stand-up comedian.

I want to share your **"views"** as they are important to our parish family.

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