

5. Big Meadow

Saint John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The settlement of the Big Meadow area began in 1918–1919 with the arrival of immigrants from Bukovyna, including Metro Denys and Peter Yarema. In 1926, a two-acre cemetery was established and registered under the Lessard Community Cemetery Company. Interestingly, two non-Ukrainians, Johnny Levesque and Jack Walter, were listed on the land title. Although they did not wish to join the church, they supported the establishment of a community graveyard. Provincial regulations required a structure to be erected at the site to house bodies before burial. In 1927, Reverend Ivan Mayba dedicated a cross at the cemetery following the first Ukrainian Orthodox Divine Liturgy in the community, which was celebrated at a local residence.

A small 16' x 16' log church was constructed on the cemetery site in 1930 by community volunteers. In 1933, the cemetery was blessed by Reverend Tymofei Horbay. He advised the congregation to apply for official admission into the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC). By 1936, correspondence from the congregation indicated that St. John's Church had 15 members and 11 graves. The same letter detailed the founding and early years of the congregation.

In 1937 or 1938, the original church was enlarged and adorned with traditional Orthodox features. Monthly services were held by visiting priests. On August 26, 1941, during a meeting attended by 12 members, the congregation formally adopted the UGOC constitution and bylaws. Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich signed the papers as a witness. Two days later, he consecrated the church during a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy.



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By 1943, the congregation had grown to seven families. A post-war influx of new members tripled its size. However, this growth led to internal tensions, particularly concerning financial obligations to the Diocesan Pension Fund. In 1948, conflicts arose between the old and new church executives over unpaid dues and leadership. Father Senishen attributed the unrest to poor communication about financial responsibilities and personal rivalries. Despite these challenges, the congregation resolved its issues and fulfilled its financial obligations by 1949, when membership reached 16.

The early 1950s saw further declines in membership, that dropped to seven by 1952. Financial struggles persisted, exacerbated by a lack of clergy and competition from the Russian Orthodox Mission. Correspondence from the Consistory in 1954 encouraged the congregation to recruit young men for theological studies to address the clergy shortage. By the end of 1954, the congregation reported hosting seven Divine Liturgies, supported by 10 members and four sympathizers.

The late 1950s and early 1960s brought a resurgence in activity. Membership exceeded 20, and monthly Sunday services were

reinstated. However, in 1961, a decision to establish a new congregation in Bonnyville led to another period of upheaval. Disputes arose over financial allocations and leadership, culminating in legal threats and intervention by the Consistory. The conflict was eventually resolved, but lingering grievances affected the congregation's morale and finances.

By 1967, membership had dwindled significantly, with few willing to register as members. Although the congregation ceased budgetary contributions and curtailed activities by the 1970s, the church remained a site for occasional services, weddings, funerals, and annual cemetery commemorations (provody). In 1980, Father Sawchenko reported that the congregation had approximately five members and had been largely inactive. The church property, excluding the building, was valued at \$20,000, while the hall was estimated at \$15,000.

Today, the original log church, which was enlarged and renovated during the 1930s and 1940s, still stands on its original site. The church, painted in 1952, continues to host rare services and annual provody at the cemetery, which is listed among the churches served by Father Lipinski.



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Priests

I. Mayba (1927)
T. Horbay (1933)
H. Wasyliv (1936–1943)
W. Woytowich (1943–1944)
W. Senishen (1944–1949)
W. Boychuk (1949–1950)
P. Satsevich (1950–1951)
Iov Skakalsky (1952–1953)
I. Magas (1953)
S. Hredil' (1954)
I. Kulish (1955)
E. Trufyn (1956–1958)
P. Dorosh-Zmiyiwsky (1958–1961)
J. Vitenko (1961–1962)
P. Zubrytsky (1962–1963)
E. Stefaniuk (1963–1964)
O. Sorochuk (1964–1970)
L. Kubin (1970–1972)
S. Semotiuk (1972–1974)
S. Shcherban (1972–1975)
A. Chrustawka (1975–1978)
M. Sawchenko (1979–1985)
D. Hohol (1985–1994)
J. Lipinski (1994 -)

Location and Feast Day

Big Meadow is 13 miles northeast of Bonnyville on the highway to Lessard. The church is a few miles further north and due east of La Corey, situated on the south bank of the Beaver River in the Municipal District of Bonnyville. *GPS Coordinates:* 54.35561, -110.65599 | Their *Feast Day* is July 7.

Founding Members

A. Demko	J. Laschuk
D. Denys	J. Necaui
M. Ilchuk	N. Ogrodiuk
S. Marchuk	M. Slewinsky
A. Ogrodiuk	A. Stusiak
P. Yarema	M. Yakowiniuk
P. Yurak	H. Yarema
W. Chyz	A. Yurak
J. Ilchuk	

Cemetery

Located on the church property.



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