



Census figures show that Canadians have a wide range of religious beliefs (including not having any religious beliefs), a variety that reflects the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity of the nation. As Canada's 1.2 million people of Ukrainian heritage look back at 120 years since the first settlers came from Ukraine to Canada, Peter Goldring takes a look at the religious heritage of those first immigrants and their descendents.

As the Ukrainian Canadian community celebrates 120 years of Ukrainians in Canada in 2011, it is worth taking a look at the religions of the first immigrants. They quite naturally brought with them the form of Christian worship they were accustomed to. That meant the introduction of Orthodox Christianity and Ukrainian Catholicism to a country more accustomed to the Roman Catholic and Protestant expressions of the faith of England and France.

Ukrainian Catholics (the majority of the immigrants to Canada) were immediately per-

ceived as different from their Roman Catholic counterparts. They used a Ukrainian liturgy, instead of a Latin one, and their clergy could be married - unlike Roman Catholic priests who are required to be celibate. The Ukrainian Catholic church (both in Canada and Ukraine) continues to look to Rome for ultimate authority but operates as a separate entity.

Around the same time, particularly for Canada and Alaska in the late 1800s, the Moscow-based Russian Orthodox Church sent missionaries that developed parishes in both Alaska and northern Alberta.



St. Peter and Paul Russo Orthodox Church in Alberta's Smoky Lake district has served the community for more than 100 years.

John Taschuk, the great-grandfather of my wife Lorraine, came to Canada and settled in the Smoky Lake area farming community of Dickie Bush. John Taschuk, a practising member of the Russo Greek Orthodox Church, do-

minated land on the hilltop for the St. Peter and Paul church, community hall and graveyard that still has regular services today.



Other Orthodox churches sprang up, especially across the Prairies. These churches were of vital importance to these new Canadians, places not only of worship but of community and the preservation of the Ukrainian language.

For many of the newly arrived Orthodox in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the only choice of church was the Russian Orthodox Church, which had planted a number of mission churches in Western Canada. When a new Ukrainian (Greek) Orthodox church was formed around the end of the First World War not all Ukrainians who had been worshipping in those Russian Orthodox parishes chose to join the new church. Some stayed, especially in the rural communities where the congregants saw no need to switch. Their descendents still attend those now century-old churches which are Russian in name but Ukrainian in character.

That there have been differences and some suspicion over the years between the different churches is a sad historical fact. But the issue is no longer whether any church is said to be too close politically to Moscow – neither the Tsarists nor the Soviets are in

charge. Today it would seem that there is a certain rapprochement between the clergy of the different churches who are able to work together for mutual benefit. That would indicate the time has come for the entire Ukrainian community to come together, regardless of their faith background. There is a need to recognize what has happened historically, but we should not allow the present to be dictated by the past if that is no longer appropriate.



Beautifully decorated sanctuaries and ornate priestly vestments are part of the long tradition of Ukrainian religious expression - symbolising the offering of only the best to God.

Canadian census numbers show that the vast majority of the 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian heritage do not identify themselves as being part of a "Ukrainian" church. In the 2001 census 126,200 Canadians identified themselves as Ukrainian Catholic and 32,720 claimed to be Ukrainian Orthodox (a five per-

cent decline from the 1991 census, although the number of Ukrainian Orthodox in Alberta rose by two per cent in that decade). Even allowing for Ukrainians who have joined the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches (such as those in my riding of Edmonton East who attend the Evangelical Baptist Church, part of the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Convention of Canada), it is quite possible that the majority no longer claim any religious affiliation. Earlier census figures also showed that large percentages



of the Ukrainian-Canadian population identified themselves as members of the Roman Catholic or United churches.

According to 2006 figures, in Ukraine 50.4% of the religious population are deemed to be part of the Kyiv Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church while 26.1% look to the Moscow Patriarchate. Other groups include the Ukrainian Greek Catholic (8%), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox (7.2%), Roman Catholic (2.2%), Protestant (2.2%), Jewish (0.6%), and others (3.2%).

Canada has a long tradition of separation of church and state, both similar too and different from that of the United States, where the doctrine is enshrined in law. Here the monarch is also the titular head of the Anglican Church, but there is no state church. Our politicians, for the most part, separate their personal religious beliefs from their official duties.

When I was in Ukraine at the time of the failed 2004 presidential election and the Orange Revolution that followed, it was quite apparent that the clergy were indeed taking sides in favour of one presidential candidate or another and that the divide between "orange" and "blue and white" was frequently

along religious lines. That understandably would lead supporters of one side or another to question the clergy of the church on the opposite side of the political spectrum. From a Canadian perspective it would seem obvious that the clergy's involvement in this fashion in such a polarizing event would not be beneficial to the country of the churches they serve.



The entire community takes part on celebrations as the church has been the focal part of the Ukrainian community in Canada since the first settlers arrived here.

However, that taking of sides in Ukrainian politics was not evident in clergy in the Ukrainian churches in Canada, no matter their denomination. There is no doubt that the vast majority of Ukrainian-Canadians, as a result of history and inclination, would see themselves as more "orange" than "blue." It would however be wrong to assume that those Ukrainian-

Canadians who choose to worship in the Russian Orthodox Church are supporters of the "blue" side or are sympathizers with Moscow's politics.

Simply put, the choice of which house of worship to attend does not make one person more or less Ukrainian (or Canadian) than another.

It would make sense that as we celebrate the 120th anniversary of the first wave of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada that all of our religious traditions are honoured and have the opportunity to take part. Religion has been perhaps the mastic that holds the communities together, ensuring the preservation of the Ukrainian language and cultural traditions in Canada. By bringing together the different strands of Ukrainian religious heritage we will set an example not only for other Canadians but perhaps more importantly for Ukraine. If we can bridge our religious differences perhaps it will inspire the churches in Ukraine to make the same effort.

That there is religious difference in Ukraine that frequently splinters along political lines is perhaps understandable, though regrettable. However there is no reason for Ukrainian Canadians to be divided over differences in the ancestral homeland. As we celebrate 120 years of Ukrainians in Canada it is time for Ukrainian Canadians to show that they truly have unity in the community and acceptance of the faith choices of all Ukrainians.

Update: Representatives of both Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox churches have been asked to take part in a solemn ceremony of remembrance for the victims of the Holodomor and the Holocaust that is being held on May 31, 2012 on Parliament Hill.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Question 1 Do you think it is important for Canadians to honour their religious heritage?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Question 2 Should the Ukrainian church in Canada publicly declare it's position on political issues in Ukraine?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Comments: _____

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