

St. Mary Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church in San Diego California



[Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of San Diego Services/Location/Maps](#)

[Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of San Diego Photos](#)

[Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of San Diego Picnic 2005 Photos](#)

[Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of San Diego Palm Sunday 2007 Photos](#)

[Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of San Diego Easter Services 2007](#)

-By Alexander Skop and Alex Nesterenko
-Edited by Bill W. Loznycky, Jr.

Church life in San Diego is closely tied to the organizations developed by the first settlers of Ukrainians in California, especially those in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Details about the early days of California Ukrainians can be found in Mykola Novak's autobiography *Na storozhi Ukrainy* (Guardians of Ukraine) and in *Slidamy Pioneriv* (Pioneer Tracks) by Ulas Samchuk.

The number of Ukrainians in San Diego grew at the end of WWII, particularly with the arrival of immigrants and refugees who had come from the Displaced Persons camps in Germany and Austria. In the late 1950s, under the leadership of army doctor Dr. Bohdan Osadca; a Ukrainian American Association was formed. That same year the Ukrainian American Association was accepted into the international organization House of Pacific Relations in Balboa Park as the House of Ukraine, which shared a cottage with Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Saturday Ukrainian School was held at the cottage, as were church choir rehearsals, both under the direction of Hryhory Kytasty.

On June 20, 1961 at the home of Alexander Skop a group of nine individuals met to discuss how to form a Ukrainian Orthodox parish in San Diego. Mr. Skop reported about this meeting while visiting in Los Angeles to Fr. Oleksiy Limonchenko, who agreed to look after the newly formed parish in San Diego. Fr. Oleksiy was the assistant to Very Rev. Peter Mayevsky, the pastor of St. Volodymyr's Church in Los Angeles. The group passed a resolution to name the parish St. Mary Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Fr. Oleksiy Limonchenko traveled once a month from Los Angeles to conduct services in the buildings of the All Saints Episcopal Church on 6th Street in San Diego.

In the spring of 1963 Fr. Ananiy Miroschenko, the pastor of St. Andrew's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Los Angeles, was appointed pastor of the San Diego parish. Fr. Miroschenko, along with parishioners witnessed a significant event in 1965 with the arrival of Colonel Vasyi Prokhoda Soviet political prisoner. Colonel Prokhoda arrived, after a long separation from his family, from a Soviet concentration camp and rejoined his wife Maria and son Roman, who were active members of the San Diego parish. An officer of the Ukrainian National Republic army as well as a community and political activist of the Petliura emigration in Czechoslovakia, Prokhoda was incarcerated by the Soviets at the end of WWII and was sent to Siberia. After more than 20 years he was released as a citizen of Czechoslovakia. In San Diego he would become active in the Ukrainian community and would write his memoirs Zapysky nepokirlyvoho (Memoirs of the Undeclared.)

On November 20, 1966 the Orthodox parish welcomed Bishop Alexander, who was returning to the U.S. after visiting Ukrainian Orthodox parishes in South America. Fr. A. Miroschenko welcomed the bishop in the church. During the banquet, the president of the House of Ukraine John Danylchuk welcomed Bishop Alexander in addition; Jaroslav Sysyn spoke on behalf of the Ukrainian Catholic parish.

In 1967 parish treasurer Ivan Matiash obtained permission to use the chapel of Greenwood Memorial Cemetery as a place to conduct services. At the same time the parish bought a section of the cemetery "Gethsemany Gardens" where many church members have been laid to rest.

On October 13, 1968 the church parish celebrated its Saint's Day in conjunction with Fr. Miroschenko's 50th anniversary of priesthood and his 50th wedding anniversary. Members of the San Diego Ukrainian Catholic parish Our Lady of Perpetual Help with their parish priest Fr. Sylvester Solomon took part in the festivities, as did guests from Los Angeles. The sisterhood of the church parish prepared a banquet.

In 1970 Fr. A. Miroschenko retired. Fr. Oleksiy Limonchenko became the parish priest. On June 13, 1970 after the church service a welcome meeting was held in honor of Fr. Oleksiy; A. Skop, board president, said a few words of greetings, as did M. Svirsky on behalf of the sisterhood. Treasurer Ivan Matiash appealed to church members to start a fund raising campaign to buy a church for the parish.

On September 23, 1971 Very Rev. Ananiy Miroschenko passed away. Many St. Mary's church parishioners took part in his funeral services at St. Andrew's church in Los Angeles. Fr. O. Limonchenko was transferred from California in 1973 and Fr. Archimandrite Alexander Dovhal was appointed pastor of St. Mary's Church. Fr. Dovhal had been pastor of Ukrainian Orthodox churches in Venezuela before coming to California and became the parish's first permanent pastor.

In the spring of 1973 San Diego greeted the newly ordained Bishop Constantine for the first time. After a Hierarchical Divine Service in the Greenwood chapel, a banquet was held at St. George's Restaurant. Members of the board, sisterhood and representatives from the San Diego Ukrainian community welcomed the Bishop.

In fund raising, every year St. Mary's Ukrainian Orthodox Church celebrated its Saint's Day with banquets and special programs. Church picnics were also held regularly in Balboa Park.

In the spring of 1979 a commercial building on University Avenue for \$80,000 was selected. Church members decided to purchase the building with a 50% cash deposit and a loan from Ukrainian National Aid Association in Pittsburgh for the remainder at 9% on March 3, 1979.

The fund raising effort to purchase this property for the church commenced with donations from its members. The large property needed much renovation, from rewiring the electricity to subdividing the building into two parts. One section would be for the church itself and the other used as rental property for a commercial business. Church members did the majority of reconstruction. St. Mary's parish celebrated Christmas and New Year's 1980 in its own building that was blessed by Fr. Lev Porandowsky. Church services were held every two weeks.

In the spring of 1981 Bishop Volodymyr celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Service. The Bishop was returning to the U.S. from a visit to Ukrainian Orthodox churches in Australia and New Zealand.

Fr. Lev Porendowsky's health declined as a result of his years in Siberia; his visits to San Diego became more infrequent and the parish became concerned about its future. In 1988 the Consistory appointed Fr. Hryhory Wolkowinsky as the pastor of the Ukrainian Orthodox parish in San Diego.

In the spring of 1987 the Orthodox and Catholic parishes of San Diego formed a joint Jubilee Committee to Mark the 1000th

Anniversary of Christianity in Rus'-Ukraine, which included pastors of both churches and the church councils. In conjunction with the National Jubilee Committee in Washington D.C., billboards were placed in various parts of the city advertising the anniversary of Christianity in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Museum's (New York City) traveling exhibit "Lost Architecture of Kyiv" was exhibited at the University of San Diego in December 1987 and January 1988.

Pre-jubilee celebrations commenced on October 4, 1987 at the Saint's Day festivities of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Ukrainian Catholic Church with the participation of the Ukrainian Orthodox church. The community choir directed by Serhij Hejzler accompanied a joint prayer service. On October 18, 1987, the Saint's Day of St. Mary's became a joint holiday with a prayer service celebrated by the pastors and faithful of both parishes. In the musical program, Roman Ritachka performed with an ensemble of young bandurists, as did the choir made up of members of both parishes conducted by S. Hejzler.

The celebration of the Saint's Day of St. Mary's Church on October 29, 1988 was simultaneously the celebration of the 1000th Anniversary of Christianity in Ukraine. The festivities took place at the parish and in the hall of St. Spiridon Greek Orthodox Church. Very Rev. Dean Stepan Halyk, Very Rev. Oleksiy Limonchenko, and Rev. Hryhory Wolkowynsky, accompanied by the community choir directed by Serhij Hejzler, celebrated the holiday liturgy. Clergy and faithful from the Ukrainian Catholic Church also attended the liturgy. During the banquet, the human rights activist and dissident Petro Ruban, the head of the Jubilee Committee of the 1000 years of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine, gave speeches.

After a number of years the location of the parish in the eastern section of San Diego was becoming run-down. Parish members sought to find a new location for the church. A new home was located in a former school and kindergarten that was for sale on Campo Road in Spring Valley. After prolonged deliberations and negotiations with the owner of the property an agreement suitable to both parties was reached. The parish acquired the property for \$240,000.

The generosity of the members of the parish, funds accumulated throughout the years, and the sale of the former parish building made it feasible to purchase the property and redesign the existing structures into a church and a church hall. The Building Committee took charge of the reconstruction. The extensive project required rebuilding what would be the church hall, constructing a fence, putting in a parking lot and sidewalks. Every day, parish members came to do the necessary work. The sisterhood prepared the church hall and kitchen, looked for appropriate furnishings and equipment -- these parish "bees" worked selflessly for their Church.

An apartment built next to the church hall became an additional source of income when rented out; it has also been the parish priest's residence. With the official opening and consecration of the church slated for St. Mary's Saint's Day of the same year, work intensified to complete the most important parts of the project. Fr. Wolkowynsky and friends from Phoenix, Arizona donated candelabra that he had made himself. In addition, he donated large icons for the iconostasis and the walls of the church. His bronze dome finished the monumental preparatory work put in by the parish of St. Mary's.

"A Piece of Heaven on Earth" This was the title of an article printed by the newspaper *Ukrainski Visti* (Ukrainian News) about the consecration of the new church in Spring Valley on October 14, 1990: "On a warm Sunday morning many faithful meet Archbishop Constantine with bouquets of flowers; Miss Lida Nesterenko warmly greets the Archbishop. The president of the church council Alexander Skop welcomes the Archbishop with bread and salt. At the threshold to the church the pastor, Fr. Hryhory, meets the Archbishop and asks for his blessing. An enthusiastic "Ispola Despota" sung by the united choir directed by Serhij Hejzler greets the Archbishop as he enters the church. The pretty and welcoming church, church hall, buildings and small park in a pretty and green section of town has become the crowning glory of years of hopes and dreams of this small community dedicated to their Church. "

Almost the entire Ukrainian Catholic congregation, along with their pastor Rev. Andrew Mykyta, was among the 200 participants of the festive banquet. The musical program featured Bohdan Hejzler at the piano, solos by Lesia Bilayev and Yuri Pavlenko, and the choir directed by S. Hejzler. A prayer and "mnohaya lita" concluded the gala festivities.

The joyous achievements of the church community in San Diego were being celebrated at the exact same time that Ukraine was experiencing dramatic developments in its national and spiritual rebirth. The same day that St. Mary's church was being blessed in San Diego, thousands of faithful met in front of Street Andrew's Sobor in Kyiv to meet Patriarch Mstyslav, who was consecrated Bishop in this same sacred place during the German occupation. Thousands of banners and flags from all parts of Ukraine waved above the masses of faithful. The special church service and Patriarch's speech were broadcast over speakers, foretelling the joy of the national and spiritual reawakening of the Ukrainian people.

As pastor of St. Mary's Fr. Hryhory Wolkowynsky worked selflessly for the good of the parish. He was in poor health and also took care of his critically ill wife and his son in Phoenix. Fr. Hryhory regularly flew in or drove from Arizona to conduct services in San Diego. Fr. Hryhory died on January 13, 1997 in Phoenix. Archbishop Vsevolod conducted the funeral with Ukrainian Orthodox priests from California. A large number of San Diego parishioners and Deacon Ihor Miroshchenko took part in the funeral. The

Consistory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appointed Fr. Ivan Semko as pastor. Recently arrived from Ukraine, he served St. Mary's for a relatively short time. He was reassigned to a parish in Portland Oregon, and Deacon Ihor Miroshchenko, who was preparing to become a priest, took on parish duties temporarily.

The son of the pastor of St. Mary's in San Diego and St. Andrew's in Los Angeles, Fr. Ihor was close to church life and had served as president of the church council at St. Andrew's. He had a true calling to the priesthood and decided to fulfill his dream when he retired. Lengthy theological studies prepared Fr. Ihor for his priestly duties.

August 2, 1998 became an unforgettable day in the life of the parish of St. Mary's. Deacon Ihor was ordained as a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the U.S. by Archbishop Vsevolod. The consecration took place in St. Mary's church with clergy of California, faithful and church choirs from Los Angeles and San Diego directed by Serhij Hejzler. "Aksios! Aksios!" answered the choir dynamically to Archbishop Vsevolod's "Aksios!" (Deserving, worthy.) During the festive banquet the overall atmosphere was one of joy - that a servant of God such as Fr. Deacon Ihor was strengthening the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. As pastor of St. Mary's, Fr. Ihor paid special attention to obtaining special artifacts for the church. He regularly visited the sick and helped the infirm. Tolerant and outgoing he worked closely with the Ukrainian Catholic priest and his faithful, which resulted in close ties between both parishes.

The first traditional Ukrainian wedding at the church was held on October 21, 2000 when Darlene Edgar and Bill Loznycky were married. Active in community and church organizations, this young couple is an energetic asset to the Ukrainian community in San Diego.

In early 2001 the church council started discussing plans for the 40th anniversary of the founding of the parish and participating in the Sobor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S. In March the parish was stunned with the news of Fr. Ihor's serious illness and in June he passed away at the age of 70. Almost the entire parish traveled to the funeral in Los Angeles either by chartered bus or car. Faithful from the Ukrainian Catholic parish also attended with their pastor Fr. Myron Mykyta. Archbishop Anthony officiated at the funeral service, with clergy from neighboring Orthodox parishes in attendance.

On June 17, 2001 in St. Mary's Church a memorial Archbishop Anthony held Hierarchical Divine Service. During the wake Fr. Ihor was remembered with both deep sorrow and tremendous gratitude. During his meeting with the church council, Archbishop Anthony informed the council that the Consistory had a possible candidate for St. Mary's, Very Rev. Myron Mykhailiuk from Ukraine.

In August 2001 the parish heartily welcomed their new pastor Very Rev. Myron Mykhailiuk and Dobrodiyka Halyna, who had come from South Bound Brook, N.J. to start a new chapter in the life of the local community.

On Sunday, October 20, 2002, St. Mary's celebrated its 40th anniversary of the founding of the Church and feast day with participation of His Eminence Archbishop Vsevolod. A celebratory banquet and cultural program was held at the Red Lion Hanalei Hotel in Mission Valley.

It would be impossible to overestimate the dedication of St. Mary's Sisterhood in the parish's success. The Sisterhood organized annual picnics and fund raisers from the very start, prepared Saint's Day and holiday celebrations. The church is always tastefully decorated, the hall with its weekly activities always spotless, and the park-like grounds of the church always well maintained. Maria Svirsky was president of the sisterhood in the early 1960s and remained in that position for many years. She and her husband Boryslav were in charge of church banquets where several hundred guests from San Diego and Los Angeles would celebrate the parish's feast day. The current president is Claudia Krewsun, who like her predecessors, spends many hours a week at the church, supervising the work on the grounds and preparing special parish lunches on Sundays; she is always ably assisted by her daughters Sonya Edgar and Darlene Loznycky.

The parish choir's success can be attributed to a few dedicated individuals. After Hryhory Kytasty left in 1964, Pylyp Prodanchuk directed the church choir. He was from Minneapolis, where he had lost both legs in a railroad accident. Notwithstanding his lack of mobility, he held regular choir rehearsals and was choir director until his passing in 1976. Petro Kondratenko came to San Diego at the height of the community's activities. He was a professionally trained choral conductor and became director of St. Mary's parish choir and of the Ukrainian community choir, which totaled over 40 singers. The community choir became an important part of every event. After a difficult illness, he died on April 7, 1978.

Serhij and Maria Hejzler's move to San Diego from Rochester in August 1981 was very beneficial for both the church parish and the Ukrainian community. A conductor of both church and secular choirs, S. Hejzler revived St. Mary's and the San Diego Ukrainian community choirs. The choirs took part in many celebrations and programs.

The motto of The Ukrainian Orthodox League is "Dedicated to our Church, Devoted to its Youth" "The Ukrainian Orthodox League

is a national volunteer organization of members in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, who are committed to promoting the Orthodox faith, supporting the church, developing the potential of our youth and their active participation, and preserving Ukrainian heritage and culture."

In 1996, the parish board requested a new effort in providing for the new and young people in the church. It was decided that the best course of action would be to petition the Ukrainian Orthodox League (UOL) for permission to develop its own local chapter. On July 19, 1997, in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, at the 50th Anniversary Convention of the UOL, the parish received its own chapter charter. A small, but determined, group of St. Mary parishioners began their efforts with various fund raising activities. The most satisfying activities were promoting Ukrainian culture and heritage at the annual El Cajon ethnic "Friendship Festival", and by assisting with the promotion and sales of the Ukrainian traditional bandura CD, "KOBZAR" by Andrij Kytasty.

The crowning achievement of St. Mary's UOL was hosting the hugely successful UOL convention in July 2000. It was a historic event because for the first time in the 53 years of the UOL, the convention was held west of the Mississippi River and Chicago. The entire parish participated, from the wonderful farewell Sunday lunch provided by the sisterhood, to the parish choir who led an overflow of Ukrainian Orthodox faithful at Divine Liturgy, which is one of the few times during the year when all three of our hierarchs are together at prayer. This event could not have happened without the support and dedication of the lovingly remembered Father Ihor. The parish also had wonderful support from the House of Ukraine, and from members of the sister Ukrainian Catholic Church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Throughout the years the parish took part in a variety of special projects to assist victims of Chernobyl, political prisoners of the former USSR, Brazilian students, seminarians, students and orphans in Ukraine. An especially benevolent project was the assistance to a young man from Kyiv, Yuriy Skliarenko, who lost both arms in a tram accident in Kyiv in the summer of 1991. A. Skop and the Sisterhood of the parish took the initiative to place an appeal in the Ukrainian press. Hundreds of compassionate people in the US, Canada and Australia donated almost \$20,000. That year, Yuriy was sent to Germany, where specialists in electronic prostheses made him arms and hands. The ever-grateful Yuriy regularly sends letters of thanks and holiday greetings written all by him. He now works as a computer operator at a Kyiv bank.

This short history of the parish would not be complete without a few words about Alexander Skop who was one of the founders of St. Mary's Church and has been elected 36 times to the post of president. His generosity, tact and tolerance, benevolent nature and good humor gained him the respect of the parish. His many activities in the Ukrainian community include: president of the House of Ukraine; member of Slovo, the diaspora writer's organization; member of the editorial board of the newspaper Ukrainski visti. He is presently the president of the Ivan Bahriany Foundation, which publishes books on Ukrainian history, politics and literature in Ukraine. His short humorous essays appear in diaspora and Ukrainian press; a collection of these sketches I Smikh i hore za synim morem was published in 2001. On occasion of these jubilee festivities the parishes wishes its president a Kozats'ke Mnohaya

In addition to Mr. Skop, St. Mary's parishioners bow their heads in memory of the Ukrainian immigrants who came before them to America, to their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. Some came searching for a better life, others for freedom. Our hearts fill with pride and appreciation for their dedication to the Ukrainian cause. Their generosity was the cornerstone of the creation of the Ukrainian Church and the Ukrainian community and guaranteed future generations a rich legacy in the land of the free and the brave.

