



Who Are the Carpatho-Rusyns?

In the mountainous region of Carpatho-Rus, known also as Carpatho-Ruthenia, situated between present day Slovakia and Ukraine, there is a group of Eastern Christians. Evangelized in the ninth century by those equals-to-the-apostles, Saints Cyril and Methodius, these people received the Holy Gospel and Sacred Mysteries (Sacraments) from the Byzantine Church of Constantinople.

Although Cyril and his brother, Methodius, were Greek (from Thessalonika), they promoted the use of the ancient Slavonic language in worship. This language, later known as Old Church Slavonic, would become the liturgical language of the Carpatho-Rusyns and all Slavonic Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic. In time, Cyril and Methodius brought their liturgical books to Rome to receive the blessings of Pope Hadrian, and he in turn blessed their mission of establishing the Greek (Byzantine) Catholic Tradition in the Carpathian Mountains of Central Europe.

Over time, a rift grew between East and West; and, in 1054, estrangement was realized with the Great Schism of Constantinople and Rome. Being Eastern Christians, the Carpatho-Rusyns were eventually affected by this unfortunate break and became members of the Orthodox Community of Churches. However, their *ecclesia sui juris* (self-governing Church) of Mukachevo-Uzhorod in time sought reunion with the Church of Rome, reestablishing its Catholic faith while maintaining the spirituality, ceremonies, and discipline of the Eastern Church.

On April 24, 1646, in Saint George Castle Garden in Uzhorod, a number of priests and faithful proclaimed vocally their reunion with the Catholic Church, reestablishing the unity that Christ so ardently prayed for. From this nucleus would grow a reborn Church, which the Empress Maria Theresa of Austro-Hungary would later call the *Greek Catholic Church--Greek* in its ritual, theology and art; *Catholic* in union with the Bishop of Rome. In time, the reunion would spread to

other areas of Europe, and new eparchies (dioceses) would be created in such places as Presov (Slovakia), Krizevci (Croatia), and Hajdudorog and Miskolc (Hungary).



In the 1870s, the first wave of Carpatho-Rusyn immigration brought significant numbers of Greek Catholics to the United States of America. The first parish they founded on these shores was Saint Mary's Parish in Minneapolis, Minnesota, pastored by +Father Alexis Toth. Subsequently, others were established in places like Freeland, Pennsylvania; Jersey City, New Jersey; and Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Unfortunately, the ignorance of most American Catholics of the Latin, or Roman, Church regarding Greek Catholic practices promised by Rome at Uzhorod—such as a married priesthood and other privileges and traditions—led the immigrant Church into conflict with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Minneapolis/St. Paul, +John Ireland. This conflict resulted in Father Toth and his flock entering into the Russian Orthodox Church. But despite numerous economic and ideological struggles, the Greek Catholic Church in America that remained in union with Rome continued to grow, and there was seen a growing need for hierarchial leadership.

In 1905, +Father Andrew Hodobay was sent by Rome as Apostolic Visitor to care for the immigrant church; but, being a Hungarian, he was not the proper leader for at that time a predomi-

nantly Slavic church. Rome, then, in turn, sent two men to care for what would become two separate administrations for the American Greek Catholics: +Father Peter Poniatishyn for the Ukrainians, and +Father Gabriel Martyak for the Carpatho-Rusyns (Ruthenians).

By this time parishes were springing up all over Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio and the industrial Northeast. In 1924, Rome raised the status of the American Greek Catholic Ruthenian community to that of an Exarchate (Apostolic Vicariate) with +Bishop Basil Takach as its first exarch, establishing Saint John the Baptist Cathedral in Pittsburgh's Homestead/Munhall neighborhood as its seat. Meanwhile, Greek Catholic immigration continued from Carpathia as well as Hungary and Croatia. Not only were parishes being established and priests being assigned, but the Sisters of Saint Basil the Great received a call from Bishop Takach to minister to the immigrant Church. The sisters eventually settled in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, after a number of temporary locations.

The storm that had erupted over a married priesthood back in the 1890s would continue to erupt sporadically during this period of growth, exasperated by a Vatican proclamation, *Ea Semper*, in 1905, in addition to certain members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in America seeking both to prohibit the immigration of married Greek Catholic priests and to forbid their ordination in North America.





Appeals to Rome from the American Greek Catholic community were futile; and, in 1929, another proclamation, *Cum Data Fuerit*, was issued by +Pope Pius XI, reiterating the prohibitions of the earlier decree. This was the eye of the storm, historically speaking; for this decree became the rallying cry for another segment of American Greek Catholics, dedicated to safeguarding the Eastern heritage of their Church, to once again fall into schism. A pastor in Bridgeport, Connecticut, +Father Orestes Chornock, was elected bishop of a new, independent Greek Catholic Church. Consecrated a bishop by the Patriarch of Constantinople, he eventually set his See in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. This Church would, in time, be known as the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Diocese.

Despite this sad turn of events, the American Greek Catholics in union with Rome continued to grow and establish new parishes; and, in 1950, SS. Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary was established by the second Bishop of Pittsburgh, +Daniel Ivancho, for the spiritual and educational formation of a native clergy.



As the decades of the twentieth century progressed, missionary efforts led to the establishment of parishes in California, Florida, and even in

Alaska. The term *Greek Catholic* would change to *Byzantine Catholic*, stressing that the church was not Hellenic (Greek) in nationality and that the spirituality and liturgical services were of the Byzantine Rite. Also, English, now the vernacular, became the dominant liturgical language.

The Church was then honored in its growth and permanence by the elevation of Pittsburgh as an eparchy (diocese) in 1963, with +Bishop Nicholas T. Elko as first Eparch, after serving as Exarch since 1955. In addition, the East Coast was given their own eparchy, with +Bishop Stephen J. Kocisko as first Eparch, and with the church of Saint Michael the Archangel in Passaic, New Jersey, designated as the cathedral. The Eparchy of Passaic would encompass the entire Eastern Seaboard of the United States, from Maine to Florida.

In 1968, Bishop Stephen Kocisko was transferred to the Eparchy of Pittsburgh, and subsequently Bishop Michael Dudick was consecrated and enthroned as the second Eparch of Passaic. The crowning achievement of this nearly a century of ecclesiastical growth was the creation in 1969 by +Pope Paul VI of a Metropolitan Church (*ecclesia sui juris*), based in Pittsburgh. This Metropolia would have as its suffragan Sees: the Eparchy of Passaic and the newly created Eparchy of Parma, Ohio, governed by +Bishop Emil Mihalik. The Church of Saint John the Baptist in Parma would serve as cathedral for the new eparchy.

Bishop Mihalik endeavored to establish more churches in the outermost parts of his eparchy, in places such as Las Vegas, Nevada; Albuquerque,

New Mexico; and Denver, Colorado. The growth of these missions and churches was acknowledged by Pope John Paul II through the establishment of a fourth jurisdiction for Byzantine Catholics: the Eparchy of Van Nuys, California; and, through the selection of +Bishop Thomas V. Dolinay (then Auxiliary Eparch of Passaic) as its first eparch. He shepherded the eparchy from his seat at Holy Protection of the Mother of God Cathedral in Van Nuys until he was chosen, in 1991, to be Metropolitan of Pittsburgh, succeeding the ailing former shepherd, +Archbishop Stephen J. Kocisko. Subsequently, the Auxiliary Eparch of Passaic, Bishop George Kuzma, was enthroned as the second Eparch of Van Nuys, and, in 1997, moved his seat of administration to Saint Stephen Protomartyr Co-Cathedral in Phoenix.

In 1996, Bishop Michael J. Dudick retired after a long and pastorally beneficial ministry in the Eparchy of Passaic. Upon his retirement, the Holy Father appointed Bishop Andrew Pataki (formerly Eparch of Parma), as the third Eparch of Passaic.

The spiritual life of the Byzantine Catholic Church was and continues to grow with assistance not only from the Basilians of Uniontown, but also from monasteries, such as the Basilian Fathers of Mariapoch in Matawan, New Jersey, Holy Dormition Franciscan Monastery in Sybertsville, Pennsylvania, and Exaltation of the Holy Cross Monasteries for Men and Women in Miami, Florida. In addition to monasteries and convents, the Eparchy of Passaic maintains parochial schools and academies to teach the



Gospel and to promote authentic Christian morality in an Eastern experience. Academic institutions are: Saint Mary's, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania; Saint Mary's, Trenton, New Jersey; and Holy Cross, Miami, Florida.

The Byzantine-Ruthenian Catholic Church is an Eastern Church in union with the Church of Rome and all other Eastern Catholic Churches (the Catholic Community of Churches). We are Carpatho-Rusyn in background and flavor, but we are indeed an American Eastern Church, celebrating the Gospel in words, symbols, and action. We are unique in our mystical theology, blending the colors of our many icons with the congregational *a cappella* chants; raising up our hands and our fragrant incense in prayer; and inviting you to come and see who we are and what we are all about as part of the Eastern half of the Universal Church.

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