



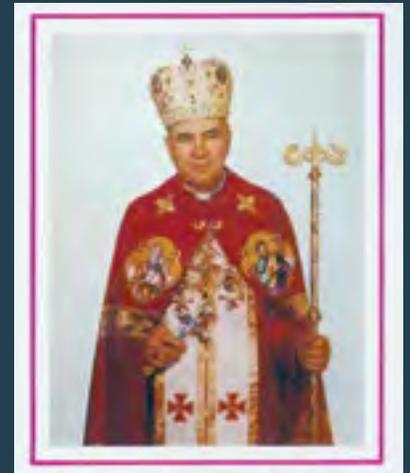
Carpatho-Rusyn lands in Europe prior to World War I

Source: Carpatho-Rusyn Society



Original St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cathedral, Munhall

Source: Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh



Metropolitan Archbishop Stephen J. Kocisko

Source: Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh



Ecclesiastical Map of Byzantine Catholic Church in the U.S.A.

Source: Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh

BYZANTINE CATHOLICS IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Father Ivan Mina, Ph.D.

Large numbers of Byzantine Catholics, formerly known as “Greek Catholics,” began arriving in Western Pennsylvania from the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy in Central Europe already in the early 1880’s. They came in response to invitations of recruiters from American mining companies. Initially, they sought to earn some money in order to return to their homeland, where they hoped to buy land. Anxiety over unsettled conditions in Europe and, increasingly, the “smell of powder” of the approaching world war caused many to change their minds and to bring their families or fiancées to America. Soon, they were organizing parishes and appealing to their bishops in Europe to send clergy. The oldest parish of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Archdiocese of Pittsburgh is St. Stephen in Leisenring, near Connellsville, founded in 1892.

Although some of the newcomers preferred to identify themselves simply as “Greek Catholic,” the people we are considering called themselves by the collective name *Uhorska Rus* (Hungarian Russians). Some preferred *Karpatska Rus* (Carpathian Russians). The ancient distributive form of the collective name *Rus* is *Rusin*, from which is derived the term “Ruthenian” (in Medieval Latin *Ruthenus*, meaning Russian). The Vatican and Vienna preferred the designation “Ruthenian” while Budapest used *Magyar Orosz*, meaning Hungarian Russian.

In 1898, the Ruthenian Greek Catholics of Hungary numbered over half-a-million. Divided by dialect and customs and by the Hungarian county boundaries, which tended to run from north to south, the Ruthenians were united by their Greek Catholic Church, the Church Slavonic liturgical language, the Cyrillic alphabet and the Julian calendar. Attempts were made to develop a literature in a Ruthenian recension of the Russian language, but these were increasingly blocked by the forced Magyarization policies of the Hungarian government. Also, the Austro-Hungarian authorities strongly discouraged contacts between the Hungarian Ruthenians and their cousins in the neighboring Austrian crown lands of Galicia and Bukovina and, of course, with those in the Russian Empire.

In the United States, the Ruthenian Greek Catholics immediately ran into problems with the Roman Catholic hierarchy, who were shocked by their different rite and their married clergy. The “Ruthenian problem” was a topic of heated discussions at the annual meetings of the American bishops in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rome responded to the concerns of the American Church in 1907 with the letter *Ea Semper*, decreeing that only celibate priests could serve in parishes in the United States. This proved completely impractical because of the dearth of celibate Greek Catholic clergy willing to come to the New World. Spurned by Archbishop John Ireland of Minneapolis, Father Alexis Toth turned in 1891 to the Russian Orthodox bishop in San Francisco, who received him and his flock into communion. Eventually, Father St. Alexis Toth would bring over twenty thousand Ruthenians into the Russian Church. Their descendants today form part of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).

Alarmed by these defections, Rome sent Canon Andrew Hodobay in 1902 as apostolic visitor. Withdrawn soon, he was replaced by Bishop Soter Ortynsky in 1907. After the bishop’s death in 1916, Rome divided the Hungarian Ruthenian parishes from the Galician Ruthenian parishes, placing them under separate administrators. In 1924, Rome sent two Greek Catholic bishops to the United States: Bishop Basil Takach for the Hungarian Ruthenians and Bishop Constantine Bohachevsky for the Galician Ruthenians (today, Ukrainian Catholics). Bishop Basil established his headquarters in Pittsburgh, while Bishop Constantine chose Philadelphia for his residence.

The bishops brought with them secret instructions from Rome to eliminate the uncanonical curator (trustee) system in the parishes within the space of ten years. On top of this, in 1929 Rome issued the decree *Cum data fuerit*, mandating that henceforth candidates for the priesthood born in North America must be ordained as celibates. Accepted grudgingly in Philadelphia, the conjuncture of these two requirements gave rise to an independence movement in the more volatile Pittsburgh Exarchate. Some forty thousand souls joined the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church, erected under the *homophorion* of the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, who also consecrated Father Orestes Chornyak as first bishop. This jurisdiction established its cathedral and seminary in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and remains under Constantinople.

The period following the Second World War was a time of rapid growth and expansion for the Byzantine Catholic Church of Pittsburgh. To train young men for the priesthood, Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary was founded in 1950. A diocesan newspaper, the *Byzantine Catholic World*, was launched. Following the Second Vatican Council, English became the main liturgical language. New churches were built, including in the South and West, and many of them were appointed with Byzantine iconography.

In 1963, the Exarchate of Pittsburgh was divided into two eparchies: Pittsburgh and Passaic, New Jersey. A third eparchy was added in 1969 at Parma, Ohio under Bishop Emil Mihalik, while Bishop Stephen Kocisko became the archbishop-metropolitan of a new ecclesiastical province. In 1982, Bishop Thomas Dolinay organized a fourth eparchy at Van Nuys, California, and in 1991, he succeeded Archbishop Stephen Kocisko as the second archbishop-metropolitan of Pittsburgh.

Our present Archbishop-Metropolitan William Skurla took part in the Roman synods on the family. In accordance with recent Vatican directives to the Eastern Catholic Churches, he has opened our seminary to married candidates. As a judicatory head, he participates in the work of Christian Associates, the major ecumenical organization in southwestern Pennsylvania. Our archeparchy is represented also on the financial (Msgr. Russell Duker, S.E.O.D.), theological (Father Ivan Mina, Ph.D.), and social concerns (Father Robert Oravetz, E.D.) committees of that organization.