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## St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral - Part I

Like 1

By: [Elisa Shoenberger](#) Date: 07/05/2011

**St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral** in the Ukrainian Village has served as a bulwark against the loss of Ukrainian religious and cultural identity for over a century. During the early twentieth century Ukrainian immigrants faced significant threats to faith and freedom in their homeland and the US, so they decided to found a church to celebrate their religion and culture. St. Nicholas has since grown into a major center for the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Chicago and for the Western part of the United States.



Ukrainian immigrants founded the Parish of St. Nicholas the Miracle Worker in 1905. Ukrainian Village historian George Matwyshyn explains that Jakiw Olenec, a young Ukrainian man, wanted his son to be baptized in the Eastern Catholic tradition. Olenec and other immigrants established a church to fill the spiritual and cultural vacuum that existed in Chicago at the time.



Front exterior at 2238 W. Rice St.

Many immigrants to Chicago came from western Ukraine and practiced in the Eastern Catholic tradition. While the Eastern Catholics acted in full communion with the Pope in Rome, many of its traditions were similar to those of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Icons were as revered as the written word, priests could marry before taking orders, and liturgy was held in Church Slavonic. Due to these differences, cultural clashes occurred between newly arrived Eastern Catholic priests and Americanized Roman Catholic bishops. These clashes resulted in a dearth of places for Ukrainian Catholics to worship in their own tradition. The cultural similarities shared by the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches led to many Ukrainian Catholics to attend Eastern Orthodox services. However, many Ukrainian

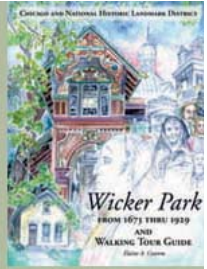
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Catholics looked to found their own church to serve their spiritual needs, following Rome.

Out of this cultural confusion and spiritual need, the parish of St. Nicholas was born. The first site was at the Trinity Lutheran Danish Church bought in 1906. After a few years, the parish decided to buy land at Rice and Oakley (its current location) in 1913. Architect John G. Steinbach, of Worthmann & Steinbach who planned other churches such as St. Stanislaus and St. Mary of Angels, designed the church, modeling it after St. Sophia in Kiev. The church held its first liturgy on Christmas day in 1915.



A southeast view of the structure

As the Communist Party came to power in Russia, and more immigrants decided to stay in the US, the parish of St. Nicholas began to grow. The small school housed in the basement of the church received new permanent lodging in 1935 and later expanded into a second building in 1955. Eventually, the parish grew large enough that the Catholic Church established the Eparchy of St. Nicholas in Chicago in 1961. St. Nicholas Church became St. Nicholas Cathedral. Most Reverend Jaroslav Gabro, a native son of Chicago, was established the Bishop of this new Eparchy, stretching from Ohio to Hawaii.



Closeup view of the Cathedral's doors

The unity of the burgeoning Ukrainian Cathedral was disrupted, however, by a dispute over the calendar system. In the 1960s, the majority of parishioners agreed to change to the Gregorian calendar system but a group of parishioners preferred the Julian calendar. This group split from St. Nicholas in 1968

and founded Sts. Vladimir and Olha at Chicago and Oakley.

In 2006, St. Nicholas celebrated its 100th anniversary. During that century, St. Nicholas had over 10,000 baptisms, 4,000 marriages and 5,000 funerals. Today, St. Nicholas continues to be a pillar of the Ukrainian community in Chicago.

The church is at 835 N. Oakley Blvd. and the rectory is at 2238 W. Rice St.

Part II will look at the architecture and spiritualism of the church itself.

**For more information:** [Part II](#) ; [Part III](#)

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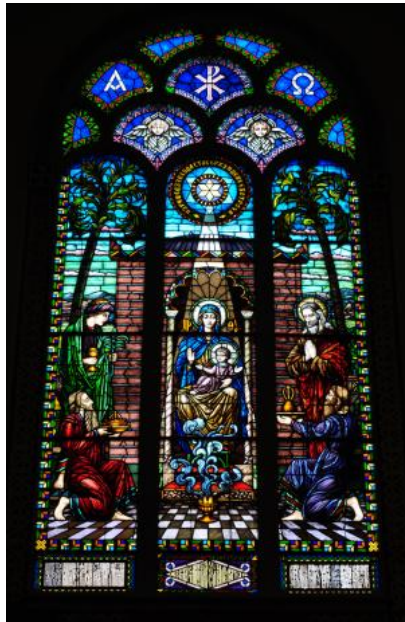
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## St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral - Part II, its massive beauty

Like 11

By: Elisa Shoenberger Date: 08/06/2011



Shining icons, bright brilliant frescoes and stained glass windows awe you when you enter St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral. Everything from the towering cathedral to the glittering broad forehead of St. Nicholas is rich with religious and historical meaning.

While the Cathedral was modeled on St. Sophia, one of the well-known landmarks of Kiev, St. Nicholas is actually larger. It is 112 feet high, 136 feet long and 85 feet wide. With its thirteen domes, one for Jesus and each of his twelve Apostles, the church can hold over 1000 people.

Perched on a massive amount of bedrock, the

church soars above you stretching towards the sky. When the foundations were initially laid, the builder chose to build atop the bedrock instead of using costly explosives. Phyllis Zapanariuk, Business Manager of St. Nicholas, commented: "It was as if the Holy Spirit knew the church would someday be a cathedral."



St. Nicholas specially honored inside the church

Icons of two critical saints sparkle in the sunlight over the entrance on Oakley Street. At the top, St. Nicholas, namesake of the Church, gazes with his great intelligence on the passerby or parishioner. His image is frequently shown with a large forehead that signifies his knowledge. He is known for his generosity and assistance to those in need. One story relates how he covertly gave three bags of gold to an impoverished man so his daughters could marry well.

Below him, Our Lady of Poचाiv

benevolently overlooks the sidewalk. She has been a protector of the faithful. She first appeared as a pillar of fire before a monk and several shepherds on



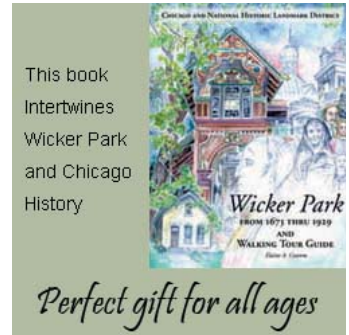
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Mount Pochaiv. When she disappeared, an imprint of her footprint remained and a spring developed from it. Later, she protected the people of Pochaiv from several disasters including a Turkish invasion by deflecting the arrows with her mantle.



Lady of Pchaiv



The scene of the Dormition high over head.

Within the church, the mosaics, frescoes, stained glass windows and harmoniously strike the eye of the viewer. Parts of the ceiling mimic the sky with golden sparkling stars. Vivid frescoes decorate the main golden dome. At each of the four corners, there is a depiction of each of the four Gospel writers. Two larger frescoes decorate the North and South walls under the cupola. The first facing North shows the Descent of the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection of Christ, otherwise known as Pentecost. On the South, there is the Dormition, the "falling asleep" or death of Mary. On the main dome and around the Cathedral, there are several six winged angels, known as seraphim, who hover around the church. These angels with their multi-colored wings, blue and pink, dazzle the viewer.



One of the seraphs

Chicago-based stained glass windows shine with scenes from the New and Old Testament. These multi-colored and geometrically patterned stained glass windows were created by the Munich Studio from Chicago. The Munich studio was founded in 1903 by Max Guler, a German immigrant, who studied design in Munich. His stained glass windows have a Germanic Baroque inspired style. In addition to St. Nicholas, Munich studio's stained glass works can be found in several churches of Eastern European extraction in Chicago and the rest of the Midwest.

Guler included nationalistic and ethnic symbols and figures in many of his designs, in addition to biblical scenes.

All of these artworks together make St. Nicholas an incredible institution to behold. They are a magnificent celebration of faith.

Part 3 will focus on more on the interior and the community of St. Nicholas.

Photos by: E. Coorens

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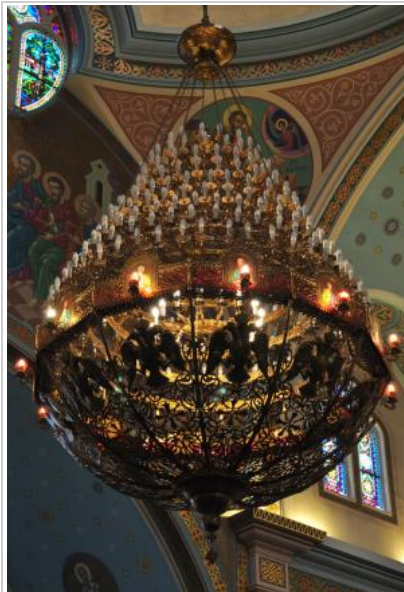
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## St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral - Part III, part of a larger community

Like 4

By: Elisa Shoenberger Date: 08/30/2011



The Chandelier

Following the vibrant religious traditions in the Eastern Catholic faith, St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral also establishes itself as part of a larger community. Every part of Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, its liturgy and structure has significance according to Phyllis Zaparaniuk, Business Manager of St. Nicholas.

A massive twinkling gold chandelier hangs from the main cupola. The chandelier has 480 globes that was made in Greece. On the outside of the chandelier are depictions of the gospel writers of the **New Testament**. The chandelier represents light of Christ. Within the chandelier, it is dark, but the outside is

bright with the teachings and the life of Christ.

A beautiful marble iconostasis divides the sanctuary from the body of the church. The screen marks the division between the heavenly and the earthly. The priest conducts ceremonies facing east towards Rome, where, it is believed, the second coming of Christ will occur. Therefore, the priest will lead his congregation to the second coming.



Iconostasis divides the sanctuary from the church's body

On the iconostasis, the four icons show St. Josaphat, who brought the Church back into communion with Rome, the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and St. Nicholas. The colors on Mary and Christ's robes are quite critical. According to Ukrainian Catholic iconography, red is the color of divinity and blue is the color of humanity. Mary wears a blue dress with a red robe, symbolizing how she was human and then

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became divine. Christ, on the other hand, wears red robes with blue covering, representing how he is divine and became human.



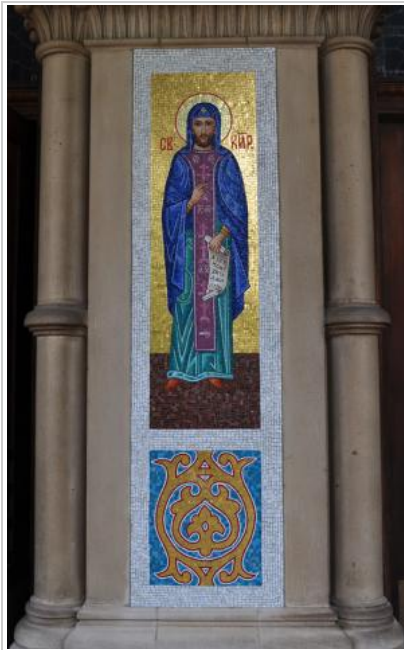
**The Pantocrator tower high above the iconostasis**

Pantocrator is the main icon above the altar. The name *Pantocrator* comes from Greek and means "ruler of all." In many Greek Catholic churches and cathedrals, it is typical to have the Pantocrator in such a prominent location. He is shown with a book in his left hand, signifying judgment, and his right hand upraised in blessing.

Zaparaniuk explains that the services activate each of the five senses. First, the incense and the candles activate the sense of smell. The candles in particular are made from pure beeswax, not manmade materials, in order to represent the purity of Mary. Second, the sense of hearing is stimulated by the chants and songs throughout the service. Third, the sense of sight is brought into play by the sheer glory of the Cathedral and its icons. Fourth, the sense of taste is used when one takes Communion. And fifth and finally, touch is employed when you cross yourself with the trinity in your hand.

At the same time the Cathedral has strong religious ceremonies and icons in the Eastern Catholic faith, the Cathedral and the society of St. Nicholas are open to the community. St. Nicholas has a daily liturgy in English in addition to Ukrainian. St. Nicholas Parish School of Arts offers classes in subjects from all over the world including the Argentine tango. Moreover, many people who are neither Ukrainian nor Eastern Catholic come to services. Zaparaniuk explains: "It doesn't matter what language you pray in. You should open your arms to anyone interested in the mystery of the church."

Between the rich history of the Church and its services, its incredible architecture and art, and its inclusive community, St. Nicholas is a special institution in Chicago. Sunday English Liturgy is at 11:30 a.m. and Sunday Ukrainian Liturgy is at 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., and 10:00 a.m.



**One of the mosaics that greet you next to the front exterior doors**

**For more information: [Part I](#) ; [Part II](#)**

**Photos by Elaine Coorens**