



### Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage Fact Sheet

- First called Wakamne (or “God’s Lake”) by the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation who live on the west end of the lake and Manito Sahkahigan (or “Spirit Lake”) by the Cree, the lake was called “Lac Ste Anne” by Rev. Jean-Baptiste Thibault, the first Catholic priest to establish a mission on the site.
- The pilgrimage grounds had been sacred for generations of peoples and had become widely known as a place of healing.
- According to Alexis’ oral history, a charismatic Nakota chief from the south-east followed his vision and led his people to the shores of the sacred lake Wakamne (God’s Lake – Lac Ste Anne).
- Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation people lived on the site long before the arrival of European fur traders and settlers. The lake and the surrounding area is rich in natural resources and during the early fur trade it used to supply Fort Edmonton with fish. To this day, it remains a spiritual centre celebrated during each annual pilgrimage.
- Father Joseph Lestanc organized the first annual pilgrimage to Ste Anne in July, 1889 after an inspirational visit to St. Anne d’Aurey shrine in French Brittany the previous year.
- Over the years the Lac Ste Anne pilgrimage has continued on an annual basis and always during the week of July 26 (the feast day of Ste Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the grandmother of Jesus).
- The grandmother figure has a very strong importance within indigenous culture.
- The annual Pilgrimage in honour of Saint Anne is one of the most unique and memorable spiritual gatherings in North America.
- Founded in 1887 by missionaries of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate this historic event today draws as many as 40,000 pilgrims. The pilgrimage is especially close to the hearts of many First Nations people who attend faithfully each year.
- The pilgrimage site is located on the shores of beautiful Lac Ste Anne in Alberta, Canada about 45 miles west of Edmonton.
- In 1841 a local Métis named Piché asked Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher in St. Boniface to send a priest to live among them. Bishop Provencher had only four priests to minister to a territory that stretched from Ontario to the Rocky Mountains. Still, the next spring he sent Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault to make an exploratory trip of over 1,400 kilometers.
- In 1844, a small shack was built to house Father Thibault and a young priest named Joseph Bourassa. Fr. Thibault immediately blessed the lake and called it “Lac Ste Anne”. This was in fulfillment of a promise he had made to give her name to the first mission he would ‘father’. It was the first permanent Catholic mission west of Winnipeg.
- The Oblates of Mary Immaculate are a society of Catholic missionaries. Founded in France in the early 1800s
- With the coming of the Oblates, such as Father Lacombe, the Mission enjoyed a period of great growth and importance.

- After that first permanent mission was established by Father Thibault, the Oblates have continuously served the area ever since.
- By 1887, the buffalo had disappeared and the lake lost its importance as a gathering place. Most of the population moved away and the mission was almost deserted. Its pastor Father Lestanc then decided to close the mission. Then, on his first holiday back home to France in 30 years, he paid a visit to the Shrine of Ste Anne d’Auray.
- He later related that while in prayer at this Shrine, God revealed to him in a powerful way that he must not close the mission. Rather, he must build a shrine there in honour of St. Anne, the grandmother of Jesus. It would be a place for pilgrims to come and receive spiritual help.
- The first pilgrimage was held in 1889 with several hundred attending. It soon became an annual event, drawing people from all directions and many nations.
- In the early 1900’s the pilgrimage was attended by about 1,000 pilgrims each year. Many came from St. Albert and the Morinville area.
- The pilgrimage grew to a two-day event. One day was especially for indigenous and Métis people, with the sermon preached in Cree, and the second day with services in English, French and often vespers in Polish. The non-indigenous population included large groups from the French, English, Polish, and German communities and parishes.
- In 1926, 2500 indigenous and Métis pilgrims and 3,000 more non-indigenous pilgrims attended the pilgrimage.
- The pilgrims included people from Cree, Sioux, Montagnais, Assiniboine, Chipewyan, Beaver, Sarcee, and Blackfoot nations. They traveled mostly by trail in a traditional manner. Often the journey of the pilgrimage and back home took months.
- Attendance continued to grow with about 4,500 in 1938 and over 6,000 pilgrims in 1950.
- A new shrine which could seat up to 4000 people was built in the early 1980s. Significant improvements were made to the grounds, sidewalks, washrooms. A shower building was added and new Stations of the Cross were built with paintings by Alex Twinn.
- On July 26, 2000, in the year of the great Jubilee, the Missionary Oblates made a public declaration of intention to enter into a new partnership with the aboriginal people to own, direct, and operate the Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage.
- An initial LSA Trust was established in July 2003. The Oblates transferred the lands and the operating company to this Trust.
- The Trust was composed of the Provincial of the Oblates (or his designate) the Archbishop of Edmonton, three first Nations Catholics (from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territory) and one Métis Catholic.
- One of the first actions of the Board and the Trust was to apply to have the pilgrimage grounds declared a national historic site by the Government of Canada. This approval occurred in 2004.
- A new structure of Trust was established in 2018.
- The mission of the trust is to encourage and support aboriginal people to direct and operate the Pilgrimage; preserve, enhance, strengthen, and facilitate the spiritual nature of the Pilgrimage, its site and facilities; provide an environment where all peoples may express their Catholic faith; promote growth and healing in all stages of life

- Today, over 4,000 individuals camp on the site and up to 30,000 pilgrims attend the weekly events. The program includes three daily Eucharistic Services, Rosary and spiritual talks each hosted by different Communities.
- These communities usually include: The Lac Ste Anne parish, the Alexis and Paul First Nations, Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples (the national aboriginal parish in Edmonton), the Métis Nation of Alberta, the Blackfoot (rotated among the various parishes), the Cree of Northern Alberta (e.g. Wabasca), the Dogrib from the Northwest Territory and often an aboriginal community from Northern Saskatchewan.
- Father Garry LaBoucane, born in Red Deer, Alberta, was ordained in 1984 at Lac Ste. Anne. He has been the spiritual director of the Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage since 2002
- He is the chair of program member of the Lac Ste Anne Pilgrimage board. Father Garry has served the community as a pastor at Grouard, Joussard, St. Albert, Sacred Heart of the First Peoples, Saddle Lake, and Slave Lake. He is the oldest of six children in his family and has attended the Pilgrimage since he was a baby.
- In addition to his role with the Pilgrimage, Father Garry was appointed, by the Edmonton Archdiocese, as pastor of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Parish in Maskwacis. The appointment was announced on May 25, 2022.
- From these humble beginnings the pilgrimage today has grown into one of the most unique spiritual events in North America.
- The lake once again became a place of meeting, a place where once traditional enemies now gather as friends under the Sign of the Cross.
- As many as 30,000 people attend on any single day. Here the old and the new are blended together. It is possible to see racks of meat and fish drying alongside modern campers and motorhomes. And always, in the background, the sound of hymns and prayers and worship.