



THE PARK BENCH

The magazine of Oak Park Church of Christ | January 2024



**INTER-AGENCY
CHRISTMAS LUNCH
PAGE 3**

LIVING OUT GOD'S TRANSFORMING LOVE.



by Lane Scruggs
Senior Pastor

We began our Fall Sermon Series on Vision with a story of Ernest Shackleton's London newspaper ad for crewmen. In the ad, Shackleton pulls no punches:

"Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success."— Ernest Shackleton.

Yet, despite the raw honesty, the response was overwhelming as men applied in droves. Why? Because the Mission was clear and the future honour was worth the present risk! This past fall we spent seven weeks trying to make our Mission, Vision, and Values clear. We turned our attention toward renewing, recasting, and clarifying these things so that we can better understand the demand and cost of God's calling on our life as a Church family.

To paint a bit of a picture (or map!) for how Mission, Vision, and Values fit together, we talked of the Mission being the aim or destination of where we are going: **Living Out God's Transforming Love** together as a congregation. That's our Mission!

The Vision statements are the paths or roads we must travel to get there, and they each focus on a different direction we want to travel together.

First: **We will immerse our lives in deep, ongoing relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

That is, we will move "upward" to ensure our relationship with God is the crux and centre of our purpose together.

Next: **We will respond to the radical call of God as we are led.** This, we acknowledge, ought to be met with a certain amount of trepidation. Our faith needs to be deep enough to go "outward" and join the Holy Spirit where God is already at work around us.

Finally: **We will be the heart and home of the Oak Park neighbourhood.** That is, we will be a

place of hospitality and vitality in our community; welcoming people "inward" as we meet tangible needs and provide a space for belonging.

The Values that we adhere to and live by as a church community are like the mode of transportation – the way we will carry ourselves, our collective character, the communal integrity of how we will travel: **Christ Centred; Biblically Rooted; Spiritually Transformed; Generously Hospitable; and Missionally Driven.** The Mission and Vision will only be authentic if they are pursued by a community that commits to upholding these values.

Let me try and rewrite Shackleton's South Pole ad for our own context:

"Men, Women, and Children needed for a hazardous adventure. Challenges, trials, abandonment, and emotional scars guaranteed. Sacrificial self-giving required. A lack of visible success and worldly riches guaranteed. Eternal reward and a crown of glory upon completion."

So, all that remains is to ask: **"Are you in?"**

CHRISTMAS 2023



INTER- AGENCY LUNCH

On Saturday, December 16, 2023, Oak Park Church of Christ hosted a Christmas lunch for a number of families from the Oak Park neighbourhood.

by Jennifer Blagden



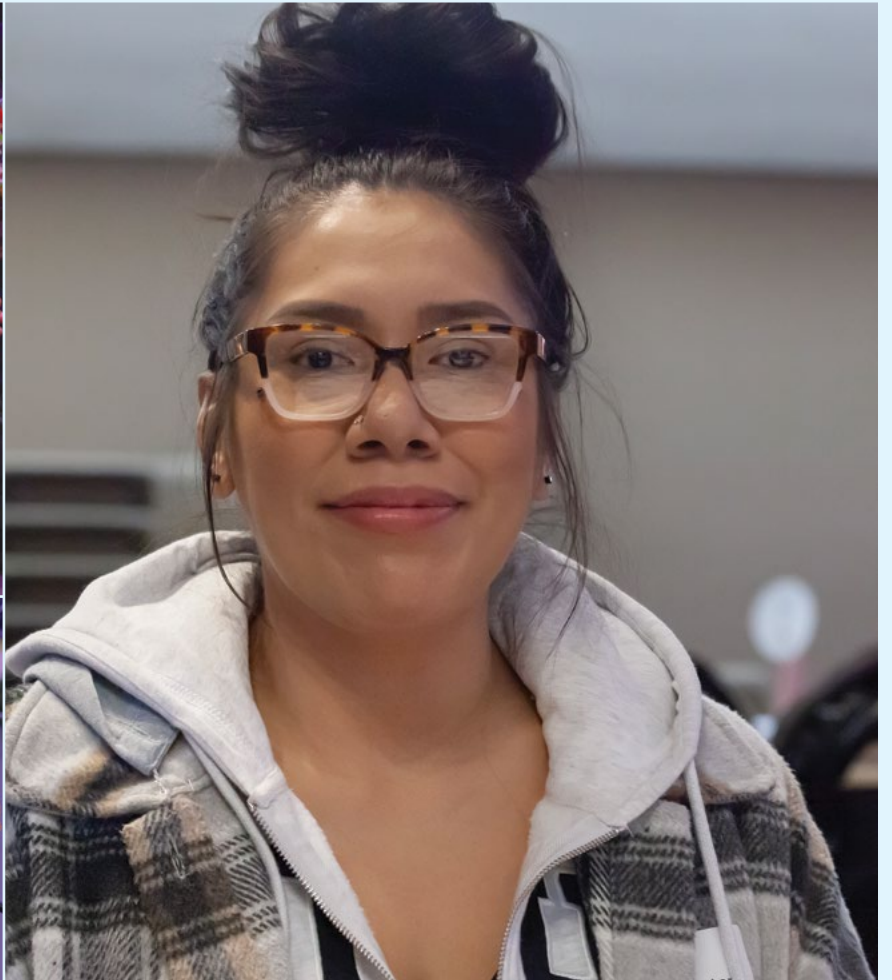
We partnered with Trellis Society, Hull Services (Patch), Southwood United Church, and Hope for Life Christian Fellowship to pull off this large event, with the invited guests being clients from Trellis and Hull (Patch).

Despite the construction mayhem, guests were welcomed by numerous volunteers on site to enjoy a lovely Christmas lunch and activities. We had a musician singing Christmas carols, a cookie decorating station, balloon animals, and several arts and crafts. We also made the clothing rack available during this time, which several teens especially appreciated. The sanctuary was filled with children playing and families singing along to the Christmas carols. It was a beautiful sight!

A delicious lunch was served, complete with pulled-chicken, mashed potatoes, vegetables, and buns. There was more than enough to go around, and we packed up the remaining food for guests to take home. The Girl Guides and Embers Units based out of Oak Park even baked desserts for the event.

After lunch, there was a special visit from Santa (Lane), Rudolph the reindeer (Padraig) and Santa's chief elf (Jennifer) who helped to distribute hand-picked gifts to each of the 60+ children. (Santa's elves were very busy in the weeks leading up to the event, reaching out to families for Christmas wishes and then ensuring those wishes were granted). Women were given purses loaded with personal care items (donated by Purses of Hope), and each family received a laundry hamper filled with all sorts of goodies to bring home, thanks to Mitch and Ray-ann's Gift Drive team!

It took an incredible number of volunteers on many different levels and at various stages to pull this event off, ensuring the event ran smoothly and was a tremendous success. There were many smiling faces and much laughter that day. Thank you so much to all who donated, prayed, and volunteered, so we could bless our neighbours this Christmas.





CHRISTMAS

2023

INTER-AGENCY LUNCH



REFLECTIONS ON THE YOUTH MISSIONS TRIP.



When I heard the youth were going on a mission trip to Honduras, I thought this might be an opportunity for me. As a child, I loved to hear the stories the missionaries would tell about how they were sharing God's love around the world.



by Val Lautischer

It was something I hoped to do someday. So, I prayed, and God said "go." There was still a spot available for a leader, so I signed up. As I waited for the trip to begin, I found comfort and strength in these verses: 1 John 4:4, 1 Peter 5:7 and Psalm 56:3-4. But as departure day got closer, fear began to set in: "What was I doing? What was I thinking? – at my age?"

After arriving in San Pedro Sula, we drove from the airport to the place we would stay; I couldn't understand why there was garbage lining the streets and the smell of it burning filled the air. Later I learnt that it was up to individuals to dispose of their garbage. This first impression made me wonder what this experience would be like. It was the next day that I began to see the beauty within Honduras through the people

who lived there. This was a reminder that God calls us to see and love people where they are at in their life and circumstances. God's love helps to build bridges between people of different languages, ages, and cultures to create meaningful connections in a short period of time. This was evident at our first church service when a lovely young woman, Caroline, greeted me with a warm hug. After the service we started talking, with the help of our translator, and she told me how I reminded her of her mom, who had passed away a year ago that day. We hugged, cried, laughed, and talked. A connection was made through our shared faith and love of God.

Another example of God's love working was when we went to Los Naranjos. In the morning we did home visits, and everyone welcomed us into their humble homes with open arms. One of the homes we went to belonged to Cindy, a single mom with two boys: Michael (4) and Sebastian (2). Sebastian was clearly not too pleased that we were there. After these visits, our team lead a VBS for all the children, and I had the joy of working with the littlest participants. While playing catch with a couple of the children, Sebastian came over with his tiny soccer ball and motioned to me to play, which instantly melted my heart, and I felt so much love for that little guy. God's love flowed through the hearts of those children! That day was filled with many emotions. I had a hard time with the economic gap between the poor and rich – seeing homes with dirt floors and makeshift stoves compared to some beautiful large vacation homes was upsetting. But it was that day, with the people who had the least, that I felt so connected with God through our team and the people we were serving... they had so little, but really had so much.

Our team of youth all brought their own gifts to make this mission experience a success. Watching

everyone working together made me think of Romans 12:4: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.” It was beautiful to watch and listen as our youth stepped out of their comfort zones and trusted God. They prayed for the families and shared their experiences with the group at the end of the day – what a blessing it was to be a part of this!

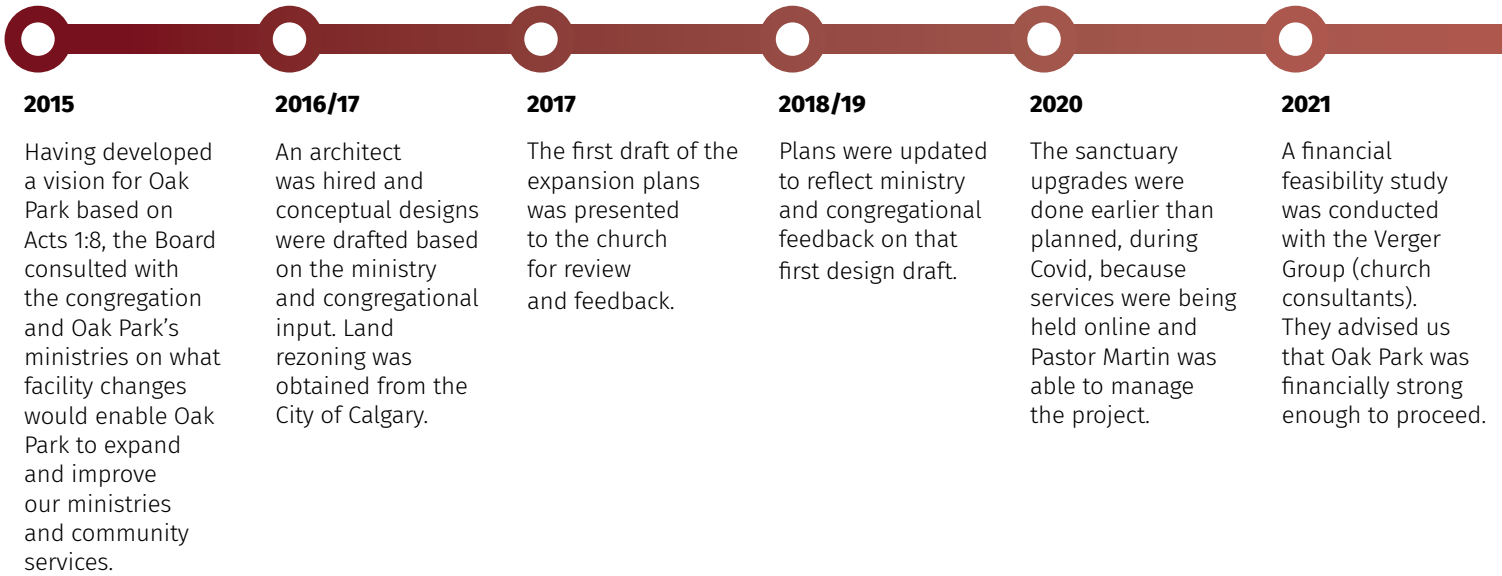
It was encouraging to hear how God is working in the lives of the pastors and their congregations in Honduras and how Lifeline is making it all possible by coming alongside – not doing it for them but doing it with them. I am so grateful that I did not let my unfounded fears prevent me from going! Isaiah 41:10- “So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

This was an experience that would be of value to anyone, no matter what age or where you are in your relationship with God. God used all of it from fundraising to returning home to push me to grow. Now it’s up to me to continue to grow and use this experience in my little corner of the world.

If we remain where we are comfortable and safe and only do what we know, we may miss out on God’s beautiful plan for us!



Project Timeline



INFINITELY MORE PROJECT UPDATE.

JANUARY 2024



Project Costs and Funding

Total Project Cost:	\$2.5m
Congregational Pledges:	\$852,000
CFEP Grant:	\$1m
20-Year CCDC Mortgage:	The balance*

* The actual mortgage amount will depend on final project costs and the pace at which pledges are received.

Winter 2021/22

Infinitely More fundraising campaign raised pledges totalling \$852,000.

Spring 2022

The updated plans were bid to four general contractors. Project prices came in higher than expected, so the plans were further revised to bring costs down.

Our church applied to the Government of Alberta's Community Facilities Enhancement Program (CFEP) for project capital support.

Fall 2022

New development and building permits were obtained from the City of Calgary, based on the revised design.

Winter 2023

Oak Park was awarded a \$1 million grant from CFEP and the Church of Christ Development Corporation (CCDC) agreed to provide a 20-year low interest rate mortgage for the balance of the project funding.

Spring 2023

The building contract was awarded to Milestone Construction and work began.



by Doug Walker
Chairman, Long Range
Planning & Construction
Committee

Project Summary

Following are the key elements of this project:

- Expanded foyer with dual entrances, glass front wall, fireplace and expanded coffee and welcoming areas.
- New offices, church reception and meeting space on the east side of the expansion.
- Movable glass wall between the sanctuary and foyer to improve sanctuary lighting and enable larger event space.
- Upgraded and modernized kitchen facilities, with exterior access.
- Upgraded and enlarged nursery.
- Expanded and modernized men's and women's bathrooms.
- Three individual bathrooms/change-rooms, two with shower facilities.
- Upgraded building fire and security alarms.
- Upgraded heating, air conditioning and ventilation.
- Parking lot upgrades.

Current Activities and Next Steps

- The kitchen and bathrooms are complete, with some minor finishes still to come.
- Finishing work is nearly complete on the expanded foyer and new offices.
- Once the offices are complete, the old offices will be converted into the new nursery.
- The glass foyer/sanctuary wall will be installed around Easter 2024.
- The parking lot upgrades will occur in the spring of 2024.
- An official church-warming celebration will be held later in 2024 once everything is complete.

MISSIONS FOCUS: GRACELAND MINISTRIES



Irresistible. Jesus was irresistible and the crowds gathered around Him. People gave up food and shelter to follow Him to His next teaching spot. He had to slip away quietly in order to have a moment's peace.

He is still irresistible today... and WE are His ambassadors.



by Colette Ladan
and Jay Bowyer

The Graceland team believes in giving our best to build the kind of irresistible community that Jesus built to attract believers, seekers, and skeptics alike. Those far from God will engage when they experience authenticity. This authenticity, combined with a commitment to be there for the long-haul, has developed a loyalty among both adults and teens. This loyalty produces longevity which allows relationships to be established and friendships to be forged. In the safety of these friendships, hearts are softened to hear the truth

of Jesus' love for them, and the hope is that these dear ones will ultimately decide to become His followers as well.

Pioneered in 1998 by two Canadian businesswomen, Colette Ladan and Jay Bowyer, Graceland Ministries was born out of an invitation to teach English to middle-class businesspeople in Ciechanów, Poland. Over 25 years later, the work continues in Kraków using God-honouring, biblically-focused materials.

Drawing students into the lives of people like Joseph, David and Daniel, as well as contemporary Christian biographies, novels, leadership books and even Superhero movies, matters of the heart and soul are discussed from a variety of perspectives. Students also learn the grammar they need for their language acquisition through the curriculum developed by the Graceland team. Over the years, a recurring comment from the students has been that 'they came for the English, stayed for the community, but were transformed by the content.'



The lady on the left joined us in 2010 as a hard-core skeptic. She is now one of the most outspoken people in the group about her faith in Christ.

Those far from God will engage when they experience authenticity. This authenticity, combined with a commitment to be there for the long-haul, has developed a loyalty among both adults and teens.

Graceland has always intended to be THE place where people want to learn and where North Americans want to serve. Graceland is quite proficient in hosting cultural exchanges – opportunities for guests from North America to share their personal passions with the Graceland students in Poland. These educational, cultural, and spiritual exchanges have initiated friendships that have lasted for years, and some that will stretch into eternity.

These are just some of the reasons why Graceland is known in Polish as “szkoła z duszą” – the school with soul!

Graceland is thankful for the long-standing partnership with Oak Park and would love to host some of you in Kraków: the Polish city of culture.

HOW CAN WE AT OAK PARK HELP?

Looking for a God-sized adventure? Why not consider heading to Poland for a couple of weeks or a month to dive into some really great interactions? The only qualifications are: a love for Jesus, a heart for people and the ability to speak English. By the way, Poland is lovely in the spring and fall seasons and there’s so much to see and do!

If you’re not ready for an in-person adventure, perhaps you might consider becoming an online discussion partner. Although in-person classes are preferred, there is still a great opportunity to connect with students online. All you need is a good internet connection and a computer, tablet or phone.

You can contact Jay at: jay@gracelandcentrum.com



This young lady joined us in 2007 when she was 7 years old, and has now finished university but is still a part of Graceland. She is engaged, performing as a ballerina, and doing costume design (she made her dress).

WHY I SERVE.

Serving others is a way to serve God. Colossians 3:23-24 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men. It is the Lord you are serving.”

Jayne and I first started attending Parkhill Church of Christ in the mid 1980s and then moved with the church to its present location, where it was renamed Oak Park Church of Christ. In those early years of attending, Jayne was quick to get involved; I, on the other hand, would enter the church, smile, shake a few hands on the way to my seat, worship with the congregation, listen to the pastor’s message, and when the service was over, quickly say goodbye on my way out the door – I was not taking the time to talk to or get to know the members of the church.

This all changed once I got to know our pastor at the time, John Nicholson, and I began to attend the men’s breakfasts. There I met men from all walks of life, and I learned the variety of ways they served the church. That inspired me to get more involved.

After selling my accounting practice and retiring in 2012, I served as the Treasurer on Oak Park’s Board for six years. It was an opportunity to use my accounting background to serve the church and at the same time to give back and say thank you to the congregation for all the support they had given my business over the years.

Six years ago, Oak Park’s long-time greeter, Richard Taylor, passed away suddenly. I was asked by the Connections Team Lead, Shirley Hiebert, if I would take over that role. I thought of the smiles Richard would bring to people’s faces as they entered the church and he warmly greeted them with a hug or a handshake. I certainly always looked forward to seeing him as I came in! To be greeted in this way is especially important for someone who has never been to our church before, and essential for someone who has never been to *any* church before. People would often comment on how warm and inviting Oak Park was, and how welcome they felt. I wanted to help continue



by Tom Barnett

that tradition, so Jayne and I gladly became members of the Connections Team.

A great part of being a greeter is that it allows you to start to build relationships with others... something I avoided for so long. It is rewarding to give of your time and see the gratitude of those you serve. I have been amazed over the years seeing the many volunteers who come out every day of the week to be of service to our pastors, church members, and community.

Jimmy Carter once said “I have one life and one chance to make it count for something.. My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.”

How will you serve?

Visit oakpark.ca/connect to share your gifts with our church.