

Christmas 2022

Food Bank & Gift Drive

By Kerry Grant

December 6, 10:39 a.m. – an email arrives in my inbox from a contact at Calgary Housing:

"Hello Kerry, I have encountered a couple of families that could really use food and/or Christmas gifts. I know it's too late right now, but I thought I'd send an email to check if there is anything left over for these families. Felt it was worth a shot."

Panic sets in, as the deadline for applications was November 25, and all the food shopping, gift shopping, and pre-ordering of perishable food items has been completed. But how do you say no to two more families in need? Hmmm....

About two hours later, a text arrives from a friend:

"Don't know why I didn't think of this sooner!! I have a bunch of unopened toys I'm looking to donate – the girls have now outgrown this stuff and it's never been opened!... your church probably has a good use for them this holiday season, no?"

Is that not answered prayer and God at work?
But wait, there's more...

An Oak Park volunteer went out early one Saturday morning to purchase the non-perishable items for the last-minute additional Food Bank family. It wasn't until she had scanned all the items at the self check-out





that she realized she had left her wallet at home! The cashier supervisor was reluctant to hold all her items while she went home to get her wallet. Hearing this, a

gentleman at the next till came over and offered to pay for the groceries. After a brief back-and-forth discussion, she finally agreed to let him pay.

"As a single mom this meant everything to me and my kids. We did good for 7 years and recently things got really difficult. The gifts were perfect and we still have some food left 3 weeks later! We are so grateful for the love and support shown to us by Oak Park Church."

Feeling compelled to explain further, she told him the food was not actually for her, but for a family that her church was supporting through a Food Bank - a mom and two kids from a domestic violence situation. The gentleman then tells her that he is a retired police officer who spent most of his career working in the domestic violence unit!

He was delighted to hear what the groceries were for, his generosity took care of our last-minute recipients, and our shopper was saved from an embarrassing situation.

So many people were involved in making the Christmas 2022 Food Bank and Gift Drive such a success – the many faithful volunteers making reminder calls, donating money, donating shopping



"Our Christmas wouldn't be complete and merrier without the Christmas hamper we got from Oak Park Church! The love was amazing, we can't thank them less! God bless"

bags, praying over this ministry, grocery shopping, showing up to pack and sort food, loading up (and unloading) trucks full of food, gift-wrapping hundreds of presents, and delivering the final product. All of this during the worst possible weather conditions (remember the -40's?) and not a single volunteer failed to show up because of it.

With everyone pitching in, we held the biggest donation event in the history of the Oak Park Church Food Bank & Gift Drive,



"Thank you so very much again for everything you did for us. You're so amazing!! Thank you for being such a blessing for us this Christmas. We really appreciate you."



providing two weeks' worth of groceries and a complete Christmas meal to 32 families, and gifts for every member of the family for 36 families. The combined efforts of Oak Park, Hope for Life, and Campbell-Stone United Church made this happen, so a huge thank-you to all who participated. And a big thank-you to the staff who let us stash items all over the church.

Incredibly, our food shoppers were able to bring us in below budget. These bargain hunters and fierce negotiators were able to source everything on the massive shopping list (and then some) – an amazing feat.

By bringing us in so far under projected spending, we have a head start on fundraising for the Easter Food Bank.

Thank you so much for the continued support and enthusiasm for the Oak Park Food Bank and Gift Drive – it wouldn't happen without all those "hands and feet" of God.



Ash Wednesday

Do not avoid difficult truths and do not sugar-coat life's realities. You and I will die. It may not be something we like to bring up in a casual conversation with an acquaintance, but deep down we all know it is true. Amidst all the big and meaningful topics that the church engages with, death is not often front and centre; like in broader culture, death can feel a bit like a hush-hush topic within the church as well. Even the contemporary rebranding of a "Funeral Service" to the more upbeat name, "Celebration of Life," is a telling sign.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent - the 40-day journey to the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. This year at Oak Park, we will be having an Ash Wednesday service (February 22), to mark the beginning of this season. There will be prayer, Scripture, and the imposition of ashes (where a cross is marked on your forehead with ash). It will be a service where talk of death is not avoided and our mortality is marked by a communal confession that we are not our own, but we belong to the eternal one.

I love what Tish Harrison Warren has to say about the reality of Ash Wednesday: "But the truly countercultural message of Ash Wednesday is not that we will die. It's that though death awaits us, despair is not inevitable. By naming the stark, intractable horror of death, we as a church—without triteness or saccharine denial—can proclaim true hope in the midst of it."

By Pastor Lane



**FUN FAMILY
DAY OUT!**
FEBRUARY 20

Visit oakpark.ca for more details.



IF:Gathering 2023

I love to look back on moments throughout my life that didn't seem all that significant at the time, that were seemingly small decisions, but display evidence of God's pursuit of me, his faithfulness, healing, and his careful preparation of me for bigger things. My decision to participate in IF:Gathering a few years ago is one of those moments. The first time I heard about IF:Gathering, it was in some small, insignificant context; a brief mention in a podcast, I believe. When I heard about it, I just had this feeling that I needed to be part of it. So, I committed to a weekend of worship, learning, prayer, conviction, healing, and hope - and I am so thankful I did.

IF:Gathering was an answer to many of my prayers. The first time I participated, I was in a difficult place in my faith journey, and it was transformative. The messages spoke to my heart. That year, I logged in on my own at home - but I didn't feel alone at all. It was such a blessing to gather with women around the world, with one focus: Jesus Christ. Even though IF is held in Dallas each year and many women attend in-person, it is also streamed live across the globe. Women of all ages gather to participate at churches, in living rooms, dorm rooms, or around their kitchen tables. What an experience to see the expanse of Christ's church, and to see sisters in Christ joining together to deepen their faith and build the kingdom. I came out of that weekend with a renewed spirit; my heart was on-fire for Jesus again, in a way it hadn't been for quite some time. IF: Gathering has become something I look forward to each year. It inspires me, it lifts me up, I find healing, and I grow in my hunger and thirst for God's word. So, you can imagine my excitement when I heard that women at Oak Park decided to host an IF:2023 local gathering this year! What an amazing opportunity to gather with sisters in our own community, to worship and learn together, to hear messages from amazing speakers, to experience fellowship with one another and consider the work God is doing or calling us to in our lives.

IF:Gathering has been so impactful in my life, and it's my hope that you'll gather with us for IF:2023 right here at Oak Park!

By Nicole Sharpe

IF:2023[☆]

Women's Conference
March 3 - 4 at Oak Park Church

More information/registration at oakpark.ca

Christmas Shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse

A big 'thank you' to those of you at Oak Park who packed 38 wonderful, gift-filled shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse. These boxes will be distributed to very needy children living in difficult circumstances such as war, poverty, and environmental disasters. Let's be praying that the children and their families will be encouraged and comforted as they look to God for protection and peace.

"Every shoebox gift is an opportunity to reach a child with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's about telling children around the world and their families that God loves them. He hasn't forgotten them. We're taking the Good News to the ends of the earth and doing it through a shoebox."

-Franklin Graham, President & CEO of Samaritan's Purse*

*Quote taken from https://packabox.samaritanaspurse.ca/?_ga=2.153492656.949177155.1674492895-1739800223.1669055708

Oak Park Missions Update

Refuge of Hope Internation

Christmas was filled with a wide range of emotions at Refuge of Hope in the Philippines. There was plenty of joy that went along with the fun parties, food, silly games, and gifts, but also sadness for the girls as they continue to miss their families. It was such good news to hear that the gifts purchased by Oak Park arrived December 23rd!

The girls have been enjoying some special times roasting hot dogs, playing games and gardening at the new property, the 'promised land' as they call it. The posts and roof for the administration building are now up, providing a covered place for them to gather at the property. There are now 14 girls at Refuge of Hope, most of whom have made the decision to follow Jesus – such radical transformation in their emotions and character from anger, bitterness, and defiance to kindness and confidence.

Refuge of Hope is currently focused on fundraising for a van and the new housing unit. The costs of caring for the girls on a day-to-day basis can be broken down as follows:

\$7 = drinking water for a week or one meal for the whole household

\$9 = a medical or dental check-up

\$15 = the girls' school allowance for a week

\$18 = one bag of rice (Filipinos eat rice three times a day)

\$21 = transport to school for a week

\$87 = the electric bill every month



Pioneer Bible Translators

Norm has spent the last few months in Dallas, Texas, where he was able to complete the next step of translation checks on the Akukem book of Mark. Eight different reading clubs have been taking place back in the Akukem villages to try to improve the peoples' literacy so that they will be able to read their Bibles when they are printed. Over 900 literacy shell books (cultural storybooks and short Bible storybooks) were printed for these classes, and they were very enthusiastically received. What an exciting time of preparation and anticipation!

Norm has now returned to Calgary to spend a few weeks with his family before he and Jill fly to Papua New Guinea on February 12 to do the final check on this translation of the book of Luke before it gets sent for printing. They will be visiting us at Oak Park Church on February 5, and we hope you will join us as we take the opportunity to pray for them before they once again head overseas.



Long Range Planning Committee and Construction

The expansion and renovation redesign to bring costs down was completed last fall and a revised development permit submitted to and approved by the City of Calgary. Revised drawings were included in the Park Bench last fall and are posted on the foyer wall. Copies are also available from the church office. The construction general contractor, Milestone, has been selected and approved by the Board. Milestone has been working with us and our architect as we finalize detailed engineering and prepare detailed construction drawings to be submitted to the City for a Building Permit later this winter. We anticipate construction starting in April and taking 6 to 8 months to complete.

We are also currently working with the Church of Christ Development Corporation for a low-interest, long-term loan for the portion of the project that will be financed. They have told us they anticipate no issues approving our application and will formally start that application once the church's congregation has formally approved the project. The Board is preparing the proposal to commit to the project that will be presented and voted on at the special congregational meeting on February 12.

As folks heard at the service on January 22, we received approval from the Government of Alberta's Community Facilities Enhancement Program (CFEP) for a grant of \$1 million on January 16. What an answer to prayer that we should celebrate and be grateful for! This is a matching grant, meaning the government will contribute up to \$1 million towards the first \$2 million of the project's costs. It is unusual for a church to receive such a large amount – it is Oak Park's many community-focused missions that attracted CFEP's attention and approval. The balance of the project costs will be met by the pledge campaign from church donors (Infinitely More) and a loan from the CCDC as noted above. The greater the congregational donations to the project, the lower the loan will be.

Additional project information will be provided by the Board ahead of the upcoming congregational approval meeting. In the meantime, Lane and I are always available for any questions you might have.

Doug Walker, Chairman
Long Range Planning & Construction Committee



Eat Well. Spend Less.

 **oak park**
CHURCH OF CHRIST

2023

**Any one can order one or more
Good Food Boxes.**

Boxes must be pre-ordered and paid for in cash (exact change) on or before the order by date. You can pre-purchase your next box when you pick up your order. Boxes must be picked up, before 6pm. (Note: Boxes not picked up will be donated - no refunds will be given.)

Good Food Boxes come in the following sizes:

LARGE	40 lbs	\$35.00
MEDIUM	30 lbs	\$30.00
SMALL	20 lbs	\$25.00

ORDER BY

January 9
January 30
February 27
March 20
April 24
May 22
June 12
September 11
October 9
October 30
November 27

DELIVERY DATE

January 18
February 8
March 8
March 29
May 3
May 31
June 21
September 20
October 18
November 8
December 6

For information call Oak Park Church office at (403) 251-5150 or email office@oakpark.ca



SPECIAL MEETING. FEBRUARY 12

Visit oakpark.ca for more details.



AGM MARCH 19

Visit oakpark.ca for more details.



Access online sermons & event information at oakpark.ca. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

11263 Oakfield Drive SW
Calgary, AB T2W 4M2

Phone: 403.251.5150

Email: office@oakpark.ca
www.oakpark.ca



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