



THE PARK BENCH

The magazine of Oak Park Church of Christ | April 2023

WHY I SERVE.

I love football! I love everything about the game: the locker room banter, the sideline strategy sessions, the energy and rivalry on the field, and I love winning games! It has been a long time since I geared up for a game of football, but when I was younger, I lived, ate and breathed football. My two older brothers played for our local CJFL team, the Red Deer Packers Football Club, and I was part of our High School's championship football team, the LTCHS Raiders (1981-1983).



by Rob Beingessner

These days, I'm thrilled when I get a chance to watch our own Calgary Stampeders play, even from the nosebleed section. Sometimes, if it's not too crowded, I sneak down to the bottom rows close to the team bench and lean in on the rail, just to hear the players chatting

about the game together. What I wouldn't give for a chance to just sit on the bench and get a feel for the game from their perspective!

That is the same thrill and energy that I feel when I participate in the ministry and activities of our church. I am honoured to be part of an outstanding team of talented individuals who serve our Lord Jesus with the same tenacity and fervor of a championship

football team. As I enjoy the privilege of sitting on this bench, and watching these amazing servants perform their acts of ministry and servanthood, I get to see our Heavenly Father coach and orchestrate life-changing moments in the lives of people all around me. This is amazing!

I was once consumed with trying to achieve success in my life through my career, and with my wife and children; I poured everything into my job, while trying to be a great dad and a loving husband. Although those were not bad goals in and of themselves, I constantly struggled with doubts and fought against the thought that I just wasn't good enough. I thought that in some way, I was letting down my children, my wife, and my Heavenly Father.

Then, we discovered a home here at Oak Park Church of Christ and we were welcomed in like dearly loved family. Slowly, this amazing group of players on God's championship team began to train, strengthen and equip me to know our Father's strategy of overwhelming love, and unsurpassable peace and joy. How could I keep that to myself? How could I just sit on the bench and do nothing? I wanted to get into the game!



CONTINUED

WHY I SERVE. CONTINUED

It was in my men's mentoring group at Oak Park that I discovered, "as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

"In my role as an Elder, I enjoy exploring strategies that build deeper health, endurance and strength in our team, and carrying those out."

I enjoyed having a front row seat to see how the love of Jesus Christ can purify and temper the lives of these men when they challenge and commit themselves to this process. In my role as an Elder, I enjoy exploring strategies that build deeper health, endurance and strength in our team, and carrying those out. I'm excited to discover nuggets of gold from

God's playbook that will nurture deep connection, trust, and confidence in a championship team that joins God in victory after victory after victory.

Back in the day, I played offensive halfback. When everything aligned – if the coach called the right play, and I had great blocking, and our quarterback executed the perfect fake, even I could perform an outstanding play, and an occasional touchdown! That's why I love serving at Oak Park Church of Christ so much. This is a team of gifted servants, coordinating and performing together to shine the light of Christ's love and salvation repeatedly. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Put me in the game, coach!

COMMUNITY TUTORING: WE NEED MORE TUTORS!



Community
Tutoring



by Kenzie Rushton

It has been one year since we began our tutoring program here at Oak Park Church of Christ. It is so amazing to see God's hand at work in the growth of this program. Currently, we have connected with 14 families and have impacted 32 students through this program. Every week on Thursday evening from 6:00 PM until 7:30 PM, our church's foyer is filled with 25 individuals: tutors, students being tutored, and parents being supported with English acquisition and connecting with other members of their community.

As a result of this program's continued growth, we are in need of more tutors. If you are feeling the tug to serve in your community and have a passion for supporting children and youth (grades 1-12) with their educational learning, we need your help! One area that we are noticing an immediate need for tutors is supporting students in grades 7-12. If you are interested in joining our tutoring program or have any questions, please reach out to Laura and Kenzie Rushton (kcrushton@shaw.ca).

YOUTH MISSIONS TRIP TO HONDURAS.

When I started working at Oak Park in September 2022, the youth missions trip seemed like a distant goal which would grow clearer and more defined the closer we got to it. We began talks with Lifeline Christian Mission about taking a group to Honduras, and we ran a successful Christmas bake sale fundraiser, but August 2023 still seemed a far way off. However, now four months into 2023, the youth missions trip is practically around the corner!



by Ben Joubert

Our youth missions team has begun meeting more regularly to plan fundraisers, and to prepare together for our trip. We have started working through a curriculum, Helping Without Hurting, to better equip us for our trip, and this has helped us clarify why this trip is important for us: we want to learn, serve, and grow. There are many Christians in different countries striving to serve God in their unique contexts. Travelling to Honduras will give our team a glimpse into Christians' lives in a completely different context than our own. Culturally, economically, socially – Honduras is unlike Canada in many ways. This presents a

great learning opportunity for us to see how the local Hondurans live out their faith in their unique location.

care towards our brothers and sisters in Christ in another part of the world. It is often easy to get caught up in all that is happening in our local lives, without consideration for the rest of the world. This youth missions trip is a chance for us to see a completely different way of living from our own and be changed by it.

We have been incredibly grateful and blessed by the support of the church in our fundraisers. Many people have donated their time, talents, and money to help us succeed. We would appreciate your prayer as we continue to fundraise and prepare for this trip. It is a big endeavour to travel so far and experience a place so different from Canada. Please pray that we will be equipped to learn, serve, and grow through this trip. Please also be praying that Lifeline's work in Honduras will continue to be a force for good in their communities.



Partnering with Lifeline Christian Mission provides us the chance to serve alongside the local Hondurans in the ways that are most helpful to them; we want our trip to be an encouragement and blessing to those we encounter. We also want to grow in our humility, compassion, and

THE TEAM

Leaders: George Graffunder, Val Lautischer, Chantal Joubert, Ben Joubert

Participants: Treyden Beingessner, Tim Graffunder, Theo Graffunder, Alex Graffunder, Will Graffunder.



“I WAS A STRANGER

“The outpouring of love and support to the Abshylavas has been such a blessing to them and to me”



by Julie Kerr

It is amazing to be part of a church family that supports me to live out my faith in tangible ways. Late last year, I saw a social media piece expressing an urgent need for host homes to welcome displaced Ukrainians. I felt God's prompting to open our home to these people who

were fleeing the war and seeking to make a new life in Calgary. Within days, we were put in touch with the Abshylavas, who had fled from Harkiev and were laid over in the Netherlands, en route to Calgary, with no idea of where they would stay when they arrived.

When we met Olga

and Roland via video call, we were touched by how relieved and grateful they were to know that there was a safe home awaiting them.

By the time we picked up their family of four at the airport, it already felt like we were friends. They came with one suitcase and backpack each, filled with bare necessities and English textbooks. They left behind their apartment, with its blown-out windows, their extended families, their friends, and their careers, not knowing whether they would be living in the airport or on the street. I admire their courage and commitment to creating a safer future for their 4-year-old son, Davyd and their 7-year-old daughter, Taia, who had not been in school for over a year.

So many of our existing community ministries at Oak Park were easily mobilized in support of our Ukrainian guests, to augment what was already in place for war refugees through the Ukrainian Orthodox churches, the Centre for Newcomers, and other social services. The Abshylavas shopped for free clothing and groceries on Thursdays, and Roland came with

me to Thursday night tutoring to practice his English with Linda Best and other ESL community members. A post on our church Facebook page resulted in the delivery of donations and loans of clothing, toys, games, puzzles, Calgary Flames gear, welcome gifts, toiletries, and household items. Doris MacKinnon and the church staff identified donated items that were exactly what the Abshylavas needed to set up their home. So many other church members stepped up to help in various ways: one family provided gift cards for stores; another went shopping for new household items on the Abshylavas' must-have list before they moved; one of our seniors assisted them with transportation while I was away; one of our youth went through her toys and gave the kids some of her gently used favourites; a church member coordinated a donation of bedroom furniture for the children, and another church member agreed to use his truck to deliver it.

The outpouring of love and support to the Abshylavas has been such a blessing to them and to me – as we found them a rental home, supported them to find work, enrolled Taia in school, and brought four other family members over from Ukraine. The Abshylavas are amazed at the way our church community has extended itself to welcome and help them. Olga kept asking why we would all do so much for complete strangers, and I had the joy of explaining our belief as Christians that everything we have has been given to us by God and is intended to be shared, even with strangers. I told her that God loves her and her family and is providing for them through His people.

What an incredible testimony to God's love and care our church has been to this family in need of welcome, safety and peace. Thank you for being partners in this important ministry! The Abshylavas asked me to extend their warmest appreciation to each and every one of you.

AND YOU WELCOMED ME."

Matthew 25:35

CARING FOR THE CREATION.



by Matthew Morris

April 23, 2023 is *Good Seed Sunday* – a day when churches across North America worship the Creator by considering the works of His hands and committing to care for His good creation. Here are ten biblical reasons we all should participate in care for living creatures and the water, air, and soil we enjoy.

10

The created world is good.

(*Gen 1:31, 1 Timothy 4:4*)

“Good” does not necessarily mean “morally perfect”, but rather “delightfully complete” or “beautiful.” We see in Genesis 1 that God delights in the goodness of His creation – and pronounces creation “very good” when humans are added to it. It is not humans that are very good, but rather our participation in the rest of creation that makes it “very good.”

9

God blesses His creation. (*Gen 1:22*)

God promises the fish and birds that they will be fruitful and will multiply – a promise He then hands over to us to fulfill (*Gen 1:28*). How does the collapse of the Atlantic cod, or the extinction of the passenger pigeon, fit with God’s vision for these creatures?

8

God provides for His creation.

(*Job 38-39, Psalm 104*)

Although God hands creation over to humans to “rule over”, it is clear God is still the one in charge – the animals

look to God for their food. God brags to Job about the animals, and delights in those spaces where humans are not – such as the desert wastelands and the craggy cliffs of the mountains.

7

God places moral restrictions on our use of the natural world.

(*Prov 12:10, Habakkuk 2:17*)

God gives us creation to care for, but then provides limits on what this looks like. The righteous person cares for their animals, whereas wanton destruction of animals leads to God’s wrath.

6

God seeks to protect nature from human mismanagement. (*Deut 22:6-7, Deut 25:4, Lev 25:4, Ex 20:10*)

Humans are not the only beings brought into His promise of Sabbath rest – the land and the wild animals are also included. Again and again we find land management practices in scripture that permitted the flourishing of both humans and animals, such as a seven-year rest for agricultural lands.





5

We are to seek redemption in all broken relationships. (*Gen 3*)

In Genesis 3 we see that sin breaks relationships, including our relationship to the land. As the Church, we are called to heal the consequences of the Fall. It turns out caring for the land doesn't just heal our relationship with creation, it also provides care for our neighbour and gives people greater opportunities to encounter the Creator.

4

Creation brings glory to God.

(*Psalm 8, Psalm 19, Psalm 29, Psalm 104, Luke 19:40, and more!*)

We encounter the Creator in part through His creation. We are filled with wonder at the size of the universe or the intricacies of the smallest microbe. Many people describe feeling close to God when in the "great outdoors." We diminish God's glory when we diminish His creation – no one seeks out landfills or polluted waters to be close to God.

3

We have kinship with creation. (*Gen 1, 2*)

Humans are "beings of earth" in the Genesis 1-2 account, which unites us with plants and animals, and "beings of breath", which the animals also are. We are united in substance with non-human life, meaning by caring for those structures of life – the soil and the air and the water – we care for creation while also caring for ourselves. Love of neighbour is not disconnected from love of creation when we are united with living things in substance.

2

We are made rulers over creation.

(*Gen 1:26-28, Gen 2*)

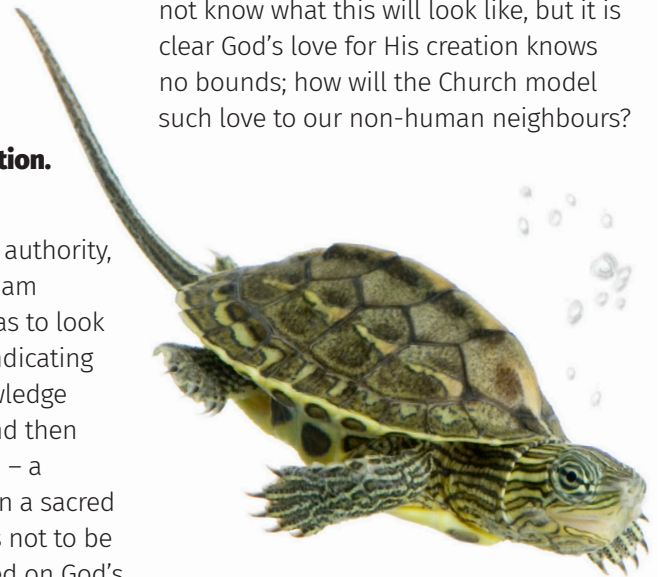
God placed creation under our authority, not as despot, but as priest. Adam demonstrates what this rule was to look like – he names the animals, indicating intimate relationship and knowledge of the things under his care, and then serves and protects the garden – a description of priestly activity in a sacred space. Our rule over creation is not to be tyrannical, but is to be modelled on God's rule of self-sacrificial love. Perhaps it is our fallen nature that has made creation "groan" (Romans 8) as it awaits the restoration of our ability to rule it well.

1

Christ died for creation, to restore it.

(*John 3:16, Colossians 1, Romans 8, Revelation 21-22*)

"For God so loved the world" is a passage we all know, but as C.S. Lewis points out, "world" here is cosmos, which is not the social world of humans but the entirety of created things. Jesus died and was raised, not as a spirit, but as a physical restored body, to reconcile "all things" to God, making it possible for there to be a "new heaven and a new earth." We do not know what this will look like, but it is clear God's love for His creation knows no bounds; how will the Church model such love to our non-human neighbours?



VISION MINISTRIES CANADA

Vision Ministries Canada (VMC) was started in 1992, primarily for the purpose of evangelism through church planting. VMC's Mission is to plant and invigorate churches by nurturing, inspiring and collaborating with leaders and cultivating a partnering network of churches, primarily in Canada.



by Mike Stone,
Executive Director VMC

Connected by relationship and missional collaboration, a family of nearly two hundred churches across Canada has coalesced around VMC. VMC is not a denomination, but rather an independent mission agency that serves a network of self-governing local churches and ministries. VMC provides some denominational services but exercises no control over the churches it serves.

The vision of VMC is to see more churches on mission and more people following Jesus, pursuing virtue, justice and the reconciliation of all things. Its mission is to plant and invigorate churches by nurturing, inspiring and collaborating with leaders, and by cultivating a partnering network of churches. Vision's culture is shaped by four core values: missional, relational, pioneering and Jesus-centered. Partner churches are expected to affirm VMC's vision, mission, and values as well as a statement of faith that is evangelical in flavour.

Vision Ministries maintains an office in Waterloo, Ontario, but most team members work remotely. With staff from coast to coast, Vision has boots

At this year's AGM, Oak Park voted to adopt Vision Ministries Canada as a supported mission partner. We are so excited to be a part of their network and multiply our ministry together!

on the ground across the country. Our core team includes two volunteers, eleven part-time and two full-time staff. An additional ten volunteers serve as regional coordinators. VMC continues to inspire vision for national outreach and provide a practical mechanism for collaborative mission. Team members consult with churches, coach pastors, intervene during crisis and provide guidance throughout pastoral transition. VMC convenes national and regional events, disseminates stories of God's active presence, and offers resources related to leadership, administration, governance, etc.

At our annual retreat, through presentations, discussion, prayer, silence and scripture, we discerned a nudge from the Spirit to double down in three critical areas: Continue to lead with church planting, establishing new kinds of fellowships for Canada's shifting religious landscape; develop next generation leaders, instilled with fresh ecclesiological and missional imagination for greater impact; and leverage the kingdom potential of human migration and the gospel opportunity newcomers represent. Some need Jesus, having never heard the gospel, while others come with a love for Jesus and missionary zeal uncommon among most Canadian believers.

Vision Ministries is passionate about these strategic priorities and believes the Spirit will inspire collaboration among network churches and leaders for kingdom impact.



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