



THE PARK BENCH

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**LIFELINE
CHRISTIAN
MISSION
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THE FAB FOUR: FAITH TOGETHER.

“We are designed for community, and our mission is relational; there are few other themes more prevalent in our lives than this.”

Ethan

Knute

Megan

Jewlyn



We are married couples Knute & Jewlyn Vallevand and Ethan & Megan Innes, or as we are more commonly known, *The Fab Four*. We have had the unique opportunity to live and work together for the last five years.

We spent three years living in a trailer together and have been blessed with a house for the last two years. As you may expect, being around one another all the time can certainly be difficult; however, it has also provided us with many chances to learn to love one another the way Christ does. Along with relational and material growth, we have been blessed to experience spiritual growth that (as you may have seen) led us all to get baptized recently! We would love to share with you how God has worked in our lives, and how He has affected our aspirations for the future!

Our story started when Ethan and I (Knute) met during our elementary school years, at the local rink playing shinny (which is about the only thing to do in rural Saskatchewan). The next year he moved to the school I attended, and we have been best friends ever since. Megan and Jewlyn met each other at school in Strathmore where they both attended the same class. Jewlyn and I began dating shortly after we met during the summer, at a lake in Saskatchewan where we both had family connections. I was visiting a friend who happened to be staying next door to her family's cabin. Shortly after we started dating, Jewlyn asked me if I "had any cute friends" for a friend of hers (Megan). I said "No, but I have a friend named Ethan."

Two years and many long road trips back and forth to Alberta later, we all moved in together. A year or so after that, we started coming to Oak Park! Being so close has forced us to deal with many of our flaws and focus on acting out the things we believe. Looking back on our journey so far and the progress we have made makes it easy to see how God has worked in our lives. His love is transformative, and it has certainly transformed us.

Recalling all of the challenges we have overcome, I often think "I'm not sure how I had the strength to deal with that." Whether it was the death of a

family member, uncovering and working through emotional baggage, long and stressful hours at work, or just bickering with each other, behind each of these struggles lies a prayer answered, faith strengthened, and a person loved dearly. In both of our marriages, and the relationships between the four of us, God has always provided us with more than we need.

I think back to the days when Ethan and I were working four sixteen-hour days, followed by three nightshifts, having only one day off to reset our sleep schedule, and then doing it all over again. That was a stressful time for us all, as the girls had to take care of more things, on top of their work, to support us. It was a high-stress environment, but somehow, we always had exactly what we needed to continue. We had just enough strength, patience, and energy to push through those tough days. After some time, our prayers were answered, and we were able to swap positions for our dream jobs in the company.

As our lives went from long hours and little sleep to desk jobs where we could work from home in our pyjamas, our focus shifted, and we started to become more involved with the church and the beautiful people in it. Our relationships with our new brothers and sisters have added depth to our lives that has impacted us deeply. The chance to serve one another has been so life-giving. We are designed for community, and our mission is relational; there are few other themes more prevalent in our lives than this. I'm sure this theme will continue as we form new relationships and cherish the ones we already have.

God is good, and the evidence of His grace is scattered throughout our life story. The difficult situations give us the opportunity to hand over control to God and focus on loving one another better today than we did yesterday. We have been blessed to have siblings in Christ who encourage, inspire, teach, and love us. We are so excited to continue deepening and creating new relationships here at Oak Park. "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19). As our understanding of His overwhelming love for us grows, our love for others grows also.

WHY WE SERVE: THE MUSIC TEAM.

If you attend our weekly services, you know what those of us on the music team do: we use our various musical gifts to help lead the congregation in song to worship our great God!

Music has always played an important role in the way God wants His people to worship; it must matter a lot to Him! What a gift it is to us as well.

Music is featured throughout the Old and New Testaments: Levitical musicians, the Psalms, Jesus and His disciples sang together at the Last Supper, the early church sang hymns as part of their regular gatherings, disciples sang together while in prison, and we read in Revelation of heavenly creatures and the Elders singing before the throne of God.

Music goes beyond physical notes – it transcends boundaries. It affects our emotions, our minds, our spirits and even our bodies. Hans Christian Anderson put it well: “Where words fail, music speaks.”

My husband David and I met at Rocky Mountain College, here in Calgary. We both graduated with our Bachelor of Arts; David with a contemporary guitar focus and me with a vocal performance focus. We started attending Oak Park while we were dating in 2010 and served on the music team with our good college friends Shawn and Sara Baran. David and I got married in 2011, had our first child, Sam, in 2012 and shortly after we headed



by Deanna Pearce,
pictured here with husband David and
children Emily, Sam, and Alice

back to my home church due to family reasons. While there we had our daughters, Emily and Alice, in 2014. We returned to Oak Park in 2021 and have enjoyed reconnecting with so many and serving here on the music team once again, alongside Shelley Potts and the rest of the crew.

I have been singing for as far back as I can remember. Growing up, my home church had some really fantastic music programs which included musicals, choirs, even an orchestra! It was an incredible atmosphere to grow up in and had a really big role in shaping me. David began playing guitar in his teens and started attending the Salvation Army church in St. Albert, serving on the music team there.

Why do we serve here at Oak Park?

I explored a number of different musical opportunities in and outside of the church as I grew older but something became very apparent to me: God gave me my voice to use for His glory. Other experiences were fun and had their moments, but I had never found any greater musical joy or sense of purpose than when I was singing for Him, whether that was in a weekly church service, in concert with



New West Symphony & Chorus (shameless plug), at weddings and funerals. Therefore, I serve on the music team because that is what I believe God wants me to do with this particular gift. I enjoy building into the next generation and look forward to more opportunities in that regard within Oak Park and my other music community. Our daughters joined my husband and I in leading one Sunday and that was a highlight for our family.

I asked David why he serves on the music team. He said that he believes we all should be serving within our church community (he also helps in Kids' Park). But he joined the music team simply

because he was asked! One of the greatest highlights for him is hearing the congregation sing from the viewpoint of the stage. You all sound so good. We love it!

Those of you with musical talent, sitting in the congregation each week... come join us! We always need more people, especially with having two services now. Even if you haven't done it before, we encourage you to pray and think about it. We would love to have you join us. If you'd like more information about being on the worship team or would like to arrange an audition, email Shelley at shelley@oakpark.ca



MISSIONS FOCUS: LIFELINE CHRISTIAN MISSION

Roles while away from Haiti

Have you ever heard the statement, ‘time flies?’ It seems as if it was yesterday the elders of Oak Park laid hands on my wife and I as we left to serve in Haiti as Oak Park’s missionaries – that was 16 years ago.



by Ricot Leon

So much has happened and changed since; we were newlywed then, now we are parents to four children including a teenager. We planted two churches and oversaw a total of five churches, two schools, and an agricultural program. Our time in Haiti was marked by two catastrophic earthquakes, killer hurricanes and countless political upheavals including a presidential assassination.

In September of 2024, through prayer and great council, we concluded that it was time to leave Haiti, and we relocated here in Calgary. We physically left the island but remain deeply involved while here in Canada. Instead of being on the frontline evangelizing, mentoring and initiating different activities, now my new role in donor relations is to be a voice for our faithful leaders on the ground. Our responsibilities haven’t changed despite our change of location; we still have many employed staff and ongoing projects so I focus on fundraising activities, building regular partnerships, and gathering necessary resources so they can continue to do the job.

A grave misunderstanding is that since we are not in Haiti, the ministry no longer needs supporters – in fact it is quite the opposite. Our faithful leaders are living through one of the darkest times Haiti has ever experienced and need all our help, prayerfully and financially. It is hard to read about their regular challenges in a gang-controlled society. It is equally hard not to feel guilty that we are comfortable here in North America saying that ‘we’ll pray for you.’ We will never stop praying for them and we are motivated more than ever to be their voices as they carry the torch forward while sharing the gospel.

Despite the challenges, Haiti is a better place because Oak Park initiated this project 16 years ago that is changing lives for this generation and for many generations to come. Haiti is grateful to Oak Park and hopefully when things calm down, you will be able to visit the saints there again. At this point, North America has suspended all international flights to Haiti as the main airport is not safe due to the gangs in the surrounding area. When flights resume, I will hopefully be on one of the first planes back, to encourage our leaders in person.

If you would like to support Lifeline’s Haiti mission, you may donate through Oak Park by designating your offering as *Missions: Lifeline Haiti*.



Ricot and Mandy's daughter Isabelle, 12, teaching English to community kids



Decision Christian Church women's choir on Sunday morning



Ricot and his replacement field-director in Haiti, pastor Edner Maurice



Play time at church kids' ESL class, held at Ricot and Mandy's house



Lifeline Haiti's district/regional leaders' yearly meeting



Port-Salut's regional director, Edner Maurice, preaching at church anniversary celebration

MISSIONS FOCUS: LIFELINE CHRISTIAN MISSION



Lifeline's Ministry and Meal Packing Events

Lifeline's ministry has been a beacon of hope and support for communities in need, both locally and globally. Through its various initiatives, Lifeline aims to *transform lives* and *provide hope*.



by Rick Scruggs

One of the most impactful aspects of Lifeline's ministry is its **meal packing events**, which serve to mobilize people to join in God's mission and address hunger and nutrition deficiencies in areas of crisis and impoverishment.

Our meal packing events have been growing here in the Calgary region. We're partnering with churches, schools, youth groups, and businesses. Each event is characterized by a spirit of camaraderie and a shared commitment to making a tangible difference in the lives of those less fortunate. Participants often express a deep sense of fulfillment and connection, knowing that their efforts contribute to alleviating hunger. This fall Lifeline Canada is participating in the Million Meal Tour which features larger meal packing events at each of Lifeline's Meal Pack Centres across

North America. Our goal for that event is to pack at least 50,000 meals with Calgary businesses!

These events not only provide immediate relief but also inspire sustainable change. The meals packed are distributed to communities where food insecurity is rampant. Our latest shipment of meals was sent to an indigenous community near Yellowknife which had been evacuated twice last summer due to forest fires and suffered a flood in the same time period.

In addition to meal packing, Lifeline's ministry encompasses various programs that focus on working with local churches to transform communities with the Gospel, provide educational opportunities for youth, and stimulate economic empowerment. We're committed to mobilizing everyone, everywhere, to join the mission of God, whether by participating in a meal packing event or joining a mission trip opportunity.

Overall, Lifeline's ministry exemplifies compassion in action, fostering hope and positively impacting countless lives with the Good News. For additional information check out Lifeline.org.



WHAT IS THE GOOD LIFE?



by Alvin Ram

Scroll through your phone, watch a movie, or talk to your financial advisor, and you will find a wide range of answers to that question. More money. More comfort. More pleasure. A life without pain. A bigger home. The perfect relationship. Our world

is constantly offering us its version of the good life.

But what if the good life is something entirely different?

This summer at Oak Park, we'll be exploring the Beatitudes of Jesus – eight surprising statements he makes at the beginning of his most famous message, the Sermon on the Mount. Each of these begins with the word “Blessed,” which can also mean happy or fortunate. In other words, Jesus is giving us his vision of what the good life really is.

At first glance though, his list seems upside-down:

Blessed are the poor?

Blessed are those who mourn?

How can those things possibly lead to happiness?

If we're honest, these are experiences we prefer to avoid. They sound more like obstacles to the good life, not the path to it. But Jesus is doing something very intentional. He isn't offering self-help tips or motivational advice; he's inviting us into a whole new way of being.

Jesus didn't just come to bring a message; he came to bring a kingdom. And the way of his kingdom looks radically different from the values of the world around us. In God's kingdom, it is often in the unexpected places like meekness, mercy, and purity, that we begin to understand what it means to truly live.

This isn't an easy path. But it is the one that leads to life as God designed it. The Beatitudes are not just poetic sayings. They are an invitation into a life of deep transformation, into becoming the people God created us to be.

Join us this summer as we discover *The Good Life* – as defined by Jesus himself.



Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:3-10

LOOKING BACK, STEPPING FORWARD.



Our time at Oak Park started rather unexpectedly. Chantal and I had just moved back to Calgary from Ontario without truly knowing what our next step would be. I was personally starting to look at work outside of a church setting, while Chantal started working at Ambrose University.



by Ben Joubert

We decided our top priority would be to find a church we could call home. Chantal found Oak Park and we visited in mid-August 2023, with no idea that a month later I would be on staff. As with many of us, I was warmly greeted by Tom Barnett and Shirley Hiebert, who made sure we knew who the senior pastor was. After finding our seats and the service starting, I was decidedly uncomfortable when I was told to greet the person next to me! Our service welcome has since then become a part of the service I love and appreciate.

After the service, Shirley again found Chantal and I, making sure we met with Lane. Lane welcomed us warmly and after spending some time talking together, I knew I would like to ask some more questions around vocation and calling. We scheduled a coffee meeting for later that week. Chantal and I both recognized the warmth of the community at Oak Park after our first visit, but were still uncertain where we would land. After meeting with Lane, things started to move rather quickly as I applied for the position of Youth Pastor and took a step into what felt like a bit of a test, working in a church again.

I am incredibly grateful that God prompted us to make Oak Park our home church. Thinking back to leading the Youth Group with only six youth on a good night, in the old church lobby, it seems like ages ago. It has not even been three years, and the group has expanded, as has the space. I have enjoyed getting to know the youth more each week and will miss spending time with them every Friday.

Leading the youth here at Oak Park and on a mission trip, getting to know the community, and receiving the support of our church family has been overwhelming and a great joy. There have been so many who have supported me in the youth ministry, helping out with events or opening up their homes. We have been supported as Chantal and I started our work with Power to Change. And now as Chantal and I start a family, your support has again been poured out. Thank you so much for all the care and love that you have shown us.

Finally, my time with the staff team at Oak Park has been an incredible gift. I have been able to learn from each of the staff over the years how to better minister to others. Hearing their deliberations on navigating different ministry situations, receiving feedback on doing ministry, and being provided opportunities to try out different ministries has been amazing. The Oak Park staff have taught me how to continually remind myself about the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus through word and deed, while not letting potential distractions cloud the way forward. Their continued example of caring for people well has helped me

to piece together a ministry vision as I leave Oak Park to begin full-time work at Power to Change.

Starting in August, I will be working on both the University of Calgary and Mount Royal campuses, helping students take their next step towards Jesus. We work on campus and run Bible studies,

big group gatherings, outreach events, and meet individually with students to disciple them. I am truly grateful to be doing this work with a church that has been such a support to us. Thank you everyone for the ways in which you have shaped and equipped

Thinking back to leading the Youth Group with only six youth on a good night, in the old church lobby, it seems like ages ago.

us over these last few years. We are excited to continue being members at Oak Park and serve this community.

Ben, Chantal and baby Adélie Noëlle



DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THE LIGHT.



by Elena Hiebert

We recently enjoyed another Easter season together at Oak Park, and I'm grateful to Pastor Lane for giving me the opportunity to share my art with you.

My artistic journey started at a very young age. As a kid, I loved to draw. In school, my teachers would scold me for doodling on my assignments or for drawing unflattering caricatures of my classmates. Even today, my hands have a hard time keeping still and are always reaching for a pencil and piece of paper.

After high school, I moved to Red Deer and enrolled in a Visual Arts program where doodling was encouraged. I also started to spend a lot of time with a fella named Richard (and I still do, as we have been married for nearly 17 years). I have to be honest – my interest in him was really piqued when I found out he owned a motorcycle. Instead of putting in the recommended hours at the art studio, I found myself delightfully distracted with my new friend as we blazed the city trails on his little Yamaha TW200.

Nevertheless, I still managed to complete my art program, even with the distractions.

Thankfully for me, God can use even the most immature and unmotivated among us. As he grows and shapes me, he has also given me opportunities to use my art to worship and glorify him.

The two images I made for Easter this year were done on a drawing tablet – kind of like an electronic sketchbook, with a stylus for a pencil. It was then printed onto a translucent material that allowed the light to pass through once it was installed onto the front window at Oak Park Church.

While drawing an image for the crucifixion was pretty straightforward, I found it really challenging to attempt a visual representation of the resurrection. Nothing I create could ever fully embody the wonder of this event. I did, however, have a lot of fun creating that “glow effect” on the entrance of the tomb. I hope it can spark some excitement as we reflect on what Christ has done for us and as we wait for his return.

Jesus is alive and well and, for as long as I am able, I will use my gifts to share that blessed truth.

