

# THE PARK BENCH

The magazine of Oak Park Church of Christ | September 2025



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# PRACTICING THE WAY.

Hello, my name is Domanic-Ryan, and I have the pleasure of sharing with you my experience with the Practicing the Way Course.



*by Domanic-Ryan*

My uncle, Stuart Ranson, told me about this course as I was coming back to my faith, so it couldn't have come at a better time for me.

This course is about more than just "how to be a good Christian" – it can be used as a guide to an abundantly fruitful life, and realigning one's self on the importance of life and the beauty to be found in it. Practicing the Way is all about following the example set out by Jesus. Don't confuse this with an easy life though – the best things in life are seldom easy.

This was a weekly, step-by-step course that taught me how everyone's journey can and will take a different course, with twists, turns, ebbs, flows, easy and difficult times. It's not a journey to be measured by someone else's successes or hardships, but a journey of discovery, where the goal is to find peace, prosperity, and newfound happiness along each step. Not every step will bring a breakthrough overnight - more often these moments are achieved through dedication, obedience, and hard work.

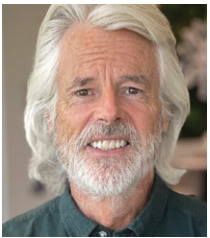
My biggest breakthroughs from the course were on the importance of Sabbath and the confession of sin. I have always viewed Sunday as a day of rest and in the past I have used it as an excuse to get out of the things I didn't want to do – not the best

use of my Sabbath time! In this course I learned that it is not only a day of rest, but also a day to reconnect with family and friends has brought me closer to my family than I have been in years. There are still Sundays where I go home after church and get ready for the gruelling work week ahead of me, but more often I spend my whole Sunday from service to evening with my uncle and Nana, sharing not only a meal but also stories of the past week, and some much-needed laughs. I feel a much stronger familial presence in my life that has been sorely missing.

Confession of sin is a lot more than just saying "I'm sorry I did this." It is a very daunting prospect to confess your sins, but it can be done with someone you trust. I chose my best friend of over thirteen years. He himself is not a Christian but when I told him about the course I was taking, he was nothing but supportive. When I asked to confess my sins to him to make it part of my practice, he welcomed me with open arms and an open heart. Much to my amazement, he even asked me if he could confess to me. Having him not only be willing to listen but also to share not only eased a great burden I had been shouldering but made our friendship all the stronger. I am so grateful to have been able to participate in the Practicing the Way course!

# A LIFE REBUILT.

From entrepreneurial triumph to epic crash to spiritual awakening, Dean Halstead's story is one of bold ambition, painful reckoning, and profound renewal.



by Dean Halstead

A native Calgarian, Dean's entrepreneurial spirit sparked early. At the age of five, he strategically positioned his Kool-Aid stand on a busy corner to maximize traffic – selling so much that his mother made him buy the sugar himself. That early instinct for strategy and opportunity foreshadowed a career defined by ambition, innovation, and risk-taking.

As a young man, Dean founded a mattress company that disrupted an industry dominated by corporate titans. His drive later led him to helm Aircura Biotech, a pioneering venture dedicated to environmental adaptation and cutting-edge solutions.

For decades, Dean chased success with relentless intensity. His ventures flourished, his reputation soared, and financial achievements mounted.

Yet despite these victories, he felt a hollowness – success without purpose. Dean poured himself into both business and leisure, calling himself a cliché: “I lost my health, my wealth, and my family. I gave everything to the chase, and in the process, lost what mattered most.”

The unraveling came in waves: the collapse of a thirty-year marriage, devastating family losses,

and, ultimately, a massive heart attack that led to triple-bypass surgery.

“While I was post-surgery, yet unconscious, I had a moment,” Dean recalls. “Profound. I was in the presence of a greater being, standing at a

portal – heaven or hell. No angel spoke; instead, I condemned myself. I grieved my failures to act in life.”

When he finally opened his eyes, it was to the angelic face of his daughter, Heather. In that moment, he knew he had been given another chance – not by boast of love, but by the eyes of love.

## A Life Transformed

This transformative event marked a new awareness: a life rebuilt on humility, integrity, and faith. Dean embraced not just survival, but redemption – a renewed sense of purpose grounded in God's love.

Today, humbled and healthy, he has re-engaged in life and business with clarity and conviction. He sails whenever possible, pursuing his passion for the open water, and finds joy in living with balance rather than burnout.

Dean's career journey reflects a commitment to service as much as success. From his early days as a paramedic, to mattress maker and innovator, to his leadership as CEO of Aircura Biotech, he has continually reinvented himself.

But his most profound transformation has been spiritual. Dean has been awakened to the beauty of redemption, the power of grace, and the enduring truth that even in our darkest moments, light can break through.

*“I lost my health, my wealth, and my family. I gave everything to the chase, and in the process, lost what mattered most.”*



# SABBATICAL REFLECTIONS:

## A TIME TO REST, LISTEN, AND BE PRESENT.

This spring and summer, I had the immense privilege of stepping away from the day-to-day work of pastoral ministry to take a sabbatical – a time of rest, renewal, and rediscovery.

Looking back, I can say without hesitation: it was a gift. A gift from God, from our leadership, and from you, our entire church family.



by Lane Scruggs

If I had to describe the experience with just one metaphor, I might default to a sports image: I felt like a “healthy scratch” on a sports team. Still very much part of the game, still in the building, but watching from the stands instead of skating on the ice. That shift in position gave me a fresh perspective – especially as we visited over a dozen churches across Calgary and beyond. Each Sunday, instead of leading, planning, or preaching, I simply sat. I worshipped. I received. And, of course, dreamed about what we could learn and apply from these churches and church leaders in our own setting. And what a blessing that was.

There are some truly remarkable churches out there – full of vibrant worship, thoughtful teaching, and welcoming communities. It was inspiring and encouraging to see the broader Body of Christ in action. We visited churches from 30 in attendance to 25,000, across Western North America. But every Sunday away only deepened my appreciation for Oak Park. We missed being with you – your warmth, your desire to grow and be formed, our rich corporate worship together each Sunday, and your love for one another and for Jesus. It reaffirmed what we already knew: Oak Park is our home.

Another major highlight of my sabbatical was the chance to meet with a number of church leaders and pastors, both local and further afield. I came away from those conversations feeling challenged and encouraged. I heard God’s Spirit speak with clarity and power through their stories, struggles, and wisdom. I expect to be unpacking and processing these conversations for several years and the impact of these conversations will be carried with me into this next chapter of ministry.

But perhaps most meaningfully, this time allowed me to be fully present with my family in a way that's impossible to maintain amid the pace of pastoral life. Our trip – as you will hear from the kids and Chantelle – was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that was both more difficult and more rewarding than I could have predicted. But beyond the epic road trip, there were other differences from the usual routine. I drove the kids to swimming lessons. We played board and card games more often. Together we read some of John Muir's adventures and C.S. Lewis' Narnian world. I lingered longer over breakfast and bedtime routines. I had more unhurried conversations with Chantelle about ministry, kids, marriage, and dreams for future adventures. These ordinary moments were, in fact, sacred. A quiet, daily kind of ordinary grace – perhaps the easiest kind of grace to miss.

Now, as I return to the rhythms and responsibilities of church life, I do so with a full heart. I'm grateful for the time away, for all it offered and taught me. My resolve and conviction that sabbatical is a healthy practice for pastors and their churches are strengthened even more. But I'm also deeply grateful to be back. Back among a people I love, in a church I want to invest my life in, with renewed energy and a deeper sense of calling.

Thank you for the gift of sabbatical. It was, truly, a blessing.



NATIONAL PARKS

10000

MILES



MONTANA



WYOMING



COLORADO



UTAH



NEVADA



ARIZONA



CALIFORNIA



OREGON



WASHINGTON



ALBERTA



BC

MOUNTAINS

RAIN FOREST

OCEAN/COAST

GIANT TREES

CACTI

WATERFALLS

DEEP CANYONS

CRAZY SAND DUNES



## SABBATICAL REFLECTIONS:

A TIME TO REST, LISTEN, AND BE PRESENT.

### • HUDSON •

I really enjoyed having Dad home because we could play pickleball together, go on bike rides, and even get out of school early to go on a big road trip.

On that road trip my favourite memory was the waterslides in Phoenix, my favourite National Park was The Great Sand Dunes in Colorado, and my favourite meal was a seafood platter in San Francisco.

I became more grateful after touring Alcatraz and hearing how little those men had while in prison.



### • CADENCE •

Our road trip was really fun! My favourite National Park was Yellowstone because of the geysers and the variety of animals. I also enjoyed a boating trip we took with some family to Roche Harbour because

I got to see fireworks for the first time, kayak, paddleboard, and jump off the boat into the water. Being in an RV with my family for six weeks made our house feel so big once we got home and made me appreciate having power and showers regularly.



### • ELISE •

I liked having Dad home because we could play games and do more things together. My favourite National Park on the trip was Zion because of The Narrows – a hike where you walk between the cliffs through a river in your running shoes (because the rocks are slippery). In Arizona we went to the biggest church I've ever seen. My birthday was also one of my favourite days on the trip because at our campsite there was a huge pool and we got to play pickleball, go on a big slide, and throw our nachos in the fire to cook them.



## • ILA •

I liked the pretend spinning microwave in Canmore, going to the pool and playing frisbee golf. I liked visiting other churches, but I kept asking when we could come back to Oak Park. One church had a twisty slide and a play area, so that was fun!

I liked going tide pooling at Olympic National Park – I saw many different colours of starfish (even a purple one) and some things that try to sting you. I really liked eating a cheeseburger at In-N-Out Burger in the States, and fish and chips in Vancouver with Grandma and Grandpa. For one hike on our road trip, I didn't have any piggybacks or carries and climbed 350 stairs!



## • CHANTELE •

"Trips like this have a way of slowing down time," a wise friend told us after hearing about our road trip.

Although no part of those six weeks was 'slow,' we completely agree! It was such a gift to make so many memories together. For me, it was a time of letting go of many things I value highly (our home, church, the end of the school year for the kids, spring sports, our calendar, time with family and friends, reasonable bedtimes...) to embrace an extended time as a family exploring the diversity and magnificence of God's creation together.

The trip turned out to be as much about resilience building as anything else, and I loved seeing the ways in which our kids learned to encourage and look out for each other. We experienced an overwhelming amount of generosity from others and felt the power of your prayers.

Projects around the house, family activities like hiking – I didn't realize how many things had been neglected because of such a busy seven-plus years.

For me one of the biggest gifts was Lane being home more and less stressed. It's hard to describe how restful and freeing it was to have less required of us for that length of time. The sabbatical felt like a much-needed reset, and we are so grateful.



# NEW

# CHAPTERS

**Tabuk Refuge of Hope  
International (TROHI)**

has been a safe haven for more than five years. During that time, we have helped many young girls who have survived abuse and neglect.

Through God's grace these girls experienced the love of Christ and have been guided in healing and restoration.







*Rachel Austria  
and high school  
classmates  
in front of the  
new shelter  
of TROHI*

After years of prayer and faith, we are excited to share that we have moved into our new home. A beautiful two-story building nestled in a peaceful forest far from the noise of the city. This tranquil atmosphere has brought a fresh sense of healing, joy and hope to everyone in our care.



**by Vienna  
Moilliet Anggowow**

As we celebrate this new beginning, we also celebrate one of our girls, “Elise” who recently graduated high school and is attending university. She is the first one in her family to achieve this, her family and TROHI couldn’t be prouder. Elise is thriving in her new environment and excited about this new chapter of her life.

Another reason to celebrate is that several of the girls recently took the step of baptism! When many of them first arrived at TROHI they had little or no knowledge of the Bible. Today we are witnessing lives transformed as one by one they choose to follow Jesus., allowing his love to heal them and finding renewed hope in Jesus. Watching God move in their lives amazes us every day.

We want to express our gratitude to all who faithfully pray and support TROHI; your encouragement and generosity fuel the work we do and remind us we are not alone.

## **How can you partner with us?**

### **1 Prayer**

Pray for healing, growth, and transformation for each girl, and for wisdom and strength for the entire TROHI team.

### **2 Learn more**

Reach out to me at [ymoilliet@gmail.com](mailto:ymoilliet@gmail.com) for more information.

### **3 Support us financially**

Support TROHI through Oak Park’s General Fund. A percentage of your giving goes to TROHI and our mission partners.

### **4 Give to the Christmas boxes**

Every year TROHI partners with Canadian churches to send Christmas boxes to every girl. This is always a cherished part of the holiday season.

### **5 Give in kind**

Throughout the year, our Canadian team lovingly prepares care packages of Canadian treats for our missionaries, staff and girls. These bring joy and encouragement to everyone on the team.

### **6 Follow**

Stay connected through Facebook and Instagram or sign up for our newsletters on our website.

# NEW CHAPTERS

*Cheryl, Executive Director of TROHI (left) and Rachel, with some of the girls at the shelter*

*At the new location of TROHI. Admin building is under construction*



**by Rachel Austria**

In May of 2025, I, along with 12 of my old high school classmates, had the opportunity to visit Refuge of Hope International in Tabuk, Kalinga, Apayao. Our journey began at 5:30 AM, and we arrived at our destination at 8:30 PM. During those 15 hours on the road, we were praising the Lord because we were protected from many near-miss accidents along the way, including one flat tire from sharp, fallen rocks on the road. Fortunately we were in a safer place when it burst!

Upon our arrival, the girls from the shelter and the staff graciously welcomed us at the church, where they kindly provided us with dinner. The girls were occupied with the Vacation Bible School (VBS) that week, which somewhat limited our interactions.

The following day, we toured the new shelter, which was located approximately a 20-minute drive from the church where the girls were staying. The building was nearing completion, and preparations were underway for occupancy the following month. We were very pleased with the progress that had been made since my visit the previous year. Upon entering the premises, we

all felt a sense of the Lord's kindness towards His children. The atmosphere was peaceful, like a sanctuary where healing and restoration could be found for its residents. We noticed the girls' enthusiasm for their new home, and they were also looking forward to welcoming more members. The residence has the capacity to accommodate up to 40 girls, and there were 13 residing there at the time.

Following this experience, we have become more aware of the reality of child abuse, recognizing its existence even within cultures characterized by strong family bonds. We acknowledge the crucial need for these girls to receive love, care, and support to secure a hopeful future, particularly through their relationship with the Lord, who provides steadfast support even amidst the most difficult circumstances. Many of the girls have been recognized at school for their talents and possess the potential to become influential leaders within the church and their community. May the good Lord continue to bestow blessings upon them and all those who are generously supporting this project.





# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS.

As elders, we recently took on the task of redrafting our membership covenant. Our hope was to craft a document that captures the heart of our renewed mission, vision, and values.



by Mike O'Toole

Over the course of several months, we prayed for direction, searched the scriptures, reviewed membership covenants from sister churches, deliberated the purpose and value of the covenant, and sought feedback from other members in our congregation. It is an important document and worthy of the time and attention it required to draft.

## Why does membership matter?

Scripture employs a few metaphors to describe the importance of membership within the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, the church is described as the “body of Christ,” with individual believers being “members” of the body of Christ. This analogy emphasizes that each member has a unique role and function and is essential for the body’s health and well-being. Just as a hand or foot is useless when detached, a Christian is meant to be part of the body and contribute to its functioning. This metaphor highlights the interdependence and mutual responsibility of each member within the church. It is a call to participate in a vibrant, interdependent community where each member plays a vital role in God’s work.

Our membership covenant communicates what it means to be a member of the Oak Park Church of Christ (body). Who can be a member? What do we commit to as members of this body? What can

you expect from the rest of the body as one of the body members? We are reminded who we are, and what we are called to do. It is a call to action and a commitment to follow through. It affirms that we are not spiritual consumers, but contributors to the life and mission of the church. Membership is more than having your name signed on a piece of paper; being a member of the OPCC body shapes how we choose to live. It’s one way we move from attending to participating, from observing to investing, and from being served to serving. It defines what it means to belong.

I love being a member of Oak Park Church of Christ! And it is with delight that I serve the OPCC body as one of its Elders. The role requires a great deal of time, effort, and sacrifice... but I love it! My prayer is that each of us would reflect on the joy and responsibility of belonging to the OPCC body. It’s an invitation to commit, to grow, to serve, and to live out God’s transforming love together.

## Belong: Living Out God’s Transforming Love

This fall, join us for a 4-week journey through Romans 12 as we discover what it means to belong to God and to one another. We’ll explore how we worship together, grow together, give generously, and serve faithfully as part of God’s family. Whether you’re new to Oak Park Church of Christ or have been here for years, this series is an invitation to step deeper into community. If you’d like to learn more about becoming a member, join us for our Membership Info Night on Sunday, September 29.

More details at [oakpark.ca/membership](https://oakpark.ca/membership).



# WHY I SERVE.



by Paul Ustick

You can call me Janitor, Caretaker, Custodian, Toilet Cleaner, Garbage Man or Maintenance Man. But my official title is Facility Manager.

I am responsible for the everyday maintenance, repairs, security and ordering of supplies for the entire church, daycare and outside property. My duties include cleaning and setup for all Sunday services, special events and rentals for various groups.

My background consists of 30+ years in the Heating and Ventilation industry.

I hold Journeyman tickets as a Gasfitter and Sheet Metal Mechanic which I used as a Service Technician and Installer of furnaces, air conditioners and water heaters.

I began attending Oak Park in 1999 due to the persistent prodding of my daughter who attended the Youth Group here. I was baptised at Oak Park in 2001. A few years later I met Yvonne, and we were married here in 2009.

Over the years we have both served in numerous ministries. Yvonne was active in Women's Ministry, Drama, Prayer, Special Events, Missions (where we went on trips to Haiti and

Poland), and she served as Office Administrator for the church. I was active in leading the Men's Ministry, Prayer Group, Missions, Communion Setup, Prayer and Drama. I also served as an Elder.

I became interested in church operations while stepping in on occasion to help Richard Taylor, the church caretaker at that time, whom I learned a lot from and deeply respected.

I was hired as Facility Manager in July 2023, just in time to be in the midst of the recent church expansion and all the associated dust.

This role has evolved greatly from throwing out garbage and cleaning toilets to managing, overseeing and scheduling maintenance with church staff, ministries, rentals, special events and outside contractors. And yes, I still do clean toilets!

Which brings us to:  
Why Do I Serve?

One Word: *Faith.*

While I was brought up in the Catholic church, Oak Park Church of Christ has always been my home church. What I have witnessed in the people, fellow servants, leadership and passion of the pastors has only strengthened my faith that God



does provide, God does hear us, He loves us and will protect us always.

I may not hear his voice but when I was a Prayer Warrior back in the day, I was blessed to witness the amazing gifts of Prophecy, Discernment, Healing Wisdom and Visions with the brothers and sisters of our Intercessory Prayer Group. Together we stood in Prayer to protect and intercede for our church, our leaders and our congregation through weekly prayer, song, fasting and vigils. We witnessed the true power of the Holy Spirit at work.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31

I wish you all the best in your journey towards His Kingdom. Peace be with you.

