



THE PARK BENCH

The magazine of Oak Park Church of Christ | March 2026



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JOURNEY OF FAITH



My name is Amelia, and I was just recently baptized at Oak Park. I'd like to share with you how and why I decided to get baptized and follow Jesus for the rest of my life.

**By Amelia
Rushton
(Grade 8)**

I have always known Jesus and His love for me – I went to church one week after I was born, for the Christmas Eve service, and have been going to church ever since! I learned through Sunday School and my devotional books that God guides you through life using your “gut feeling” to tell you what is right or wrong. I learned that you should always listen to your gut (as long as it aligns with God’s goodness), like when it is telling you not to eat your cookie before dinner (otherwise, after you eat the cookie you’ll feel pretty bad about it because you knew you weren’t supposed to eat it).

A few years ago, I was diagnosed with dyslexia, and it was very hard for me to process the idea that I had a learning disability. It felt like I was made broken somehow. But through prayer and talking to God, I started to realize that I was not really made broken, this was just an obstacle I had to face. Dyslexia will always be a part of my life and will always make some parts of my life harder,

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY JESUS.

but I also know that there will be other, different obstacles in life too. If I trust in God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, then they will help make the obstacles easier for me to overcome because I know I will not be alone, and they will support, guide and encourage me to make the right decisions.

Sometime later, I started thinking about baptism... and then my gut feeling started to tell me to go for it. So, I talked to my family about it, and then eventually I reached out to Pastor Lane and Pastor Kate, who helped me get “dunked” into the holy water! As time went on, hard stuff still happened. I know that life doesn’t get magically better just because I have Jesus in my life, but He guides me through my ups and downs and gives me strength. He has always been there for me, even when bad stuff happens, standing in my corner, supporting me and helping me get back up.

HEART FOR HOME.



By Julie Kerr

For many years, Oak Park has quietly lived out its calling to be the heart and home of the Oak Park neighbourhood – through food shared, students tutored, needs met, and relationships built. In recent years, however, it has become clear that the scope and depth of this work is growing beyond what a traditional church structure can easily hold.

Out of prayerful discernment, careful planning, and a desire to steward these ministries well, Oak Park has begun the process of restoring and repurposing a charitable organization with deep roots in our story: *Heart for Home*.

Heart for Home was a mission project begun in 2010 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, by Ricot and Mandy Leon and supported by our church. The purpose of *Heart for Home Haiti* was to support young people transitioning to adulthood from schools and orphanages by offering them the opportunity to learn practical skills that would enable them to earn a living while contributing in meaningful ways to their community, all within a loving and supportive Christian context. Churches were built and gardens and orchards were established, along with workshops that taught skills such as sewing, carpentry and construction. The Gospel was shared, church communities grew, pastors and leaders were trained, food was harvested and shared with neighbours, and a hub of vitality, wellbeing and resilience was established that continues to serve the community in Port-au-Prince through times of natural disaster and political unrest.

In 2021, *Heart for Home Haiti* and the Leons joined *Lifeline Christian Mission Canada*, and it continues its work under the *Lifeline* umbrella. The legacy of Ricot and Mandy's faithfulness to God's call is alive and well! When *Heart for Home Haiti* joined *Lifeline*, its Canada Charities number was wisely kept at Oak Park and stewarded as inactive, with the prayerful hope that we could repurpose it for our growing community outreach ministries in Calgary.

Michael and Julie Kerr, under the direction of Pastor Lane and the OPCC Board and Elders are now in the process of seeking permission from Charities Canada and Alberta Societies to rename the charity as *Heart for Home Calgary*. It will establish a new charitable organization co-located and co-led with OPCC. Its mission will support OPCC's strategic goal of being the heart and home of our local community. The plan is to move all our outward-facing community services, such as Helping Hands, Tutoring, and Benevolence, to *Heart for Home Calgary*. This will allow us to access and leverage funding typically not available to churches to expand programs and staffing to more effectively share God's transforming love by meeting more neighbours at their point of need.

As *Heart for Home Calgary* continues to emerge, we recognize that this work cannot – and should not – belong to a few individuals alone; it will require the prayer, wisdom, generosity, and participation of our whole church family as details become clear and the work unfolds. This is an invitation to remain attentive to God's leading and courageous in our response, trusting Him as we seek to be more fully the heart and home of the Oak Park neighbourhood. We are grateful for the legacy we have inherited, and hopeful for what God may yet do among and through us.

OAK PARK CHURCH OF CHRIST

2025 IN REVIEW

God has done some incredible things over the last year! We've been blessed to see lives changed, connections built, and our community served.

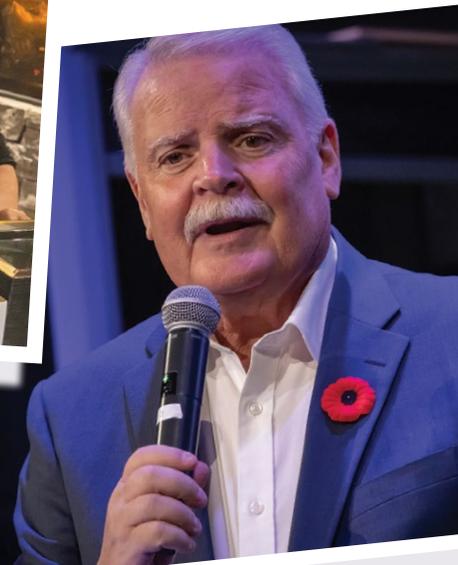
The psalmist makes a commitment to himself when he says *"I will remember the deeds of the Lord"* (Psalm 77:11). Remembering is the intentional act of looking back – the process of being reminded of how God has worked in the past so we can anticipate what He'll do in the future.

These photos help us remember the deeds of the Lord. They give a glimpse at the amazing ways God has been present in our church family in 2025. While they highlight programs, events, celebrations, and services, they are much more; they are visual reminders of how God has been working in our community. Whether it has been through discipling kids, celebrating baptisms, or feeding our neighbours, God has been moving in the hearts and minds of those in the Oak Park family.

80TH ANNIVERSARY

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On November 1st, Oak Park celebrated its 80th Anniversary in an evening of recollections, anecdotes and singing, hosted by Jonathan Chapman and John Nicholson.





SERMON SERIES

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When Plans Change:
Acts 25-28

Gospel of Mark

Living with Hope: 1 Peter

The Good Life:

A Study of the Beatitudes

Belong

Genesis: Abraham's Story

The Waiting Room



BABY DEDICATION

.....

Ben and Chantal Joubert brought their daughter Adélie before the Oak Park congregation to be dedicated to God.

BAPTISMS

.....

Following the command in Acts 2:38, ten members of our Oak Park family were baptized in 2025.

- Grayson Hiebert
- Knute Vallevand
- Jewlyn Vallevand
- Ethan Innes
- Megan Innes
- Amelia Jones
- Maria Molnar
- Brie Lewis
- Amelia Rushton
- Olivia Louie



AMELIA JONES



MARIA MOLNAR



OLIVIA LOUIE (LEFT)



WEDDINGS

.....

Amanda & Jason Tubman
March 29

Shelley & Jason Landry
August 16

**DONUT AND
NAME-TAG
SUNDAYS**

.....

Encouraging a growing
culture of welcome,
and creating space for
meaningful connection.



ATTENDANCE

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Average weekly
attendance was 255,
up from 215 in 2024.





HELPING HANDS

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Every Thursday between 125 to 130 families – approximately 457 people – receive food and clothing through Helping Hands. An estimated seven to eight thousand dollars' worth of food and clothing is given away each week.

STAMPEDE BREAKFAST

.....

Held on Saturday, July 5th. Over 60 volunteers served approximately 1,050 people. Over 2,100 pancakes were flipped, and 2,100 sizzling sausages served.





by Colette Ladan
and Jay Bowyer

MISSIONS FOCUS: GRACELAND MINISTRIES

FROM KRAKÓW WITH LOVE.

“This is not a normal English school. People really care about me. When I am here, I feel so relaxed and happy. I never thought I would talk about Jesus in English class and enjoy it!”

.....
A refugee woman who is a new student trying to improve both her English and Polish skills to be more competent as she looks for work.

“My wish is to come back to Graceland with my whole family.”

.....
A young woman who joined Graceland in 2007 as a teenager, stayed until university, then came back but left again six years ago to start a family.

“Thank you so much for hosting these Men’s Breakfasts and inviting me back to Graceland even though I haven’t attended since I began university five years ago.”

.....
A young man whose entire family have been students at Graceland for a decade.

“I have been attending Graceland for six years because this is the best place to have such open conversations about Jesus.”

.....
A retired man who says Graceland needs to have many locations around Kraków to help other people find a place to really open-up and discuss faith.



These testimonials are not solicited, paid for, or vain boasts. These are things our students have shared with us, our discussion partners and our guests since the New Year began.

Graceland is a beacon of light, hope and truth in a time of darkness and uncertainty. It's a place for great coffee and a few laughs. It's a place where THE WAY, THE TRUTH and THE LIFE are proclaimed boldly and discussed openly. Graceland is a place to belong!

While some of our adult classes are experiencing attrition, our university and young adult groups are growing and many of those who have moved to other cities or countries keep connected through

University group speed-friending with recent guests



**Men's Breakfast
January 31**



MISSIONS FOCUS: GRACELAND MINISTRIES



Monday night women's group



**A group of students receive a little gift from Graceland
(Christmas continues until February 2 in Poland!)**

video chats. There has been a happy resurgence of interest in discussing matters of faith and values among our university students.

Oak Park has partnered with Graceland for a very long time by sending teams, strong financial support and faithful prayer. Your hearts should be filled with joy at all the Lord has done during these almost 20 years in Kraków (28 in Poland); you have helped in the ministry of transformation. We want you to know how much we value your partnership. We would love to host another team sometime in the coming year – come and personally experience the abiding joy of sitting with people who are drinking in the Living Water you help supply to these dear students, many of whom didn't even realize they were thirsty.

For more information on short-term trips, being an online discussion partner, or answering your questions, contact: jay@gracelandcentrum.com.

With our deepest gratitude, Colette and Jay

BLANKETS FOR THE HOMELESS.

I started throwing around the idea of doing a blanket building drive around Christmas of 2024. I didn't really think I was the right person to do it, nor that I was capable, but it was something that sat heavy on my heart regardless.



By Morgan Rochon

My husband, Jason, and I have been working on developing the five Rs of a Rockin' Rochon Christmas for our kids. One of those Rs is "Return," arguably one of the most important. It's incumbent upon us to teach our kids to give back. As the body of Christ, we have a duty as a church and community to care for those who need it most.

This past Christmas we really wanted to make sure we did something with our kids to teach them to give back. I am a seamstress and I have a custom bridal and alterations business, and it has always been important to me that I use my business to bless others. This, combined with our Rockin' Rochon Christmas, gave birth to the Blanket Drive. I was still feeling troubled, as I had no idea where to begin. I prayed about it, and God opened doors. This wouldn't have been possible if not for God. I took a chance and reached out to a gentleman through Instagram who does a lot of work with the homeless. When I explained my idea, he got so excited – that fired me up! Suddenly, it didn't feel so impossible. God really helped build the connections that I needed, and I was met with so much enthusiasm from everyone who helped me organize this, including my husband, Jason, my parents, Lorne and Lesley (huge shoutout to my dad who made the really tasty chili), and Pastor Alvin.

I really wanted to create an event that was open to people of all ages, so that even if the kids were



too young to use scissors or tie knots, at least they were there, involved in the process of giving back. I was very worried that we wouldn't have enough volunteers to get it done, but of course, God provided. We gathered at Oak Park on Saturday, November 29th; we had more volunteers than I had expected, but it turned out to be the perfect amount, of course. It was a genuinely lovely day of community, crafting, soup and chili. We were given so many generous donations of socks, hats, and gloves as well, to hand out with the blankets. I am beyond grateful to God, first and foremost, for opening the doors to this event, and to all the incredible volunteers who made this whole event possible. Hopefully, this will be an annual thing, and we'll see some new faces next year!

FEBRUARY 22, 2026

About 20 of us gathered on a chilly Sunday afternoon near the Drop-In Centre. We set up tables to hand out food, drinks, clothing, blankets, and hand and foot warmers. It was sad to see how many people arrived as soon as we got there, and how many continued to show up; the need for help in this city is very high. But it was also so lovely to see the hope and joy such simple acts of service were able to bring to some of these people. It was a time of community, and serving these children of God. We just gave them what they asked for, listened to what they had to say, and prayed when we could. It was an absolute privilege to get to be the hands and feet of God that day.

WHY I SERVE AS A JUNIOR KIDS' PARK HELPER.

Being a Junior Helper in Kids' Park at Oak Park Church of Christ is something that means a lot to me. My role is to help look after younger kids by making sure they are safe, helping them feel included, and being someone they can trust. I play games and sing worship songs with them, help them with crafts, try to keep them focused during the lesson, help them with their memory verse, and whatever else is needed. Some days it's loud and busy,



and other days it's quieter and more emotional, but every day matters. To me, it's about being there for the kids and helping them feel comfortable at church and cared for.

A big reason I wanted to serve in this role comes from my experiences at Pine Lake Christian Camp. This is where I first really felt what a strong Christian community is like. The counsellors made such a huge impact on me – they were kind, patient, and always made sure everyone felt included. I remember how safe and supported they made me feel, and that stayed with me... it made me want to be that person for someone else one day.

So, when I got the chance to help in Kids' Park, it felt like the right place for me. Over time, I have realized how important this role truly is. The way the Jr. Helpers act can affect how kids feel about church, about themselves, and even about their faith. Something as small as including a kid in a game or being patient when they're upset can completely change their experience.

My faith is the reason I keep serving. Jesus said, "Let the little



**By Hailey Skow
(Grade 12)**

children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). This verse reminds me that children are incredibly important to God. Serving them isn't a small or unimportant job, it's a responsibility. Kids are learning what love, kindness, and faith look like by watching the people around them, and I want to be a positive example.

Being a Jr. Helper in Kids' Park has helped me grow so much. It has taught me patience, responsibility, and how to care for others even when it's not easy. Both Pine Lake Christian Camp and Oak Park Church of Christ have shown me that faith isn't just something you talk about, it's something you live out. Being able to serve in this way is something I'm really grateful for, and it's an experience that continues to shape who I am.