



# THE PARK BENCH

The magazine of Oak Park Church of Christ | September 2024

**HELPING HANDS**  
PAGE 10



# WHY I SERVE: SOUND & MEDIA.



by **Jason Rochon**

One of my favourite parts about serving on the sound team is the extended periods of worship! I serve as an audio and lighting volunteer. The role is much more involved than turning a few knobs – it's challenging and fun because there's always

something that could make the sound quality that much better.

At a previous church I learned the trade from a pro who had worked on big live concerts, small bar gigs, and even TV shows. I've done audio in a church setting for about nine years, and at one point I thought I might make a career out of being a sound guy. A friend of Oak Park owns an audio company called Sapphire Sound and they have provided many training sessions for the Oak Park team.

While we may not think of the sound board as an instrument, there is a lot of creativity and art form in being a sound guy (or gal). If you love worship and want to make an impact in a creative way, sound is an awesome place to serve.

On Sunday morning, we are some of the first volunteers to arrive. It's very cool being able to see the church come alive with incredible people. Talking to people as they arrive at church is a wonderful gift. Why I serve has a lot to do with connecting with people, giving of my talents, learning new things, and most importantly, lifting up my praise to God above through song and service! What a wonderful God we serve. If you're interested or curious about serving on the sound team, I'd be happy to connect. Pastor Shelley would also love to hear from you: [worship@oakpark.ca](mailto:worship@oakpark.ca)



by **Richard Hiebert**

Elena and I have been attending Oak Park for nearly 12 years now and have had the privilege to watch our boys grow up as a part of this amazing church family. I grew up attending a small farm church in Three Hills, which helped me gain an understanding of

how a community is made up of many people filling a number of different roles. My history of volunteering began at that church when I was a teenager running the sound booth. Their system was so ancient that it was really just four turn dials and a tape deck for recording the sermon. I'm not exactly sure what led me into that role, but it most likely had to do with me being one of only six teens in the church.

Elena and I moved to Calgary after we got married. It took us a while to settle down and raise our boys to semi-independence, which then gave me the freedom to step out and volunteer at Oak Park. It was difficult to wait so long, as I find it hard to attend a church without being involved on the tech side of things. About three months into working on the computer, Doris tracked me down and asked if I would be willing to help run the sound for the next Seniors' Lunch. I had no idea what I was getting into when I said yes, but I sure have enjoyed being a part of those Monday productions! Over the years, Oak Park has become our home, and I feel that being part of a tech department that runs smoothly is one way I can help other people to also find their home in this church.

Every Sunday in the church I grew up in, I walked past the verse "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." As a dad, I want to live this out by raising my boys to be men of good character and it is my hope that by example, they will learn to be men who are generous with their time and an active part of their church community. Personally, I love music, and I find my heart and soul are refreshed every week that I volunteer from being in both the practice sessions and the main service.

At the end of the day, it comes down to the fact that we love our church family, and the joy of being part of this community makes it easy for me to serve.

# TRANSFORMED THROUGH SERVING.

Serving is how God transformed my life.

Growing up, I thought my sole purpose in life was to be society's idea of a success: go to university, start a career, start a family – that was the plan. Dropping out of university is what happened instead. The plan failed. The very first step to success fell apart and I fell apart with it.

I'd been in church all my life, but no one had told me that my purpose could be about something more than achieving these milestones. I didn't know that my purpose could be connected to

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following Jesus, and who God created me to be. All I knew was that I had no plan, and I was in trouble.

God used that difficult season, one of failure and disillusionment, to transform me.

I remember walking up to the church during that time, with all the unknowns and the

disappointment evidenced by how hard it was to keep from bursting into tears. I paused as I put my hand on the door: I did not feel like serving; I didn't even think I had anything to offer, but I was determined to take a step of faith. I surrendered the weight I was feeling and pushed open the door to serve.

Something about that weekly practice of trusting God with my own needs in order to serve others helped me to trust him all the other days of the week too. I dug into his word and engaged in community. I didn't have a new plan yet, but I did have a direction and I'd certainly found purpose.



**By Kate Petry**  
Kids' Park Pastor

I help people identify steps of faith and encourage them to take them.

Celebrate a preschooler's natural ability to include others.

Encourage a 6-year-old to use her voice in prayer.

Empower a teenager to step out of his comfort zone.

Partner with a dad to inspire a whole room full of kids.

Help someone discover and grow their own gifts.

I make space for those who, like me, need a safe place to be reminded of God's faithfulness, purpose, and love. These are the things we get to do on the Kids' Park team. Together as a team, we have all sorts of different perspectives and personalities and gifts. We inspire each other and demonstrate grace with each other. Whether it's a great day or a rough day, we show up trusting God to work through our time, presence, and abilities to love on our kids.

And the kids! The kids will ask you questions that leave you stronger in your relationship with God. They will laugh, sing, play, and dance with you. You might join the team to serve them, but I think you'll find that witnessing and encouraging their child-like faith will help to restore and build up your own.

If you've been sitting on the sidelines waiting for the right time to serve, don't hold back any longer. Reach out. You've got purpose here at Oak Park and we can't wait to see you walk in it.

*Interested in serving with Kids' Park? Please e-mail Pastor Kate: [kidspark@oakpark.ca](mailto:kidspark@oakpark.ca)*

# OAK PARK YOUTH GROUP.

by Toby Cheung

My name is Toby and I was born and raised in Hong Kong. My family and I moved to Calgary in July of 2023. We wanted to learn more about Canadian culture, so we decided it would be nice to join a local church. God led us to Oak Park in late July.



When we started attending Sunday services at Oak Park, we immediately fell in love with the church because the people were so nice and caring! One day, my dad asked me if I wanted to join the youth group. I was hesitant, because I was shy about new cultures, and I was not sure if I wanted to be in a big group. But with my dad's encouragement, I gave it a try. It turned out so much better than I ever thought it would. I felt respected and everyone was super friendly. It was a nice small size, and the leaders were welcoming and full of energy. The things I was worried about didn't happen. I really enjoyed the gathering and praised God!

After that time, I decided to join the youth group every Friday night. We do fun things every week like making crafts, playing games (jackpot, sardines, and more), and the most important thing is that we spend time studying the Bible and learning how to communicate with God. We discuss and summarize verses from the Bible, and we also pray for each other. The main place we have youth group is at the church, but occasionally we go to other places like Fish Creek, Laser Tag, or to Bow Valley Christian Church's youth worship night.

One Friday they were serving ice cream with brownies, but unfortunately, I wasn't feeling well.

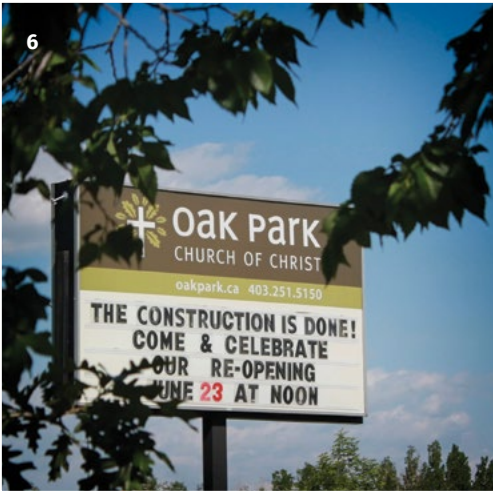
Since I couldn't eat the snack, I went to the youth room and did some crafts, then I wandered upstairs to one of the classrooms to play the piano. After a while, I heard people calling my name, then someone came into the room I was in and yelled, "I found her!" I was quickly surrounded by the whole group. I was confused and had no idea what was going on, so I followed the others downstairs. People came up to me and asked me if I was okay and where I was; they said they were very worried about me. I finally realized that they had all been searching for me! At that point I could feel how much they cared about me, and many other times since. Not only do we have fun together, but they support me all the time, share their joy with me, and pray for me and my family.

I look forward to every Friday and thank God for blessing me with such amazing friends. I'm so thankful that I am part of Oak Park's youth group, where I can make friends, learn more about God, and learn how to follow Jesus in my life!



If you're in  
Grade 7-12 and would  
like to join in the fun,  
contact Pastor Ben:  
[youth@oakpark.ca](mailto:youth@oakpark.ca)







# OPEN HOUSE CELEBRATION

J U N E 2 3 · 2 0 2 4

On June 23, 2024, we celebrated the completion of our expansion and renovation project with an open house. We were honoured to host several special guests, including Provincial MLA Tanya Fir (Minister of Arts, Culture and the Status of Women), former area MLA Whitney Issik, and City Councillor Kourtney Penner. Many church members (past and present), and community partners also joined us, creating a vibrant afternoon of fellowship and connection. Kenzie and Laura Rushton highlighted how the new and improved spaces benefit the Community Tutoring program, while Julie Kearns from SW55+ Connect spoke about the positive impact on seniors in our community. We took the opportunity to publicly thank the key individuals who made this project a reality. This photo spread captures the joy of the event and the transformation over the past year and a half.



# MISSIONS FOCUS: POWER TO CHANGE

We are in full swing for our September launch at both the University of Calgary and Mount Royal University. The buzz and excitement of a new year at university, coupled with the eagerness of new first-year students brings a sense of exhilaration for what lies ahead.



*by Ben and  
Chantal Joubert*

Students are out and about, ready to try new things, stretching their new-found freedom by exploring all that a university campus has to offer.

Chantal and I, along with many other students and campus staff already involved in Power to Change, are reaching out to these excited students to invite them to explore what life with Jesus could look like. We are surveying students to gauge their interest in spiritual conversations or being involved with a Christian community on campus. We are putting up posters and setting up tables during clubs week to capitalize on the students' willingness to try something new and get involved in something

beyond their studies. University work definitely kicks off strong in September!

This first month of the Fall semester is a crucial time to invite students, as it is when they are most likely to get connected. On campuses across Canada, from Vancouver to Halifax, students are invited to join a community that is invested in helping students answer some of life's big questions like: "Who am I?" "Where do I belong?" "Do I matter?" Power to Change – Students (P2C) firmly believes the answers to these questions find their source in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Students are lonelier than ever and increasingly finding themselves without a foundation in life. Through Bible studies, prayer, outreach, mentorship, and social events, P2C seeks to equip students to know who they are in Jesus Christ. We strive for each student to experience the belonging that is found in being part of the family of Jesus, and to fully know they have been called to a purpose in Him.





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One way we ride the momentum of September's energy, excitement, and

willingness to explore is to invite students to attend Summit, our annual Fall Retreat, where P2C groups across four major universities in Alberta and Saskatchewan come together for a weekend away to grow in their faith and in community. This event is a great time of bonding and friendship, as well as a place where many catch for the first time P2C's vision for being on mission together across our respective campuses.

Almost a decade ago, Summit greatly impacted both of our lives. It was where I (Ben) first felt called to pursue ministry and to study theology, and where Chantal first decided to participate in a P2C missions trip. Today, we are part of the team working hard to make this event a success.

## HOW CAN WE AT OAK PARK HELP?

One of the barriers which often keeps students from coming to Summit is the cost. We subsidize as much as possible for first-year students, and try to incentivize upper-years with sponsorships to keep them coming every year.

**Our invitation:** Would you consider sponsoring a student to come to Summit? 74% of students who connect with a Christian campus community do so in the first month of university. Summit is an excellent way for students to get more connected with P2C, but it is an expensive retreat for students to attend. Would you consider sponsoring a 1st year student to attend Summit by donating \$100 to our Calgary team? Donations can be made through this link:

<https://p2c.sh/calgary-team>.

**Please pray for this ministry!** Pray for students as they return or experience campus for the first time – that they would take advantage of Christian campus groups who are willing and able to help them grow in their faith. Pray that they would thrive in knowing Jesus more as they grow at university.

**Partner with us!** Our work is only possible through the ongoing support of our partners who cover this ministry in prayer and who respond to God's leading in offering financial support. We keep an open invitation to meet and share about this ministry, so we'd love to connect with you if you are interested in getting involved in this exciting ministry of bringing the gospel to students here in Calgary.





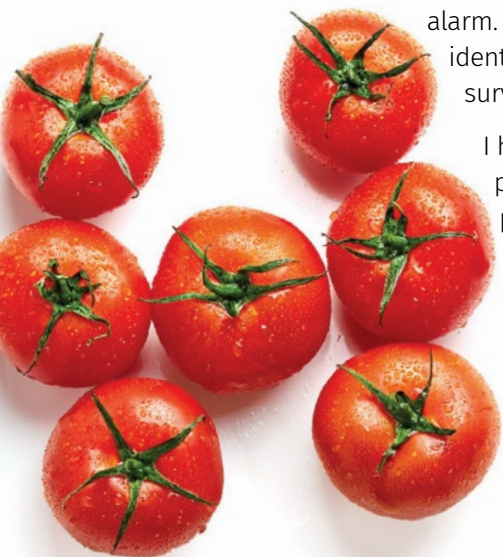
**Helping Hands** offers free food and household items to those in need every Thursday morning at the church. What sets this program apart is its commitment to fostering a sense of community that goes beyond the immediate needs of people. The following was written by one of our regular guests at the program.

“When my kids and I went through an unexpected and sudden turn of events, the impact left us totally broken. What I primarily lost was the strength to just hang on to my very basic breath of life itself, because fear crippled me to the core. I had no ability to pick up the pieces. I saw a premonition of threat everywhere, even in the officials who relieved us from our deadly situation; my whole physical being was in a state of constant alarm. At that moment, I couldn’t even identify what the kids and I needed to survive – how to even face the next day.

I heard about the *Helping Hands* program through a friend. This program does a very sensitive, ER type of service for the community. We came and were offered clothes with no questions asked and with no judgments made. The way the

volunteers communicated with us and identified what our survival needs were was phenomenal. They helped us get emergency food, bedding and hygiene products. This first step brought us light and strength to figure out the next step. I was very distrustful to grab on to the light, but the volunteers helped me put one foot in front of the other with an assurance that I am not left alone to walk in the dark – they have walked with my kids and I by taking the time to listen to us, and to support us with tenderness. I have received smiles, words of gentleness, and guidance to develop a structure to keep the kids safe and teach them to trust. We have received surprises of household items which I never imagined we would have. The *Helping Hands* team woke up our self-esteem and have helped it to grow and have made my kids aware of the value of life. The steady rhythm of service offered week after week changed something inside of me and my family. There is a harmony that’s been wonderfully coordinated within my thoughts, emotions, words and actions.

Please cheer for all the volunteers of *Helping Hands* with high magnitude – they selflessly serve in tangible and intangible ways which I still can’t fathom. I need an infinite number of words to express my gratitude for this program. I’m still on the mend, but at least I know that we are not totally plunged in the dark, and I don’t have to close my eyes and be afraid of the light.”





**Helping  
Hands**



# GROWTH GROUPS.

“I’d really like to skip Growth Group tonight.” This thought often comes to mind around 5:00pm on Fridays as my family gets ready for our weekly Growth Group.

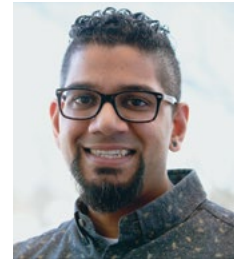
But every week, as we head home afterward, I tell my wife, “That was great; I love our group.” What changes my mind? The answer is simple: the people. Whether we’re discussing the scriptures or sharing personal challenges, it’s the interaction with the group members that I value the most. The people in my group are a blessing.

I’ve been part of various church groups in the past – some were wonderful, others were

not. But I’ve come to understand that my experiences, whether positive or negative, often reflect my own heart more than the people in the group. In Genesis 2:18, God says, “It is not good for the humans to be alone.” Loneliness was the first problem in God’s perfect world. Today, just as in the Genesis story, our hearts

naturally lean towards isolation. We often choose solitude over community because, if we’re honest, it feels easier. It is this inclination towards isolation and disconnecting from others that makes 5:00pm on Fridays challenging for me. It’s simpler to stay home and watch a show than to engage in conversations about other people’s days and faith. However, being part of a Growth Group, especially over the past year, has shown me how much my faith is shaped through community. This growth isn’t dramatic or obvious, but it happens in the simple, ordinary practice of meeting together. Each week, our group starts by catching up over snacks before spending time discussing the upcoming Sunday’s scripture and then praying for each other and our community. This regular routine encourages me to think about God and others in practical ways. To grow in my relationship with Jesus, I need to grow in my relationships with others – they go hand in hand.

Being in a group is undoubtedly challenging. Growth Groups require commitment, vulnerability, and an openness



by Alvin Ram

to discovering God in new and powerful ways. You might not become best friends with everyone in your group, but the main goal is to deepen your relationship with Jesus. And what better way to do that than by building relationships with others?

If you’re already in a group, challenge yourself to engage more fully this year. If you’re not in a group, don’t miss out on the opportunity to grow with God and others this year – step out of your comfort zone and become part of a Growth Group.

As we start a new year, I hope you’ll join me and many others at Oak Park in learning what it means to “live out God’s transforming love” with others.

Questions about Growth Groups? Connect with Pastor Alvin: [groups@oakpark.ca](mailto:groups@oakpark.ca)

