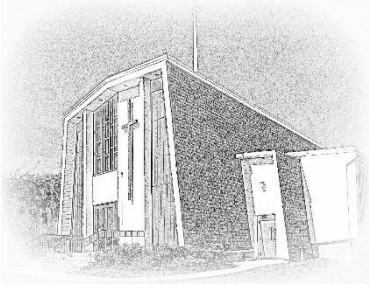


HIGHWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

December 2023 – January 2024

The Newsletter of Highwood Lutheran Church



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1340591 PW: highwood

Zoom by Telephone

Dial 1-587-328-1099

Meeting ID: 411 134 0591 #

Passcode: 592794 #

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

The Gift of Christmas

Christmas can be difficult for many, especially those struggling with personal issues, loneliness, or grief. You may feel like you have nothing to celebrate or that you don't deserve to be happy. You may even wonder why the celebration is in a world where God allows suffering. Some voices question if He even cares about anything. In such a context, one may easily miss hearing the message of hope and love.

Take a moment to appreciate what a gift is. In a culture of economic exchange, many struggle to understand that a gift is a voluntary transfer made without consideration. *Indeed*, a gift is given freely and unconditionally without any expectation of reciprocity. It is an expression of love, grace, and generosity. It transcends economic transactions, for debts and obligations do not bind it.

Just as God's grace is freely given to us, so should our gifts to one another reflect our love and compassion. For Christians, Christmas is much more than a commercial holiday or a time to exchange material goods. The season is when we remember and cherish the belief that God, in His boundless love, bestowed upon us the gift of His Son. This act of divine generosity teaches us a valuable lesson about the nature of blessings as we celebrate God's greatest gift: God's grace.

Grace, too, is a word that we often hear in church, but we may not fully understand what it means. Grace is God's unmerited favour, undeserved kindness toward us, and unconditional love. Grace is God's way of saying, "I love you, no matter what. I forgive you, no matter what. I accept you, no matter what." As a gift, grace is not something we can earn, buy, or trade. It is not something that we can lose, forfeit, or repay. It is not something that we can manipulate, bargain, or demand. Grace is a gift, pure and simple. A gift that God gives us freely and generously, without any expectations or strings attached.

Martin Luther was passionate about the grace of God. He realised that grace is the core of the Christian faith and the basis of our salvation. He wrote, "Grace is given to heal the spiritually sick, not to decorate spiritual heroes." Luther understood that we are all sinners who need God's grace. We cannot save ourselves by our own efforts or by following rules and rituals. We cannot impress God by our good deeds or religious knowledge. We cannot make ourselves worthy of God's love or His presence in our lives—the only way we can be saved is by means of God's grace. *Indeed*, Christ is the ultimate expression of God's grace. He is the reason why we celebrate Christmas. He is the gift God gives us out of His love for us.

Our appreciation elevates the importance of retelling the story and how it is that we have the creeds to remind us that Christ came into this world as a baby, born in a humble stable, to show us that God is with us and for us. He lived among us as a man, teaching and healing us to show that God knows and cares for us. He died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead to show us that God loves us and saves us.

Continued of Page 2

Continued from Page 1

As a gift from God, this is the proleptic gift that keeps giving. Christ presents us with forgiveness for our past, peace for our present, and hope for our future. He gives us joy for our sorrow, strength for our weakness, and comfort for our pain through new and eternal life with Him.

I hope the spirit will fill you with the gift of faith this season as you encounter God's gift of grace.

May that same spirit open your heart to Christ and let Him fill you with His love and presence so that you will experience Christmas's profound meaning and joy. We are remembering Jesus as Emanuel, God with us, and we are not alone or forgotten. Indeed, we are loved by God more than we can imagine.

May God bless you and keep you this Christmas and always.

See you at worship.

Pastor Mike

The Word Became Flesh

"The Word is born this very night:
Hail, Mary, full of grace!
A hanging lantern sheds its light
On Joseph's anxious face.

The Word must come in human form,
In God's redemptive plan.
A Babe takes every heart by storm,
But who will heed the Man?

The Word is born this very night,
And humble is the place;
The world is dark, but hope is bright,
And sinners look for grace.

The Word has come to end the war
Which Adam first began.
O bless the Babe who sleeps on straw.
And listen to the Man!"

- Fred Pratt Green

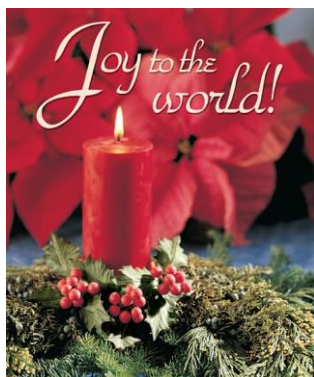
ADVENT CAROL SERVICE



**Sunday, December 3, 2023
7:00 PM**

Refreshments and social time to follow the service.

CHRISTMAS AT HIGHWOOD



Sunday, December 24, 2023

10:30 AM – Fourth Sunday in Advent

4:00 PM – Christmas Eve Service

Monday, December 25, 2023

10:30 AM – Nativity of Our Lord



**Ten Months ended
October 31, 2023
Financial Summary**

October current offerings were \$11,230 and church rental receipts were \$2,435. Synod benevolence receipts were \$60 and non-budget benevolence receipt consisted of \$165 for the Calgary Foodbank, \$200 for Lutheran Campus Ministries and \$270 for CLWR. Total October 2023 offerings and church rentals of \$13,665 was \$690 greater than last year.

October expenses of \$13,165 was \$1,306 under budget.

Highwood had a surplus of \$500 for October 2023 compared to a shortfall of \$727 last year. Year to date, Highwood has a shortfall of \$2,383 compared to a shortfall of \$16,132 last year. Church receipts for 2023 are \$12,372 greater than last year (\$294 higher on Offerings and \$12,077 higher on church rentals) and church expenses are \$1,377 lower than last year.

Capital Fund – \$90 was donated to the Highwood Ladies group (current balance - \$1,378) and \$140 to the Building Fund. The balance in the capital account at the end of October was \$47,141.

Memorial Fund – No changes. The balance at the end of October was \$10,375.

Bishop's Message for Month

The message can be found online by clicking [here](#)

OUR HIGHWOOD FAMILY

MEET THE CONTEH FAMILY



Here is a little insight about my family background. I guess and believe that most of you know that we came from Africa and to be specific Sierra Leone, Freetown. We were Born and raised in Freetown the capital city.

I was born in a Muslim dominated family where 70% of my family are Muslim and 30% Christian, but that has changed to 50% either way. My late dad was a Tribal Head Chief and a Muslim, and my stepmother was a Christian. I mentioned my stepmother because I was told that my biological mother passed away when I was a little baby.

My wife, Sukainatu Conteh, has a similar story because she, too, lost her mother when she was still a little baby and was brought up by her father. We have three children, two girls and one boy. Medinatu and Abdulrhaman are here in Calgary while Ramatu is still in Freetown pursuing her degree at the University of Sierra Leone.

I attended the West African Methodist Collegiate school, and my wife attended the Vine Memorial School for Girls. At the time of my high school days, I was an active member of my school Drama club, a soccer player for my school team and a journalist for my school magazine. I was voted three years in a row as the best actor for my school Drama Club and was given the opportunity to represent the entire school to have an interview with the then president of Sierra Leone, the late Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh at his presidential lodge.

After finishing high school, I attended the Catering Institute where I graduated with a diploma, and because of knee injury I had to stop playing soccer and focus on the food industry. I met my wife in 1991 at a popular restaurant at that time call Paddy's along the Lumley Beach working as a kitchen clerk. We had plans to get married in 2002, everything for the wedding was ready when one night my house burned down completely. Thanks to my neighbors who gave me shelter and clothes.

During the war in Sierra Leone things became more difficult for the family. I lost so many friends and family members. My wife's sister at that time fled to Gambia, where she then had the opportunity to move to Canada, first Halifax and then Calgary. With the help of

her and Walter Anderson and Executive of the Highwood Lutheran Church my family was sponsored to move to Canada.

While in Conakry, Guinea as refugees, we were rescued by a Sierra Leonean pastor, who was running a mission which included a school, a church, and an orphanage home. He gave us one classroom for shelter, with all five of us sleeping on the floor. We all accepted Christ and were baptised in Guinea before coming to Canada.

Since we arrived in Canada 2015, my family has been part of Highwood Lutheran Church and will continue to be members. I work at Kuhne Nagel, third party for Amazon as a MHE operator working in the shipping department also I'm an ambassador for the staff and management. My wife works at Intercare. On behalf of my family, I would like to thank the pastor, executives, and members of the Highwood Lutheran church for their support and the love they show to my family. May God bless us all.

MEET THELMA JUNG



The family at Highwood probably knows that I am from Guatemala. I was born in Zone One in Guatemala City, the fifth child of Maximino and Refugio Rodriguez.

Some of my fun memories were of the weekends. Mom was very busy preparing a large skillet of refried beans, freshly baked buns, soft cheese, and a pot of coffee for the unexpected visitors. In those days, almost nobody had a phone to announce their visit. The house was like a kindergarten with lots of children to play with.

I planned to stay in Guatemala despite that my older siblings emigrated to the United States, looking for a better future for themselves. I was planning to attend a university and study architecture. I had the pleasure to visit some European cities which all have beautiful architecture.

Another plan was to see my country, especially its natural beauty, Mayan customs, and traditions, and learn more about their culture. I visited Mayan cities, specifically Peten with its monumental ruins, jungles, and beautiful forest.

The Guatemala tropical forest of Peten is full of wildlife. A single hectare harbors between 40 and 100 species of trees and hosts mammals, birds, insects, and plants. The word Guatemala comes from the dialect Nahuatl which means "land of many trees."

Guatemala is the home of 527 species of orchids. This plant lives on trees but obtains its nutrients and water from the air. The orchids are found in the jungles under clouded skies, in pine woods. The city of Coban in Alta Veraps is the orchids' capital.

Guatemala harbors 664 species of birds. There are nineteen varieties of parrots and hummingbirds. The wildlife of Peten is in danger of extinction. These include keel billed toucan, scarlet macaw, white tailed deer, howler monkey, and jaguar, which were worshipped by the ancient Mayans.

My plans changed when I met an American in a bookstore in Guatemala. After a short time of dating, we made plans to get married in California because this was convenient for my family. We settled in his small hometown in northwest Iowa. Eventually, because of unhappy circumstances, we separated. I moved myself and the two children to California and became a single mom.

A family friend introduced me to a German Canadian gentleman named Klaus. After dating for a while, we got married. The family moved to BC to the small town of Falkland. This town is located between Vernon, Kamloops, and Salmon Arm. Klaus had lived in the area since 1968 and worked in the forestry industry as a heavy-duty mechanic.

My daughter Carlotta finished high school in BC, and we were looking for a university for her to attend. Universities were very expensive in BC. Carlotta thought that the University of Calgary had good reviews and was affordable. We invested in a house in Calgary to be ready when Carlotta started her studies at U of C.

Carlotta met Gramie Finlay at Chapters, where both worked, and they started dating. They got married after graduating from U of C and it didn't take too long before they bought their home. Carlotta and her husband both work in education. Carlotta works for the Calgary Board of Education and Gramie is the principal of Westmount Charter School. My grandchildren attend their father's school. My son Max lives in California with his wife Donna and her beautiful daughter.

When Klaus retired in full, we were in California. He wanted to come back to Canada and live the rest of his life in Calgary. I'm glad we kept our home in Calgary.

After we moved to Calgary, I wanted to do something to keep myself busy. I opened a day home, and I ran it for fifteen years. It was a very enjoyable time. I was able to see my grandchildren grow.

God had plans for Klaus when he called him home on January 30, 2022. I keep myself busy gardening in the summer and sewing and making paper flowers in the winter.

Lately, I started volunteering at BP Church which has an English school. I help the ESL teachers with the newcomers. I am also taking a writing class to improve my writing skills.

BRUCE COOPER OBITUARY



It is with sorrow and much love that we mourn the passing of Bruce at the age of 92 years.

Bruce was born in Orillia, ON, to Harry and Muriel Cooper. After a "crazy" (his word) road trip with his buddies in 1952 that took them to California (USA) and Vancouver, BC, Bruce found work in Edmonton, AB, and decided to stay. His girlfriend, Ramona, soon joined him when her employer in Ontario transferred her as part of a corporate expansion into Western Canada. Bruce and Ramona married in 1954. He graduated from the University of Alberta in 1960 with a degree in Civil Engineering and became a professional engineer. His career spanned 35 years, mostly in the oil and gas sector in Alberta, including a move to Calgary in 1970 to join Hudson's Bay Oil & Gas Company (HBOG).

Bruce was "big on DIY" and took pleasure in doing home renovations, blending woodworking skills he learned from his dad and uncles with his engineering skills, crafting projects for his home, and helping family and friends with their projects. He was an aviation enthusiast and would go to airshows as often as he could; he particularly enjoyed the Reno (USA) Air Races. He also enjoyed outdoor pursuits, nature, and animals, and enjoyed the company of many beloved pets over the years.

Bruce was a gentleman and a gentle man, remembered for his good nature, calm disposition, and kind heart. He is survived by his daughter Donna Christensen (Ole), son Cameron, brother Gerry Cooper (Carol) of Wasaga Beach, ON, brother-in-law David Lovering of Airdrie, AB, sisters-in-law, Lexi Lovering of Regina, SK, and Lois Lovering, and his nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by Ramona, his best friend and partner of nearly sixty years, his brother Don Cooper, his sister-in-law Barbara Cooper, and his nephew Scott Cooper.

A Memorial Service was held at Highwood Lutheran Church (419 Northmount Drive NW, Calgary, AB) on Wednesday, November 22, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.

Rest eternal grant him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.





GAUDETE SUNDAY

About forty years ago some western churches, including the Lutheran church, adopted blue as the colour of advent (see page 14 of ELW). This replaced the colour purple that is still used in the Catholic church. We now have blue candles in our advent wreath instead of three purple and one pink (rose) candle.

Your pastor has a rose-coloured stole that holds significance for the Third Sunday of Advent, also known as Gaudete Sunday. The use of rose-coloured vestments on this Sunday is still a tradition in many Christian denominations, symbolising a sense of joy and anticipation as Advent progresses.

Gaudete Sunday is a special time during the Advent season when the focus shifts from the penitential and reflective tone of the earlier weeks to one of joy and rejoicing. The term "Gaudete" is Latin for "Rejoice," and it comes from the entrance antiphon for the day, which begins with the words "Gaudete in Domino semper" (Rejoice in the Lord always).

The rose colour is a visual representation of this joy and anticipation, breaking the sombre tones of purple or blue that are typically associated with Advent. It serves as a reminder that the wait for the Messiah is nearing its end, and the celebration of the Nativity is drawing closer.

Wearing the rose-coloured stole on Gaudete Sunday is a way for clergy to participate in the liturgical symbolism and convey the changing mood of the season to the congregation. It adds a visual and symbolic layer to the worship experience, helping to deepen the connection between the liturgy and the spiritual themes of Advent.

Gaudete in Domino semper

REGARDING CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to man so that he should proclaim the Word of God through Music.

Martin Luther Liturgy and hymns (ed. 1965)

9-8-8 SUICIDE CRISIS HELPLINE

This new service provides hope, support, and recovery to save lives so everyone can access help when they need it the most. Dial or text 9-8-8 if in crisis. More information is available at 988.ca

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Darcy Anderson
Walter Anderson Jr.
Donna Harbour
Lydia McTavish
Barb Patychuk
Helen Sandau
Sam Sandau
Audrey Sribney
Helga Weissenberger
Rick Woycenko

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Redatte Natmake
Alma Bietz
Avriana Crisanti
Pat Fedkenheuer
Kevin Ford
Judith Nagel
David Wong

ON THE WEB BEYOND OUR WEBSITE

Here are some links that may be of interest to you:
Lutheran Advent

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2012/12/6-advent-traditions-you-may-not-heard/>

The heart of Vienna

<https://stephanskirche.at/history.php>

Ideas from Prague

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hussite>

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0108.xml>

ST. NICHOLAS, BISHOP OF MYRA

The divine acts and the deeds of saints extend beyond the final chapter of the Bible. Consider St. Nicholas, a beloved figure throughout Christian history. While historical certainty about him is limited to two key facts—he served as the bishop of Myra in Turkey and lived in the fourth century, passing away around 350 AD—legendary tales have painted a vivid picture of his faith, piety, and compassion.

These legends recount his noble acts, from rescuing kidnapped children to providing gold to a destitute man on the verge of selling his daughters into prostitution. He even persuaded a ship captain to donate his entire wheat cargo to famine victims. Nicholas inspired countless acts of generosity, convincing bakers to share bread and clothiers to provide clothing. His legacy of selfless giving continues to shape our Christmas season, rooted in his profound faith and Christ's call to give as God has given to us. Emulating such a saint would be a worthy tribute.

Why House Blessings?

A house blessing is a sacred Christian tradition that transcends denominational boundaries, finding resonance in the practices of Lutheran, Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches, uniting believers in a shared desire to receive God's divine favour in their homes and with all those who reside or visit. The universality of these practices highlights the profound desire for divine favour, protection, and blessings that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries and the tangible manifestation of God's presence within the home. Steeped in history, the Christian custom of chalking the door also maintains a contemporary relevance. It serves as a visible proclamation of faith, inviting divine protection and blessings into the heart of the home. This act of faith, whether performed by a clergy member or the homeowners themselves, establishes a sacred connection between the physical space of the home and the spiritual realm.

While an ordained priest or pastor is often the designated conduit for invoking blessings, the head of the household may also conduct the ritual. Carrying the sacred implements of water and incense or oil, those celebrating the blessing will traverse through the various rooms, imparting prayers, and reciting passages from the holy scripture. The duration of this sacred rite may vary from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the number of elements observed and the size of the dwelling.

This practice is particularly prominent following the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated annually on January 6th. On this significant day, Christians commemorate the Magi's visit to the infant Jesus, a manifestation of God's love for humanity. The house blessing on or following the Feast of the Epiphany is a poignant homage to this biblical event, seeking divine benefits for the home, its inhabitants, and visitors. In the Occasional Services supplement to the Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW), the rite for house blessing includes prayers, intercessions, and benedictions. Blessed water and the optional use of incense enrich the ritual, creating a multisensory experience that engages the participants spiritually and physically. These additional elements contribute to the depth of the blessing, infusing the home with layers of symbolic significance.

As the ceremony unfolds, a spiritual tapestry is woven, connecting a contemporary household to ancient practices that have endured centuries. Chalk is a distinctive element of the house blessing, employed to inscribe symbols on the door or door frame. The characters 20+C+M+B+24 hold profound significance, representing the names of the three Magi – Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar – or the Latin blessing “Christus mansionem benedicat,” translating to “May Christ bless this house.” This inscription is a visible reminder of the divine protection sought for the household. Water is central to the house's blessing, symbolising purity, and divine grace. The pastor typically moves from room to room, sprinkling water as a cleansing and sanctifying agent. The ritual may also involve incense burning, its fragrant smoke ascending as a symbol of prayers rising to the heavens. In place of incense, homeowners can choose the use of anointing oil. This oil, often cold pressed and extra virgin olive oil blessed by a minister, becomes a medium for marking crosses on windows and doors within the home. As each cross is drawn, a simple prayer is uttered, asking for God's peace, joy, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within each room.

Consider scheduling a house blessing with your pastor. This personal engagement with the pastor and family reinforces the communal aspect of the blessing, fostering a sense of spiritual community within the household.

In essence, the house blessing tradition encapsulates the intersection of the sacred and the mundane, bringing a profound sense of spiritual significance to the very spaces we inhabit daily. Whether carried out by an ordained clergy member or the familial head, the ritual becomes a tangible expression of faith, weaving together the threads of ancient traditions and contemporary spirituality. It stands as a testament to the enduring human yearning for divine presence, protection, and blessings within the refuge of home.

Pr. Mike

20+C+M+B+24