

My Redemption

CATHOLICS RETURNING HOME

I have been away from Church for a number of years and felt it was time to come home.

I grew up in Grande Prairie. I have been a member of St. Joseph Church all my life and went to Catholic school. All those loving teachers, priests, church members and students gave me the moral compass to guide me through the storms and heartaches I was about to face, and overcome. And believe me, there were many trials and tests. Unfortunately, I failed miserably at many of them. But my faith in God allowed me to realize I was doing wrong. I asked God for forgiveness every time I sinned. And I meant it.

My love for alcohol started at an early age. When I started working in the oilfield, that's when my alcoholism got out of control and my life spiraled. I was becoming someone that I was ashamed of. That is also when I started to be afraid to sleep in the dark – because I was no longer walking in the light of God. Then one day I consumed too much poisons. I overdosed and crossed over and got a glimpse of heaven. When I opened my eyes the light was so bright my eyes had to adjust. Heaven looked like Switzerland: mountains, colours so beautiful and I heard an eagle and watched it fly over me. I saw an outline of Jesus, because the light was too bright behind him. That is when I thought of my sons and I awoke with a fire and will to get up and live again.



2025 Save The Dates

- JAN 8-MAR 12:** Catholicism Series
- JANUARY 25:** Men's Conference: "We love because He first loved us."
- FEBRUARY 28:** Mardi Gras
- MARCH 19:** Feast of St. Joseph
- APRIL 6 -9:** Parish Mission "Pilgrims of Hope"
- MAY 2 & 3:** Women's Retreat "Cast Your Worries, Embrace Joy"



What Is A Jubilee?

Jubilee was first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus, which mandated that every 50 years personal debts would be forgiven and indentured servants freed. The practice was later adopted by the Church, eventually settling on one every 25 years. The last regular jubilee was 2000, marking the beginning of the 3rd millennium, and in 2016 a special jubilee, the Year of Mercy, was called. At the heart of each jubilee is God's mercy and forgiveness.

The jubilee in 2025, "Pilgrims of Hope," begins Christmas Eve 2024. Throughout the year, Catholics are encouraged to participate in various religious practices, such as retreat, regularly celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, and even pilgrimages to Rome or other holy sites. Throughout the jubilee year there will be many special events in the parish and Archdiocese. In particular, we will be holding a parish mission on the same theme "Pilgrims of Hope" in April. We pray that this year will be a truly sacred time of God's grace and mercy.





A Great Journey

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL 2024

I have been involved with Vacation Bible School for 5 years and each time has been a wonderful experience!

As one who used to be a participant, seeing all the care and effort that goes into initiating a project such as VBS has been so edifying! This year I had the pleasure to work behind the scenes in preparing the music and celebrations of this year's VBS program: Hometown Nazareth. Preparing the music and witnessing the children perform the action gave me a fuller sense of purpose and filled me with joy. There is nothing to compare with the feeling of seeing eager children singing, mirroring your every action and word, dancing and praising God.

It was easy to see that this feeling was reciprocated. When I went around with my bell, signifying the end of an activity, I was greeted by many groans – the kids were so enthralled by their stations that they didn't want to leave.

Not only does this program build up the children, but also the volunteers. I have watched teens, who were complete strangers to each other, become good friends by the end of the week. The youth learn valuable skills and bloom with confidence. Eventually some even grow to become future VBS leaders and take on roles that challenge and encourage them on their journey.

I find it such a gift to witness the growth and revival that VBS brings to our parish every year! And I am so blessed to be a part of it. I pray that Vacation Bible School continues to be a fruitful program and that all might be witnesses to God's infinite love for us!

Join us on this **Great Journey with Jesus** at Vacation Bible School 2025, July 7-11. Hope to see you there!



I Am Enough

In May I attended our Woman's Retreat, "I Am Enough". It was a wonderful experience, shared with over 100 other women. I attended solely because the title caught my eye. Often feeling that I am not enough in multiple areas of my life, I was curious to see how this retreat would address this issue.

There were three local speakers: Cecilia Mzvondiwa, winner of the Grande Prairie Women of Influence Award, was the primary speaker and she was simply marvelous. She had us laughing with her dynamic and energetic talks and we were glued to her every word. Her incredible life story was woven into the retreat theme, infused with scripture and spirituality. Emily Kiedyk spoke on women's health and Michelle Blondin gave a presentation on women's mental health. Joanne Chiasson was the MC and touched upon women's self-image and God's love for us.

I felt very comfortable and welcomed by my fellow sisters in Christ and met many new people. We are so richly blessed with our church community, and I am excited for the upcoming May retreat, "Cast your Worries, Embrace Joy!" This year, I will be inviting other women who may be searching for something more.



Parish Mission: Pilgrims of Hope

APRIL 6 - 9, 2025

A parish mission is a special time of grace – an opportunity to spark a personal relationship with the Lord. We hope you will find much to refresh and renew your faith, which may have grown lukewarm or half-hearted.

An exceptionally gifted preacher, Father Ivel Mendanha, C.Ss.R., a Redemptorist priest and educator, will lead us. He is originally from India but is now working in Rome. Each evening Fr. Ivel will lead us through a reflection. Besides the evening preaching, there will be a variety of daytime events for all ages.

Discovering Jesus

DISCOVERY YOUTH RETREAT

My Mom told me about an overnight youth retreat called Discovery happening in my school. At first, I never really thought much of it, thinking it was pretty weird to be sleeping in some classrooms that I attended during the day. That was until a few of my friends texted me saying they would also be going to the retreat!

As soon as I got their text I changed my mind immediately because I was looking forward to spending a whole weekend with my best friends. On the weekend the leaders told us we would be doing something called Adoration. I was confused because it was something I wasn't really familiar with even though I grew up in the faith. They told us that we didn't need to do anything but reflect and adore the body of Christ that would be on the altar. When they took us to the chapel and we found our seats, the atmosphere felt different. I didn't think much of it until it started. We were all singing, praising God like I never did before – we were all just living the moment. It was in that moment that was when I truly found God and who He really is. It was then that I realized that the reason why I felt so empty inside, even after I thought I had everything I wanted, was because I was trying to satisfy my heart with things in the world that only God can truly give. I had never had this feeling before, with all my sixteen years of living, and in that moment I've never felt so ALIVE and it was all because of HIM!

When the weekend ended I walked out of the school feeling renewed as a person. Monday came and I felt great! I started being happier, kinder, and more generous towards others. I made some new friends who genuinely accept me for who I am and my belief in God. I started volunteering and attending Church feeling more connected to Mass and the people than I ever did before. I didn't let what happened in the past hurt me any longer. But most importantly I didn't feel empty anymore. My search for something more was finally OVER! That hole in my heart was no longer there because of God... And I'm forever grateful for that.

Catholicism Series

Experience the Catholic Faith as you never have before! Bishop Robert Barron's 10-part video series is "a stimulating and compelling exploration of the spiritual, moral and intellectual riches of the Catholic world." – George Weigel. The first evening begins Wednesday, January 8, at 7:45 pm. We invite you to watch and discuss key aspects of the faith, including the Trinity, the Church, Liturgy and the Eucharist, Mary the Mother of God, the Apostles and the saints. Join us as we discover the full meaning of our Faith. Come out for one, some, or all evenings.