



# The In Touch

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*Our Mission: To Seek, Know, Love and Serve Christ in all Persons and in all Creation*

## Ramblings from the Deacon...

Respectfully submitted, Archdeacon Leland H. Grim

### **Organizational Synergy in A Welcoming Community Project at Int'l Falls, MN**

The Bible teaches, that welcoming visitors, also known as hospitality, is a crucial command from The Creator found in both the Old and New Testaments. It is rooted in the principle of loving others as oneself and emulating The Great Spirit's own welcoming nature.

Welcoming strangers as neighbors is a core principle. Jesus extends this mandate in Matthew 25: 35 by equating welcoming a stranger with welcoming Him. The core principle recognizes a profound sense of solidarity and compassion, recognizing that everyone, regardless of origin, deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and care. This love for the stranger is a reflection of God's character and a key aspect of faith. One might ask why does it matter? Practicing hospitality allows believers to mirror God's generous and accepting love for all people. Welcoming strangers helps foster a sense of belonging and connection within communities, combating isolation and division.

Hospitality is not just a social duty but an act of worship, honoring God by serving others. That hospitality should extend beyond the confines of our religious community into our community at large. **Community synergy**-the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects is what it took to enact a ***Rotary Welcoming Community Initiative*** in our community. Synergistic support from International Falls Rotary Club, the Episcopal Church in Minnesota (ECMN); Friends Against Abuse; Minnesota North College-Rainy River Campus (RRC); the Northspan Group; The Minnesota Humanities Center; Holy Trinity Episcopal Church (HTEC), Voyageurs National Park, KCC-TV, Backus Community Center, guest speakers/presenters and members of major civic sectors of International Falls and Koochiching County helped make this project possible.

The Rotary Club of International Falls Welcoming Community Initiative arose in response to challenging conversations that surfaced in 2020 around how communities across the nation, including our own, viewed immigrants and new residents. In the face of these discussions, a group of Rotary members came together with the conviction that our community must clearly and proudly express a message of welcome to anyone who might consider making this region their home.

The Welcoming Community Initiative seeks to foster an environment where all individuals and families feel valued, respected, and supported as they settle and thrive here. This means not only extending a genuine invitation to new residents but also working intentionally to build connections, celebrate cultural diversity, and create opportunities for positive integration.

The Initiative's aim is to ensure that newcomers experience International Falls and Koochiching County as a place where they belong—where neighbors help neighbors, where traditions are honored alongside new perspectives, and where the community grows stronger through inclusivity.

When Minnesota Episcopal Bishop Craig Loya was informed of this proposed initiative and the first planned programming he said, “We are humbled and excited that the Minnesota Episcopal Church is able to support your *Welcoming Community/Understanding the Value of Others Speaker Series* in International Falls, MN.” He also asked Holy Trinity Episcopal Church to be his representative in their community's work with International Falls Rotarians to move the project forward from the Fall of 2021 through the Fall of 2025.

The original project planned for a speaker series in the fall/winter of 2022/23 that provided insight into demographic trends, success stories of other welcoming communities, and sharing perspectives from underrepresented groups within our community. The series included,

- Dr. Bradley Wolfe from Ridgewater College, Hutchinson, MN conducted a public presentation on "Creating Inclusion While Preserving Our Identity."
- Amber Lewis, Welcoming Community Program Coordinator from Northspan did a public presentation sharing successes of welcoming communities and efforts taking place in northeastern Minnesota associated with this effort.
- Dr. Anton Treuer, of Bemidji State University, conducted a presentation on his perspective as an advocate for Ojibwe culture.
- Deacon Ross Murray, Senior Director of Education and Training for The GLAAD Media Institute (Gay, Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), presented on growing up gay in the Borderland and is originally from the Littlefork, MN area. He discussed growing up gay while a student at Rainy River Community College in International Falls.

The speaker series generated a conversation about the future of our community and how we can continue to grow as a welcoming community. About 300 community members participated in the opportunity. These four *YouTube videos* presentations are available on our local KCC-TV-56649 channel. Click on each of these Presentations links. [Anton Treuer](#), [Amber Lewis](#), [Bradley Wolfe](#) and [Ross Murry](#).

The speaker series was followed with a series of broader community discussions facilitated by Northspan Group in 2024/25 when they recognized our effort and selected our work as part of their [Inclusion Learning Cohort](#) (ILC). All the conversations focused on sharing what our community can do to become more welcoming and inclusive to gain shared economic prosperity and community vitality. Cultivating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture is

essential to realizing a vision of a world where people unite and take action to create lasting positive change.

The overall goals of this effort were to: 1) Build relationships across difference 2) Learn inclusive community practices 3) Identify gaps in inclusion and discuss areas of need in the community and 4) Identify a Community Inclusion Project to move forward together. In collaboration with Northspan Group our group facilitated seven evening workshops at Rainy River Campus with the following topics of discussion:

- The ABCs of Constructive Dialogue Across Difference
- Exploring the "Born Here/Not from Here" Perspective
- Creating Diversity Awareness, A Braver Angels Discussion, Political Diversity-"What's your 'Red Line'?"
  - Building a Foundation for Growth
  - Educating About the Impacts of Colonization
  - Involving Youth in Building a Welcoming Community
- Celebration Workshop: Accelerated Action Planning for Community Inclusion Project

Through the ILC, the group has committed to working closely with the Rainy River Campus to connect with and welcome students moving to the area for their academic growth. The ILC group recognized that each semester at RRC a cohort of 20 to 60 new residents come into our area, several from other parts of the state, the country, and internationally. What can we do as a community, organization, business, or individually to ensure that these new residents feel as though they are part of our community? The Northspan Group provided initial support through a \$5,000 grant to get the project started.

Another element of the groups public programming included participation in **Minnesota Humanities Center and Danger Boat Productions**. The MHC is an independent nonprofit and is Minnesota's exclusive affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities and collaborates with individuals, organizations, and communities to bring transformational humanities programming into the lives of Minnesotans throughout the state. Using story as a catalyst, they produce, create, and support projects and programs that explore a range of subjects.

In March of 2024, the Welcoming Community Program Manager from Northspan Group, Amber Lewis, suggested we apply to the Minnesota Humanities Center to serve as host and facilitator of the inaugural "**Sketches of Minnesota Tour**." Knowing the Rainy River Campus would be an ideal location, the college led the application process and were later awarded with the honor of hosting. The MHC's selection committee mentioned they were, "impressed with your group's enthusiasm, clearly stated purpose, ideas for partners, desire and ability to bring community together..."

That additional workshop, provided by MHC and Danger Boat came to International Falls-one of 10 Minnesota cities. Each event begins with a congregate meal and a community conversation facilitated by MHC and Danger Boat. Audience members are asked to share what makes their town great, what they think people get wrong about it, what local divisions concern them, and what future they imagine for their community. During these community conversations, the Danger Boat improv-comedy troupe will listen in. They'll then take what they heard on stage and bring it to life—through entirely unscripted improv-comedy theater! See the final *YouTube* [teamed up with media partners from across the state to capture the events](#).

Early in 2025 a Rotary and campus planning team was formed to work at Rainy River Campus to identify two ways to effectively interact with college students. The team worked with campus staff to seek their direction for the project. A new student survey was developed to assess how are community could become more welcoming. The planning team arranged for two dinners and boat rides for the students on September 4 and 11, 2025. The students were invited first to a light meal and ice breakers at the Thunderbird Lodge on Rainy Lake and then introduced to Voyageurs National Park via a sunset boat ride on their 60 feet long double decker tour boat, *The Voyageur*.

[LBeager@cherryroad.com](mailto:LBeager@cherryroad.com) editor of the *RAINY LAKE GAZETTE* wrote an opinion piece-*OUR VIEW MAKING A CONNECTION* concerning the college plans. She also wrote an opinion piece-*KICK OFF OF 'COMMUNITY CONNECTOR* after the event was completed when about 50 new students connected with the community in two session held Sept. 4 and 11.

Students attending the socials are from Hawaii, Arizona, Washington, Texas, Missouri, and other states, as well as from the nations of Canada, Türkiye, Italy, and the Netherlands. The students got to know members of the community attending by playing “ice breaker” games and sharing a meal. Each student received a resource bag filled with information and gifts provided by local businesses and organizations. “It’s a meaningful way to build relationships, strengthen our community, and show newcomers the warm welcome our town is known for” The last *GAZETTE* opinion statement about the campus program was, “Kudos to the Rotary Club of International Falls for again seeing a need and moving forward with a solution. Connecting community members - new, old, short term or lifers—is how we change a climate that could be hurting our future.”

The Rotarians core values-service, fellowship, diversity, integrity, and leadership-align with their commitment to foster an integrative environment for all in the International Falls area. These core values align with those of ECMN and HTEC too. This organizational synergetic effort was intended to further integrate more diverse members, build a more inclusive culture, and provide more equitable opportunities with our community. The project was expected to model this behavior so that community members can recognize the effects their words and actions have on others.

A hope is that the community will more fully conduct itself in order to create and maintain collaborative, positive, and healthy environments--to use respectful language, be supportive, foster a welcoming and inclusive environment, celebrate diversity, know how to report discrimination or harassment so incidents do not go unreported and some inappropriate behavior incurs no consequences.

ECMN and HTEC are making a significant outreach in our community through this project. We have prayed that the Spirit would guide us to be followers of Jesus not for what we can get, but for what we have been gifted to give. Lead us to be consistent followers and have a faith so rooted in Jesus that we would not miss opportunities to thrive and flourish by speaking up in life's most problematic circumstances.

**Listening as a Spiritual Discipline as described in an essay by The Reverend Blair Pogue (ECMN Canon for Vitality & Innovation) and Dwight Zscheile is not necessarily about how to fix institutions, but to learn what people care about. Blair and Dwight emphasized that, "Meaningful listening requires deep intentionality—especially in a culture that forms us to be distracted and reactive. Leaders need to develop the capacity to slow down, pay attention, and enter into conversations with a posture of curiosity rather than control. Listening includes hearing the longings, losses, and hopes of neighbors and beginning to recognizing the sacred work God was already doing through people in their workplaces and communities."**

During the past five years, our community was challenged as Poque and Zscheile suggested, to let go of assumptions and ask better questions-not just how do we become a more welcoming community?-but connecting in the places people live, work, and gather and with the real lives of their neighbors.

We found that the Rotary Welcoming Project shared those stories and how they intersected with the struggles and hopes of making us a more welcoming community and that organizational synergy was essential to make it happen. A challenge now is to sustain the Rainy River Campus welcoming project into the future.

#### **References:**

**1. What Does the Bible Say About 'Welcome the Stranger'?.**

**<https://www.guideposts.org>**

**2. Rainy Lake Gazette 56649 [LBeager@cherryroad.com](mailto:LBeager@cherryroad.com)**

**3. Northspan Group.org**

**4. Minnesota Humanities Center.org**

**5. Minnesota North College, Rainy River Campus.edu**

**6. ECMN.org Bishop Craig Loya**

**7. Friends Against Abuse [friendsagainstabuse.com](http://friendsagainstabuse.com)**

**8. Rotary Club 56649**

**9. Holy Trinity Episcopal Church- IFHTEC.org**

**10. Bob DeGross- Rotary President**



**11. Discipleship in a Mixed Ecology with Blair Pogue and Dwight Zscheile. 2025/07/ 07.**

**Fresh Expressions**<https://freshexpressions.com> ›

**12. KCC-TV-56649 at Backus Community Center, International Falls, MN**

**13. Brad Krasaway. Director of College Retention and Rainy River Campus & Athletic Director. [brad.krasaway@minnesotanorth.edu](mailto:brad.krasaway@minnesotanorth.edu)**

**14. Voyageurs National Park Boat Tours.[gov](http://www.gov)**



**Happy students with the boat Captain**

Voyageur Tour Boat Captain

Marissa Mills (Blackduck, MN),

Kassandra Dobransky (Rainy River, Ontario),

Nautica Dowling (Missouri),

Grace Medicine-Horton (Manitou Rapids, Ontario),

Janne Ramakers (Netherlands)



**A group enjoying sunset on the top deck.**



**Bob DeGross with two new RRC students**

Janne Ramake (Netherlands)

Nautica Dowling (Missouri)



**Students with the *Voyageur's* Captain**

Chase Shillingford (Florida)

Voyageurs Tour Boat Captain

Samuel Jideofor (Florida)

***Watch Holy Trinity Livestream On Facebook***

*Service bulletin is on our website: [www.ifhtec.org](http://www.ifhtec.org)*

*Sundays @ 10:00 am*

*Services can also be viewed on KCC-TV*



## CHRISTMAS KIDS' SHOP

To provide area children the opportunity to shop for Christmas gifts for their family. Kids can come shop for their adults! No money needed – the payment will be a promise to do a good deed for someone else.

**At Holy Trinity (820 4<sup>th</sup> St.), the church with the red doors.**

If you are able to volunteer to help with the Kid's Shop there is a sign-up sheet on the front entry table.

Hours for shopping are:

Thurs	12/4	4:00 - 6:00 PM
Fri	12/5	4:00 - 6:00 PM
Sat	12/6	10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Sat	12/13	10:00 AM - 4:00 PM



*We will have a Food Shelf Box in the Front Entry Starting Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> for Donations to be turned in the 1<sup>st</sup> of each Month starting Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>*

### HAPPY BIRTHDAY

12/1~12/31

~ Brent Schlieff  
~ Charlie Klatt  
~ Alexander Kennedy  
~ Bill Bertram

~ Jim Davison  
~ Alan Wright  
~ Sara Kennedy  
~ Ladd Corrin



12/14 ~ Dixie Juel  
12/30 ~ Mark Grim



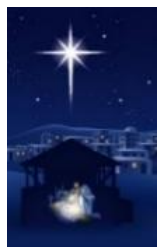
### An Advent Moment

*For Prayer, Meditation, Reflection, Anticipation*

*The Church will be Open Thurs. Evenings 5:00-7:00pm*

*Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, & 18<sup>th</sup>*





**Thursday ~ Dec 18<sup>th</sup> Faith United Church**  
**Blue Christmas Service 7:00 PM**



***Dec 24<sup>th</sup> Holy Trinity Christmas Eve Service***  
***4:00 pm***

**Notice:** We need volunteers ~ *Readers for Sunday's & Altar Guild Members & 5 Vestry Members 2026*

# December '25 Sunday Service Lay Responsibilities

Dates	Celebrants	Acolytes	Lectors & Lessons	
<b>7</b> <b>Holy Eucharist</b> 10:00 am <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent</b> 	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim		Linda Vance	
<b>14</b> <b>Holy Eucharist?</b> 10:00 am <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent</b> 	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim		Jeanne Corrin	
<b>21</b> <b>Holy Eucharist</b> 10:00 am <b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent</b> 	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim		Georgeann & Andy	
<b>24</b> <b>Holy Eucharist</b> 4:00 pm <b>Christmas Eve</b> 	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim		Linda Vance	
<b>28</b> <b>Holy Eucharist</b> 10:00 am <b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas</b>	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim		Erik Strand	





# DECEMBER 2025



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6 <b>Altar Guild</b> <b>Georgeann &amp; Michele</b> <b>Kids Christmas shop</b> <b>10 - 4 pm</b>
				<b>Kids Christmas shop</b> <b>4:00 - 6:00 pm</b> <b>Advent Moment</b> <b>5-7 pm - Holy Trinity</b>	<b>Kids Christmas shop</b> <b>4:00 - 6:00 pm</b>	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13 <b>Altar Guild</b> <b>Georgeann &amp; Michele</b> <b>Kids Christmas shop</b> <b>10 - 4 pm</b>
<b>Holy Eucharist</b> <b>10:00 a.m.</b>				<b>Advent Moment</b> <b>5-7 pm</b> <b>Holy Trinity</b>		
14	15	16	17	18	19	20 <b>Altar Guild</b>
<b>Holy Eucharist</b> <b>10:00 a.m.</b>			<b>Vestry 5:00</b>	<b>Faith United Church</b> <b>Blue Christmas</b> <b>Service 7:00 PM</b> <b>Advent Moment</b> <b>5-7 pm - Holy Trinity</b>		<b>Carolyn &amp; Molly</b>
21	22	23	24	25	26	27 <b>Altar Guild</b>
<b>Holy Eucharist</b> <b>10:00a.m.</b>	<b>Newsletter</b> <b>Deadline</b> <b>(?)</b>		 <b>Christmas</b> <b>Eve</b> <b>Service</b> <b>4 PM</b>	<b>Merry Christmas</b> 		<b>Carolyn &amp; Molly</b>
28	29	30	31			
<b>Holy Eucharist</b> <b>10:00 a.m.</b>						
