

# THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS BENEFICE

of the

## DIOCESE OF EAU CLAIRE

Benefice and Church Profiles

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION - HAYWARD  
GRACE CHURCH - RICE LAKE  
ST. ALBAN'S - SPOONER  
ST. LUKE'S - SPRINGBROOK

January 2023



The Northern Highlands Benefice is an association of 4 independent Episcopal parishes in Northwestern Wisconsin. St. Alban's, St. Luke's, Grace, and Ascension Episcopal churches of Spooner, Springbrook, Rice Lake, and Hayward are located in a rectangular area approximately 40 miles by 30 miles. The four communities are arranged along State Highways 53 and 63. Heading north on Highway 53 you will leave Rice Lake and pass on the outskirts of Spooner at its intersection with Highway 70. Continuing on 53 7 miles will bring you to the intersection of 53 with Highway 63 at Trego. Following 63 east you will arrive at Springbrook after 8 miles. Another 15 miles will bring you to Hayward. The four churches share clergy and are united in common goals, purposes, and services while maintaining organizational independence.

## HISTORY

A cooperative team ministry had been discussed by numerous clergy since the early part of the 21st century. In November 2018, Fr. Christian Senyoni (Grace Church) and Fr. Dave Bauer (St. Alban's and St. Luke's) began serious conversations and planning on creating a framework where each church involved would have a clerical presence every Sunday. The clergy would be a full time priest-in-charge and a supply priest. In December 2018, after receiving Bishop Jay Lambert's blessing to explore the possibilities the idea was brought to the three churches and Ascension. (Ascension's priest-in-charge had accepted another call and left in November.)

Representatives from each church were invited to planning meetings. The effort was called Three Rivers Team Ministry. A clergy schedule and proposed budget were prepared. A pulpit exchange between the four churches was done in January 2019. Ascension decided to explore other options. Each of the remaining churches approved going forward with the project with a beginning date of July 1, 2019. Father Senyoni accepted a call to a church in Collierville, TN, before the plan was implemented. In order to keep the project alive, Father Bauer supplied Grace one Sunday per month and St. Luke's / St. Alban's three Sundays per month beginning July 1, 2019. During this time Deacon Marlene Hogue assigned to Ascension provided supply to St. Luke's / St. Alban's the one Sunday per month Father Bauer was at Grace.

After Churches were closed due to Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions beginning March 23, 2020, St. Alban's, Grace, and St. Luke's began sharing a streamed service together. The service was streamed from Father Bauer's home from April 5 to April 28. After St. Alban's installed technology for online streaming the service originated there with recommended attendance guidelines beginning May 3, 2020. St. Alban's, St. Luke's, and Grace worshipped together online until each Church was reopened. Ascension streamed its service beginning in mid-April. St. Luke's began open air services in their cemetery on June 14. They continued until they

moved back into their building on September 13. St. Alban's opened for general attendance on June 28. Grace began holding services on October 4. Ascension opened September 13.

In May 2020, Mother Meagan Farr applied for the position of priest-in-charge of Ascension. As Ascension was not able to provide a financial package appropriate for a full time priest on its own, at the encouragement of Diocesan leadership, it approached 3 Rivers Team Ministry about expanding the association. All parties agreed. The name of the association was changed to The Northern Highlands Benefice and Mother Meghan Farr became the first priest-in-charge on August 16, 2020. She was assisted by Father Dave Bauer and Deacon Marlene Hogue.

Mother Meghan accepted a call to Cork, Ireland beginning July 1, 2022. Pastor Terry Stratton, a retired ELCA pastor, provided supply services through the remainder of the year. Deacon Bramwell Richards, recently transferred from the Diocese of Milwaukee, was added to the Benefice clergy team on Advent I in 2022.

## Mission Statement

The Benefice Board, composed of two members from each church, approved the following mission statement:

The mission of the Northern Highlands Benefice is to provide opportunities for fellowship between the Episcopal churches of northwestern Wisconsin and to provide an administrative structure to serve full-time pastoral needs of the four member churches of Grace, RiceLake; St. Alban's, Spooner; St. Luke's, Springbrook; and Ascension, Hayward.

## Organization

The churches of the Benefice maintain separate treasuries and administrative independence. Each Church pays a monthly assessment for clergy support and common ministries.

The clergy schedule is setup along geographic lines with St. Alban's and Grace churches together and St. Luke's and Ascension churches together. On any given Sunday the clergy will be at St. Luke's at 8:30 and Ascension at 10:30. The other clergy will be at St. Alban's at 8:30 and Grace at 10:30. They next Sunday assignments are switched. This schedule allows the priest-in-charge to be at each of the churches for a minimum of 24 Sundays per year. The fifth Sunday in a month was used for laity led Morning Prayer.

Common Benefice services include Easter Eve and All Saints. These services are normally held at St. Alban's which is approximately equidistant from the other churches.

Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas Eve are arranged cooperatively in each church. (St. Luke's and St. Alban's have held a combined Christmas Eve Service since 2015. The service alternates between the two churches yearly. This past year saw Ascension and St. Luke's / St. Alban's each with. 4:00 pm service while Grace held their service at 4:30.). Each church also celebrates other services uniquely. These include Epiphany, Ascension Day, Feast of St. Francis including the Blessing of Animals, and the Feast of St. Luke.

There are two rectories owned by Benefice Churches. They are located in Hayward and Spooner. The rectories are roughly the same age and similar layouts. Both are located next to the church (Spooner has a vacant lot between the two buildings) and within two blocks of the main streets. Hospitals and schools are located in both communities.

#### Financial Package

The Benefice offers a salary considered full-time in northern Wisconsin. Pension, medical insurance reimbursement up to \$6,000 annually, workman's compensation insurance, use of a rectory and utility expenses are included. Travel expenses for Benefice duties, normal business expenses, and a continuing education allowance are budgeted. In addition, four weeks of annual vacation (four Sundays), national holidays, and continuing education leave of two weeks are provided.

#### Communities

The 2020 census for the four communities and their counties is:

Hayward (Sawyer County)	2,533 (18,704)
Rice Lake (Barron County)	9,040 (46,711)
Spooner (Washburn County)	2,573 (16,623)
Springbrook (Washburn County)	536 (16,623)

Hayward is the county seat of Sawyer County. The three largest communities have hospitals with Spooner and Hayward being connected with Essentia Health and Rice Lake connected with the Marshfield Clinic. Hayward has a 2 year college on the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa reservation. Rice Lake has a 2 year college

connected with the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. It also has a vocational / technical college.

Spooner is two hours from the Twin Cities (Minneapolis / St. Paul) and four hours from Madison. (Hayward times are + 30 minutes. Rice Lake times are -30 minutes.)

All communities have recreational trails for hiking, biking, skiing, and snowmobiling. Hunting and fishing are popular with many lakes and forests in the area. The North American Birkebeiner cross-county ski race is held in February running 50Km+ between Cable and Hayward.

### Goals

The four churches have aging congregations. We are looking for a priest-in-charge who can appreciate our past and present while leading us into the future. We need assistance in interpreting the gospel and our tradition into language and actions understood by the modern world.

*Church Photos*



Grace, Rice Lake  
St. Luke's, Springbrook





Ascension, Hayward



St. Alban's, Spooner



