



Worshiping and serving with students at the North Dakota Youth Correctional Center, Mandan, and providing them re-entry support through Heart River Bridges of Hope ([www.heartriverhope.org](http://www.heartriverhope.org)).



## Calendar

### Game Nights

Thursdays, 7 p.m.  
NDYCC

### Pizza Night

Wednesdays, 5 p.m.  
Bridges of Hope Office

### Frolic Sunday School

December 2 & 16,  
9:15 a.m.  
Hope Chapel

### Intergenerational Sunday School

December 9, 9:15 a.m.  
Hope Chapel

### Tattoos on the Heart Book Study

December 5 & 19, 7 p.m.  
Hope Chapel

### Lefse Making

December 15,  
8:30a.m.—3:00 p.m.  
Hope Chapel

### Blue Christmas Worship

December 18, 7 p.m.  
Hope Chapel

### Caroling with YCC Youth

December 17 & 21

### Cottage Christmas Present Wrapping

December 23  
Hope Chapel

### Lace 'um Up for the Lord

January 6, after worship

[www.heartriverlutheran.org](http://www.heartriverlutheran.org)

Fall 2018

## Blue Christmas - by Pastor Renee

What might it be like to be a teenager locked up during Christmas? As pastor of a congregation who worships with youth at the ND Youth Correctional Center, I see a lot of tears when I look at my people on Christmas Eve. These tears are not tears of joy, but tears of great sadness. Family and friends are far away. There is no gift giving or receiving with loved ones. The stark reality of incarceration hits hard during the “most wonderful time of the year.”

Youth at YCC have made choices to end up in a court room and eventually corrections; yet, they are still human beings. They are kids longing to be with their families, yearning for a glimmer of hope that one day things will be better.

On Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, Heart River will hold a “Blue Christmas” worship service. Blue Christmas worship services create space where people can come into the house of God to lament, pray, weep, and remember. Not all people are joyful at Christmas. In fact, it can be the most difficult time of the year for many.

Instead of primarily thinking about the baby Jesus who has come into the world to save us all, people cannot help but think

about their first Christmas without their loved on who has died. They are thinking about how there is no money for Christmas presents this year. Some are recently separated or divorced or lack employment. Many have a family member imprisoned.

People who are incarcerated are often forgotten. As of 2013, 2.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent who is incarcerated. That is 1 in every 28 children!\*

We believe in a God who is present in suffering, who has entered into our lives with all its joys and sorrows. Christ is found in places like jails and prisons, and the ND Youth Correctional Center. Therefore, we will come together as the body of Jesus on December 18<sup>th</sup> to name life’s burdens and pain. We will also come together to proclaim the light that shines in the darkness, Christ in our world.

We will come together again for worship on Christmas Eve. We will hear the story of Good News of great joy for all people. Following worship we will take Christmas presents and cookies to all the youth on campus. Our prayer for those who cannot return home on Christmas Eve is that they may feel and know the unconditional love of Jesus.



“The stark reality of incarceration hits hard during ‘the most wonderful time of the year.’”

\* <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/21/sesame-street-reaches-out-to-2-7-million-american-children-with-an-incarcerated-parent/>

# Heart River Ministries

## Greetings from our new intern! - by: Alexandra Benson



Deacon Intern  
Alexandra Benson

### Lefse Making Event

Join us for fun, fellowship, and lefse making with the YCC youth on **December 15** from **8:30 a.m.— 3:00 p.m.** in Hope Chapel! We'll provide the aprons; just bring your Christmas spirit and your appetite!



Hi everyone!

My name is Alexandra (Alex) Benson, and I'm thrilled to be your deacon intern!

I grew up just outside of Hurley, South Dakota, a small agricultural community in the southeastern corner of the state. My dad is a farmer, and my mom works as an interior designer. My younger sister, Ashley, is studying special education at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, SD, and my brother, Gus, is in his first year at South Dakota State University in Brookings.

I attended Concordia College in Moorhead, MN (Go Cobbers!) where I studied psychology and religion. I found a home within Concordia's campus ministry community, and, together, my peers and I wrestled with faith, science, politics, and the hundreds of different ways we imagined we might live out our vocations as people of God. In the summers, I served at Shetek Lutheran Ministries, a small Bible camp in south-

western Minnesota. Outside of filling my wardrobe with way too much tie dye, camp was a place where I felt that I could bring my whole and messy self to be fully seen and loved. Both of these communities helped me recognize within myself a passion for ministry and leadership capacities I never imagined I could possess. They continue to support and inspire me as I explore my calling to ministry.

After college I spent a year serving with the Urban Servant Corps, a full-time volunteer program of the ELCA in Denver, CO. I lived in an intentional community of volunteers and worked at a day shelter for women and children. My volunteer year turned out to be a profound growing experience in which I was forced to confront my own privilege and lean into the complexity of social systems and justice work. I was continually humbled by the strength and wisdom of my clients, and my understanding of faith began to take on

a new shape as I heard the stories of women and children experiencing homelessness, poverty, abuse, and addiction.

After whole lot of "vocational wrestling" during my volunteer year, I landed at Luther Seminary in the fall of 2015. I have adored my classes and have also found meaningful work in serving as a part-time director of children, youth, and family ministry and later working with the seminary's Center for Stewardship Leaders. My time at Luther was filled with wonderful learning experiences, but I'm excited for this new adventure with Heart River! I look forward to learning from you all and experiencing God's goodness together.

In my spare time you might find me exploring local coffee shops, re-reading the Harry Potter books, baking, practicing yoga, or strumming my ukulele. I also have a soft spot for ice cream, NPR, jazz music, and Netflix baking shows.

### Congratulations, Brandee!

We love celebrating the successes of our people. This May, Brandee received her Associate's Degree from Bismarck State College. Good luck, Brandee, as you continue your education and pursue your Bachelor's in Social Work! We're proud of you!



Deacon Shera, Pastor Renee, Brandee, Linda, and Liz celebrating Brandee's graduation



# Heart River Ministries

## NewComer - by YCC Student

They said God is the covenant of our Blood  
but how could that be if I can't have the trust  
that in the end he is going to show me the love  
that could take me off my crumb

They said he going to wipe my sins away  
but how could that be if I sin everyday  
I guess I was lyin' if I told him I could change  
'cause no matter what happens I always stay the same

I tried it all fasted, prayed, and worshipped  
I still can't find the sense that I'm worth it  
I'm workin' to get out of the trenches I'm never returning  
I'm learning to keep movin', El Shaddai got my heart burning

He my one and only, he my day one  
He would show me forgiveness but I would never take none  
I just wanna get out the trenches but I stayed stuck  
between love and hatred, God and Satan, I couldn't face one

Is it the dog in the fight or the fight in the dog  
I guess it don't matter, he put up his all  
I'm deprived of my sin 'cause he hung on the cross  
I don't have to be afraid 'cause the battle is God's

I may be new to this but I'm still his child  
only followed him just to see my mamma smile  
but now I'm different and I'm going wild  
for my Father's love and he put me to trial

He's testing me and testing my faith  
every time I rap about him I feel like Lecrae  
he's always on my mind and he runnin' through my brain  
would it change if my mamma was still here today

Every time he call my name I know I got to listen  
if I fail to pay attention, I don't know what I've been missin'  
all these materialistic things got me teachin' a lesson  
I been to hell and back but I'm going to heaven

Every time I think about his love, I know it's never ending  
no estimate, no testing it, 'cause I know that he testing  
I was quenching a thirst to get out of the trenches  
he lended me happiness, took my aggression.

## Reflections from the ELCA Youth Gathering

"For by grace you have been saved through faith,  
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."  
-Ephesians 2:8



Tim, Brad  
(chaperone),  
and Ian in  
Houston

This July, Tim Kadrmas and Ian Eilers attended the 2018 National ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston, TX. Together with Lutheran students from across the country, they joined in worship, service, breakout sessions, and of course, some adventuring around Houston. They share some of their reflections below!

### What was the most meaningful part of the youth gathering for you?

Tim: Having people talk to me about how being a Lutheran isn't a bunch of do's and don'ts, and God has different plans for us than we think.

### What is one thing you learned about yourself, the church, the world, and/or God?

Tim: I learned that God sometimes picks people that don't want to have an encounter that deepens their Christian faith to have that encounter.

### What was something one of the speakers said that you will remember?

Tim: One of the speakers talked about how he went to a pastor that told him he was going to hell for cutting himself and a second pastor said "there's grace for that" for the same situation.

Ian: "There's grace for that."

### What is something you would like to say to the people who donated money to make the trip possible?

Tim: It was a trip I won't forget and I'm grateful that I had an opportunity that somebody else might not have had.

Ian: The trip was really fun and it was a good experience.

### Do you have a favorite fun memory from the trip?

Tim: Riding the Titan at Six Flags. They really do make everything bigger in Texas!

Ian: Waiting in line for seven hours with my cousin's church to get floor seats for the mass gathering.



A huge thank you to everyone who helped  
make this trip possible!

## Thank You!

Thank to everyone who has donated Fresh Start Kit items, quilts, and financial gifts to Heart River Ministries! We are so grateful for your partnership in ministry and service. To consider a year-end gift, please see the self-addressed envelope or visit <http://www.heartriverlutheran.org> and click on the "Give Now" button.



Special shout-out to Zion Lutheran Church in McGregor, ND for your amazing donation of gift cards and 45 complete Fresh Start Kits! Your generous stewardship will benefit young people seeking a new beginning after YCC.  
Thank you!

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HEART RIVER  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

