

PRAIRIE SPIRIT Country Gospel Band

After a very difficult decision for the members of Prairie Spirit, we have decided to discontinue doing the country gospel evening services at Christ Lutheran and other events outside our Church. Covid 19 isn't the entire reason, but it plays a part, having been inactive for over a year and a half. There were also other factors we considered that led us to our decision. I have put together a summary of some of the highlights over the years as follows:

In the 80s it was a goal of mine to form a band that would play gospel music in church and so, along with Tom Kurtz and Pastor Bob, in 1987 Christfolk was formed. A few others joined us, including Lonnie Benson who sent us in the direction of country gospel. In 1994, after Lonnie moved away, we regrouped and changed our name to Prairie Spirit. The name was chosen by Pastor Bob, who in his wisdom said it seeks to honor the Spirit of God and the spirit of the prairies which is found in the beauty of the prairies and the deep caring of prairie people for each other.

Over the years the following musicians/singers joined us. Some stayed for awhile, some stayed for years: Lonnie Benson, Mark Flamond, Deanna Hamilton, Gail Edwards, Daryl Hack, Dianne Leib, Laurel Mattison, Phil Lewry, Garth Ruecker, Ed Rogoza, Phil Trylinski, Stacey Euteneier, Neil Berg, Al Almassey, Pastor Doug Shepherd, Jim Westman, Margaret Roth and Pastor Carlton Larsen.

In 1992 we began getting invitations to other places in the province and it wasn't unusual to travel outside the city once a month. In 1996 we began the country gospel evening service here at Christ Lutheran, at the suggestion of Sandy Leeson. The first service we had 50 people come, the next month 163 and after that for several years there were around 200 or more in attendance. The services continued monthly for 24 years, and I only recall one time we had to cancel because of stormy weather. For us, our normal routine on a Sunday afternoon was to rehearse.

We have performed at Craven Jamboree, festivals, weddings, funerals, anniversaries, community and fundraising events, conventions, senior's and special care homes, many small country churches in the province and two benefit concerts at the Center of the Arts in Regina (one of which Rory Allen made a guest appearance and performed some songs to the surprise of the audience). We have always been met with open arms and an expectation that we would touch people's hearts in the love of sharing and gathering, of singing and offering praise to God through our music.

In 1996 we recorded our first album; The Flowers We Love. In 1998 we recorded our second, Whispering Hope. In 2000 our third, This Christmas. In 2008 our fourth, That's Jesus and finally our last album, My Best Friend. Thank you, Pastor Dennis, for your in graphic design for album covers. Our albums reached many places all over the world, including Africa, England, New Zealand, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany, USA and many provinces in Canada.

We have had a lot of assistance from some very special people. Jim Ackerman did the 'Sound' for many, many years. John Holizki took over from him and, in the last few years, was assisted by Bruno Nerenberg. Linda Kurtz, and then Dorathea Little, managed our bookings and offered support in other ways. George and Margaret Roth, Helen Almassey, Noreen Westman and finally Bruce and Pat McAskell were gracious and hardworking hosts at coffeetime after the services. June Galger, and others greeted and made people feel welcome, along with Noreen Westman who was willing to help wherever she was needed. All the help we received from many was so much appreciated and we send out a huge Thank You to everyone!

Prairie Spirit has been blessed in so many ways in all our experiences performing in many different and unique venues, as well as the evening services at Christ. It has been a privilege to serve in this way. We are thankful for the love and support that our Church has given us. We are also grateful for the outreach to communities outside our own church and city that it provided.

We are looking forward to one final concert on a Sunday afternoon, perhaps in the spring and updates to that concert will be forthcoming. As spokesperson for the group, I am confident in saying that we will all miss all of you who have been faithful in coming out to our services and we are grateful for every opportunity we have had to serve our God in this very special music ministry.

Carol Holizki

On behalf of Prairie Spirit (Tom Kurtz, Garth Ruecker, Jim Westman, Pastor Carlton Larson, Margaret Roth *and me.*)