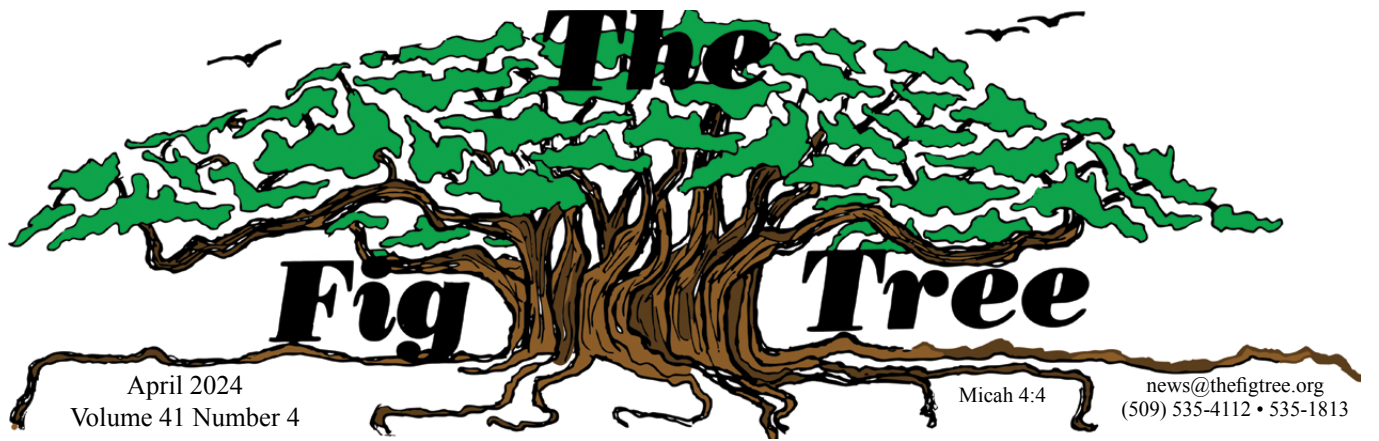


40TH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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FEATURES 90 EVENTS



40th Anniversary Edition

Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest
online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Editor elicits understanding, relationships

Four stories on Fig Tree staff

Freelance ecumenical journalist Mary Stamp, editor and publisher, who co-founded The Fig Tree with Holy Names Sister Bernadine Casey in the spring of 1984 started work on it in the fall of 1983 after attending the World Council of Churches (WCC) Sixth Assembly in Vancouver B.C.

One assembly document on “Communicating Credibly” sparked thinking about the editorial approach, including being clear and concise to hold the attention of readers saturated by media.

Mary reviewed The Fig Tree history and described how it grew into a peace/solutions journalism editorial approach.

A 1967 graduate of the University of Oregon School of Journalism, she became a freelance feature writer for national denominational publications and dailies in Astoria, Ore., and Fresno, Calif., before writing and selling ads for seven years for the weekly Standard Register in Tekoa.

A pastor friend on the Spokane Christian Coalition board knew she had started a publication



There’s room for more issues in the archives behind Fig Tree editor Mary Stamp.

called InterChurch in Fresno and suggested the coalition work with her. They recruited people to serve on a steering committee. One was Holy Names Sister Bernadine Casey, who co-founded The Fig Tree with Mary and was associate editor.

“We still have the Holy Names sisters actively involved with editing, writing, planning, mailings, displays and distribution,” said Mary. “Sr. Catherine Ferguson brings her global and national leadership experience to the board, writing, editing and helping raise funds, including an annual grant from the sisters.

“Originally, we saw a need because religion was becoming invisible in media, except to play up contention and divisions,” Mary said, likening its sidelining religious voices to ignoring the voices of women unless they fit the stereotypes of the mostly male-dominated media.

Mary brought a background in ecumenical religion—working to build understanding among the diverse faith communities—and in feature writing.

She used those skills to write features about religion, focusing

Continued on page 4

Community Observance of Holocaust features essays of the 2023 winners

Lorelai Taylor, who wrote the first-prize 2023 Yom Hashoah essay for high school students, will read her essay on “The Danger of Indifference” at the Community Observance of the Holocaust at 7 p.m., Monday, May 6, at Temple Beth Shalom, 1322 E. 30th Ave.

In her essay, she wrote about reviewing historical sources and finding that portions of the U.S. government were indifferent to the events in Europe leading up to and during the Holocaust.

“Indifference, the killer of humanity, is what brings humiliation upon us today. Select individuals and departments in the U.S. government knowingly prevented the immigration of Jewish refugees during World War II and prevented information about the persecution of Jews from reaching the people,” she wrote. “In an attempt to keep protests and uprisings in the U.S. at bay, the government contributed to the deaths of thousands of Jews by not taking action during

World War II.”

Lorelai, who grew up in East Valley schools and is a junior at East Valley High School, wrote the essay as part of the Advanced Placement European history class she was taking. Her teacher, Lori Jacobson, told students about the contest during the Holocaust unit.

“I found it interesting, especially the prompt of looking into what was happening in the U.S. during the Holocaust, because we had not studied that,” she said.

Lorelai said she experienced an “aha” moment when reading the essay prompt about the indifference the U.S. showed in the Holocaust.

“I was not aware of the indifference before and it was shocking that people were indifferent,” she said. “I had not taken into consideration the beliefs and trends in those times that may have led people to be indifferent.

“I don’t justify it, but I understand how being antisemitic was reflected in the actions,” she said.

Continued on page 11

Fig Tree celebrates 40th year with Gala, speaker

Following the Spring Benefit Events, The Fig Tree has shifted to organizing to celebrate its 40th Anniversary with a Gala that will feature keynote speaker Karen Georgia Thompson—story page 7. The Gala includes a dinner with three international dishes prepared by Feast World Kitchen, recognition of people who have made The Fig Tree possible, comments and reflections from regional faith leaders and an interfaith celebration.

The Gala will be from 5 to 8 p.m., Sunday, April 28, at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John, 127 E. 12th Ave.

Tickets for the event are \$50 and sponsors may donate a suggested \$250. There will be scholarships for those who request.

“We know many have just gathered for our Spring Benefit fundraising events in person and online during March,” said Mary Stamp, editor, “but this is a once-in-40-years celebration of The Fig Tree’s influence locally and globally.”

As part of its extended 40th celebration through the rest of 2024, The Fig Tree will scan issues from 1984 to 2006 to add to the pdf files it has of issues since then. Those copies will be available through The Fig Tree’s online archive and Washington Digital Newspapers.

In addition, The Fig Tree will compile two books—one on its history and one with articles and editorials Mary has written.

“We seek sponsors to help make those projects possible,” she said. “In addition, we have a major gift towards starting a long-term investment fund.”

Spring is also the time for updating the Resource Directory and securing its support with ads and community partners.

Mary reported that benefit events have so far raised \$35,400 towards its goal of \$42,000 for benefit/spring donations. Benefit videos are online at thefigtree.org—select videos in the menu.

To rsvp, call 535-4112 or email event@thefigtree.org.

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Artist grateful for Jonah Project's help in hard time

Adam Bodhi, a local artist, will be having a Meet and Greet in collaboration with the Jonah Project from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 11, at the Shadle Library.

Adam seeks to share his story and art as a way for people to connect and raise funds for The Jonah Project, an organization working to end human trafficking.

"I'm interested in promoting The Jonah Project because they helped me at a crucial moment in my life and helped me change my life," said Adam.

Adam believes his experience as someone on the autism spectrum and as trans allows him to approach his art business and

podcast in a different way.

"Since I've been co-hosting 'Relax Let Go Be,' a podcast that connects me with spirituality, I'm getting out of my shell more, breaking out of the box and sticking up for the little guy. My goal is to grow my company, a small art business, to help the community through activism."

During a period when he was homeless, Adam was trafficked by someone he met online who lured him with promises of an apartment.

He found his door out of homelessness was costly.

The Jonah Project assisted him so he could leave that situation and get back on his feet.

Starting in 2018, Adam had

multiple art shows with Spokane libraries, the Queer Art Walk and Celebrate Inclusion for The Arc of Spokane.

Adam's medium is acrylic abstract, some on canvas and some on metal, where he uses and releases his negative energy in his paintings.

"On the podcast, I talk about how my Christianity and faith have allowed me to get through my life experiences, good or bad. I want to spread the message that God can help people solve their problems and move out of difficult situations and find God," Adam said.

"Part of my passion is to help people," Adam said. "The best way to do that is to sponsor non-

profits that assist people. Those are things I'm working towards.

"The main message is that I've been through a lot in my life, and I've worked hard to overcome many things," he said.

Now Adam wants to motivate people who struggle with things like abuse and human trafficking. Other people in the community and with similar stories can inspire others to live differently and even help people.

Adam, who advertises in The Fig Tree, recently worked with The Fig Tree to design a graphic being used for the 40th Anniversary Gala event on Sunday, April 28.

For information, visit diamondartworkscollective@

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Methodist pastor mentors German pastoral intern for two months

Alissa Amestoy, ordained elder and pastor of Spokane Valley United Methodist Church (UMC), mentored German pastoral intern Klara Diesler in February and March.

Over her 19-year career as pastor and campus minister, Alissa has mentored three pastoral interns and 30 campus ministry peer ministers.

Klara is the first pastoral intern at Spokane Valley UMC.

“My model for a reflective internship,” Alissa said, **“is I do, you watch. We talk about it. Then we do. We talk about it. Then you do it, and we talk about it. Once a week we shared what we observed both about my ministry and her ministry.”**

Alissa likes working with young people to help them refine their call to ministry.

Klara enjoyed meeting new people, learning about the culture and being open to differences and similarities in American and German cultures and congregations.

She also appreciated that people in the church were open to doing new things and liked to hear her ideas.

Alissa helped Klara better understand that when a pastor enters a gathering, many grant the pastor more power and authority, so it’s important for the pastor to draw them out and empower them to lead.

To facilitate that, Spokane Valley United Methodist Bible study classes are lay-led.

“Sometimes I need authority to give another perspective and information, but I also like people to think for themselves and see their own call in a biblical passage,” said Klara.

While Alissa’s family moved to Spokane in 1993 and she graduated from North Central High School, her family lived several years in an American community near Bonn, Germany, where her father served with the Navy at the American embassy. In the Defense Department International School she attended, 60 percent of her classmates were children of diplomats.

Alissa has also lived in California, Florida, Virginia and Sicily. Her bachelor’s degree is in anthropology from Washington State University.

The summer of 2001 between college and seminary, she was a global justice volunteer with United Methodist General Board Global Ministries at an orphanage in a Russian village northeast of St. Petersburg.

Alissa has served Spokane Valley UMC since July 2022, after eight years as pastor of Cheney



The Rev. Alissa Amestoy



Klara Diesler

UMC. She was campus minister from 2008 to 2014 for the Wesley Foundation at Washington State University in Pullman, and from 2005 to 2008 at the Wesley Foundation serving the University of California at Los Angeles, after completing a master of divinity degree in 2005 at Claremont School of Theology.

“I like partnering in ministry. I had an associate in Cheney and served in an associate-like role in Pullman and UCLA when I was a campus minister,” she said.

Klara, 22, who is fluent in English, lived in several German communities because her mother was a Methodist pastor and moved during Klara’s school years. After school, Klara’s plan to volunteer a year in Malawi with a church mission agency was thwarted by COVID. So she volunteered at a fair-trade shop in Mainz and wrote articles on fair trade and boycotting vegetables grown in Spain by slave labor.

After six months, she traveled to Sweden and then lived in a mountain hut near Steiermark, Austria, cooking and baking for hikers.

She entered the Methodist theological seminary, Theologische Hochschule Reutlingen, where theology studies generally last three to five years.

“I needed time to find out if I felt called to ministry,” Klara said. **“At first, I did not want to be a pastor, because my mother had only talked about the hard parts of being a pastor. However, after attending an inspiring church retreat, I decided I wanted to begin my journey to become a pastor.”**

Klara learned about Spokane Valley UMC from the Rev. Damian Carruthers, who attended the seminary in Reutlingen and currently serves Cheney UMC.

Alissa and Klara met on Zoom in early December and discussed their goals and what Spokane Valley UMC could offer.

“I mentor in ministry based on it being an equal partnership rather than a senior pastor-intern relationship of hierarchy,” Alissa explained.

Because Alissa lives near Cheney, church members Paul, Renee and Ali Norris, who live near the church, hosted Klara. Paul works at Fairchild. Ali is executive director at Mission Outreach Center. Renee works in Rapid Rehousing with Catholic Charities. They lived in Germany for part of Paul’s military career, and Ali studied German

in college.

“Church leaders were excited about the opportunity,” said Alissa.

Thirteen people from the church went to the airport to welcome her when she arrived Feb 2.

Klara observed worship two Sundays and then helped lead the Ash Wednesday service and preached Feb. 25 when Alissa was away. She also preached on her last Sunday, March 17.

“My internship required that I shadow a minister to see what a pastor’s work is like and then choose a topic to write on. I chose work-life balance,” said Klara, who finds Alissa’s professional boundaries between ministry and a “robust social and family life outside church” a good model.

Alissa said Spokane Valley UMC is “a healthy, thriving congregation with strong lay leadership.”

“As pastor I partner with laity in a complementary way, sharing the work of the church,” she said.

After the first week, Klara went to every committee meeting, helped plan worship and co-led a memorial service. Klara attended small groups and Bible classes, and visited social service agencies the church works with.

“The congregation fell in love with her and wants her to return,”

said Alissa, who found the internship an opportunity to let the congregation see the benefits of a multi-pastor configuration.

Klara found the congregation supportive and appreciative. They prayed for her before her first sermon and affirmed her with hugs and compliments afterwards.

Klara was curious to know about ministry with diverse people, especially about campus ministry with queer college students, so she spent a day in Pullman visiting the Wesley Foundation at Simpson UMC, the ministry Alissa served previously.

“My studies focus on diversity, queer theology and discrimination,” said Klara. **“I’m interested in how those issues are different and the same here and in Germany.”**

She has observed the split in the United Methodist Church between “affirming congregations” that support LGBTQIA+ people and leaders, and those who have separated from the United Methodist Church in the U.S.

“The Methodist Church in Germany fought to stay as one church because we believe a united Church represents the universal message,” she said.

For information, call 924-7262 or email alissaamestoy@gmail.com.

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9:10 am	Presentations on Fr. Nigro
12:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm	Community Prayer Service
2:30 pm	Closing

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Volunteer coordinator started with The Fig Tree as a volunteer

Kaye Hult, administrative and volunteer coordinator, began volunteering at The Fig Tree in early 2011. She did many of the tasks she now assigns volunteers to do.

"Volunteers do all sorts of things. They help with editing, writing, putting out mailings, delivering papers, making phone calls, planning events and doing other office work," she said.

Sometimes Kaye has to scramble to find someone to fill a slot, but "the people who work with us love what we're doing and continually tell me that they value being part of The Fig Tree."

As volunteer coordinator, she understands the tasks she assigns.

Kaye is part of an interfaith volunteer team that helps plan the annual Eastern Washington Legislative Conference to inform people what the Washington State Legislature is doing.

"We bring together people from Catholic Charities, Faith Action Network, Earth Ministry/Interfaith Power and Light, the NAACP and more to plan the event and offer a variety of perspectives on issues," she said. "Through the lens of faiths, we raise discussion on issues, offer information and a chance to think about the concerns so members of faith communities can talk intelligently to the legislators about what they believe is in the best interest of the state."

"**Recently, I was buying** a cup of coffee and talking with a woman in a store. She was railing about how everything she heard that morning on the news



Kaye Hult recruits volunteers for The Fig Tree.

was negative, and she couldn't stand it," Kaye said.

"One talking point for The Fig Tree is that it is a place that shares good news, the good things that are happening. We share stories of people who are out there trying to build up the community and the world," she said.

"There are such people all over the place, but we don't hear those stories," said Kaye. "The Fig Tree is wonderful about getting those stories out."

"**I feel I am part** of an incredibly important mission to tell stories of others, to let the world know there is hope in this place and this time. People are doing phenomenal things right in our own backyard."

"That matters. It sets me thinking about what I'm doing, what I could be doing, what actions I take and how I am doing my part to build up the world," said

Kaye, who also helps write stories about people in North Idaho, where she lives.

Recently she wrote about a barber who donates his time to people who have been homeless by giving them a new look so they can interview for a job.

"It builds up their life. It's a tiny thing, but incredibly important," she said. "I talk with other people who are doing larger things like influencing the way Kootenai County operates."

"**The team I work with** amazes me with their dedication, energy and creativity. It's an amazing place for me to be," said Kaye, noting that The Fig Tree mission fits her sense of what the church is.

Kaye learned about The Fig

Tree through First Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church in Coeur d'Alene, where she began attending soon after moving to North Idaho in 2010, because her husband Al's son and two grandchildren live in Coeur d'Alene. A short while later, she attended Veradale United Church of Christ (UCC).

She began volunteering at The Fig Tree to help build an archival database of articles. Now living in Post Falls, she has been developing relationships and outlets for The Fig Tree in North Idaho.

After Kaye earned a bachelor's degree in social work at the University of Wisconsin in 1970, she attended the Catherine Gibbs Secretarial School in New York, worked six months with Merrill Lynch and two years as a copy editor with the UCC's A.D. magazine and United Church Herald.

She helped build a trimaran sailboat in Connecticut, sailed it and married in 1975. Moving to Boston, she did typesetting, attended Boston University School of Theology from 1980 to 1983 and was ordained a UCC pastor in 1984.

Kaye served two small churches near Toledo, Ohio, until 1988, when she went to Cape Cod for her husband to teach school. She became part-time minister of education at North Falmouth UCC in 1988 and was minister to single adults at First Congre-

gational Church in Falmouth, as well as secretary in a law office until 1996. During that time, she divorced in 1992 and married Al Torres in 1994.

Kaye then served as pastor of the United Church of Bellows Falls, Vt., from 1996 until she retired in 2010.

Before Kaye moved to Coeur d'Alene, Southeastern Vermont Community Action honored her for her religious and community work, including helping start an emergency warming shelter for homeless people.

Kaye now serves reports on North Idaho for The Fig Tree and attends Shalom UCC/Mennonite Church in Spokane.

For information, call 535-4112 or email kaye@thefigtree.org.

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Indigenous Roots names director

Indigenous Roots and Reparation Foundation (IRRF), located in Wenatchee, recently named Twa-le Abrahamson its new executive director.

Twa-le is an enrolled Spokane tribal member and descendant of the Colville, Coeur d'Alene and Navajo Nations. The mother of two daughters, she earned a degree in environmental studies with a minor in restoration ecology at the University of Washington.

She has been a social, health and environmental justice organizer for more than 20 years.

Twa-le and her late mother, Deb Abrahamson, founded SHAWL (Sovereignty, Health, Air, Water, Land) Society, a grassroots organization on the Spokane Reservation to empower and educate people to join in the oversight of toxic uranium mine and nuclear waste sites on the Spokane Reservation.

When she worked several years in natural resource man-

agement for the Spokane Tribe, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized the tribe for its education and outreach.

With Jeff Ferguson, Rachel Crow-Spreading Wings and Yvonne Abrahamson, Twa-le produced "InnerTribal Beat," a Native American news and music radio on environmental news in the Northwest.

Twa-le recently worked for the Washington State Human Rights Commission as a civil rights investigator and serves on the Washington State Office of Equity Community Advisory Board and the Indigenous Environmental Network Board of Directors.

The IRRF is an Indigenous-led nonprofit that supports the rights of the Earth, recognizing the intrinsic value of all species, ecosystems to ensure clear water and air, and return human activity to a balanced, sustainable level.

For information, email info@indigenoustrf.org or visit indigenoustrf.org.

Race Amity Chat
1 p.m., Friday, April 26, 2024
A sacred space to offer prayers, converse, make plans for action and reflect on action
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Essay contest opens teen's eyes to U.S. indifference in World War II

Bella Buckner, a freshman at Gonzaga Prep, was in the eighth grade at Saint George's School last spring, when she wrote an essay on "Indifference and Action" for the 2023 Yom Hashoah essay contest.

As first prize winner for middle school, she will read her essay at the 2024 Observance of the Holocaust at 7 p.m., Monday, May 6.

Bella opened the essay with recognition that Americans during World War II "were indifferent to the events of the Holocaust because they were primarily looking out for their own self-interests, influential voices discouraged Jewish immigration and moral outrage was disconnected from practical action."

To move from indifference to effect positive social change, she calls for communities to educate themselves on the benefits immigrants bring, to offer resources that help people see different perspectives and to share personal stories.

While Bella enjoys cross country, track, basketball, figure skating, biology and violin in her school life, her perspective is shaped by experiences of living abroad with her family.

In her preschool and kindergarten years, she lived in Scotland, where her father, Forrest Buckner, chaplain at Whitworth University, was studying for a doctoral degree in theology at the University of St. Andrews after earning a master's in theology

at Fuller Seminary in California.

Bella not only read books on the Holocaust to learn about America's role, but also lived in Israel twice—when her father was on sabbatical from February to April 2022, and when he took Whitworth students in January 2023.

"For the essay, I appreciated learning about America's impact and found it sad how America was indifferent toward the Jews during World War II," said Bella, who attends both St. Luke Lutheran and Whitworth Chapel.

"Learning about it in detail was helpful," she said, like learning that the St. Louis, a ship filled with Jewish people fleeing the Holocaust, was turned away, and influential people did not want Jews to come to America.

"For me, it seems crazy that we have so much land and so many opportunities, but the system was set up so we did not help them. It is sad and hard to hear the horrors that happened, especially from reading Elie Wiesel's writings, which helped me see the experiences and perspectives of Jewish people."

Bella also learned that not all Americans ignored and shut Jews out. Some people worked to help the Jews.

"Sometimes it's hard for people to do what's right, instead of just looking out for themselves," she said, aware that Americans were detached from the war until Pearl Harbor. "It would



Bella Buckner

have been easy for people who were busy with their own lives to ignore it—and many people did—but there were also people who knew what was happening and were concerned."

Many felt "we were not doing anything wrong. We were not hurting them. It's not so bad," said Bella, "but I think that actually affected the character of those people. Not helping hurt not just the Jewish people, but also the people who didn't help. When we don't do something, it's almost as bad as doing something bad, because we just let bad things continue to happen."

Bella knew there was limited information then about what was happening to the Jewish people, so most Americans didn't fully know the horrors that were happening, but there were rumors

and information people could have accessed.

"Being aware of what happened in the Holocaust can help remind us what happens when we don't do anything and shows us that we need to work to have better awareness," she said. "Even little things, like helping refugees or donating money, make an impact and help us to be better people."

"The Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel was unacceptable," she asserted.

From living in Israel, Bella is aware of conditions under which Palestinians and Israelis have been living. From interacting with Jewish families in 2022 in Jerusalem and from staying part of the time in 2023 with Palestinian families on the West Bank, Bella learned that Palestinians need passes to enter Israel and their limited access to water could be shut off randomly.

She also found an amazing sense of community in Palestine.

"They are like a giant family," she said. "Most are loving people and do not like Hamas or want violence. We have Christian friends in Palestine who are helping each other."

She also learned from Palestinians of their fear of Israelis and from Israelis of their fear of Palestinians as terrorists.

"The Jewish people have been hurt so many times, and fear they will be hurt again," said Bella, concerned that some Israelis, out of fear, may treat Palestinians

like they were treated.

Even though there is no ocean separating Israelis and Palestinians, as there was separating Europe and the U.S. in World War II, Bella found Israelis and Palestinians unaware of each other's experiences.

"There are also groups of Palestinians and Israelis working for peace and reconciliation between Palestinian and Israeli people, aware that both have been hurt and it's hard for everyone," Bella said.

Because the situation is complicated and she sees hate on both sides, she knows peace will be hard, but she cares what happens because she knows and cares about people who are Palestinians and Israelis.

In her essay, Bella offered three ways communities can make positive social change and move beyond indifference.

First is to educate people on the benefits of welcoming refugees who often strengthen the economy and enrich American culture.

Second is to have diverse information sources and know media biases.

Third is to share personal stories, as did one college student who lived in Israel and Palestine for three weeks, told about the plight of two college-aged girls, and raised funds toward their education.

"Personal stories lead people to connect words to action," Bella said.

High school student gains insights into experiences of people targeted

Continued from page 1

Lorelai, who is in the National Honor Society, Modern Music Masters Honor Society, Knowledge Bowl competitions, History Bowl and Future Business Leaders of America, believes it's important to look at different sides of what happened to find the truth and the historic facts.

"The U.S. State Department hid things and blindsided people about what was happening," she said, aware that it came from prejudice and was wrong.

"I tried to understand and be aware, because even though we can't change what happened, we can learn from their mistakes," she observed.

"I learned we need to acknowledge that indifference is still shown as people look away from problems," she said. "It's a natural impulse to want to take the easy way. That's why we need to actively combat indifference in the world and in our daily lives."

Lorelai sees indifference in



Lorelai Taylor

even though we may not agree with them."

Lorelai said it's important to be able to recognize prejudice when it happens.

"After I wrote the essay, I became more aware of indifference," said Lorelai.

Having never attended a Yom Hashoah service or been to the synagogue in Spokane, she said writing the essay opened her eyes and made her aware of the Jewish community here.

From listening to people on the student leadership board with the Holocaust Center for Humanity, she realizes a goal of the essay contest is to educate area students about the dynamics of prejudice and the progression of hate.

her school related to prejudice against the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color.

"We need to acknowledge them as people needing to be treated equally, not judged," she continued. "To fight indifference, we need to recognize the need to treat people equally

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The 26th Get Lit! festival draws writers from the region and world

The 2024 Get Lit! Festival hosts writers from around the region and world with free, ticketed and virtual options.

The 26th anniversary Get Lit! Festival hubs in Spokane, Cheney and Coeur d'Alene are at the Central Library and Montvale Event Center, with venues at Spark Central, Emma Rue's and Hogwash Whiskey Den, said Kate Peterson, festival organizer.

Get Lit! opens with a panel at 11 a.m., Thursday, April 11, at the PUB in Cheney with writers Lauren Kay Johnson, a former military public affairs officer and Afghanistan veteran; Abby Murray, editor of Collateral, a journal on the impact of violent

conflict and beyond combat zones; Shannon Huffman Polson, a poet, nonfiction writer and veteran, and MaxieJane Frazier, a veteran. They will discuss the humanity of war, the impact of war on women and experiences of veterans and their families.

At 7 p.m., Friday, April 12, at Saranac Art Projects, 25 W. Main, there will be a presentation on art inspired by writers with Mary Farrell, Lena Lopez Schindler, Mariah Boyle and Josh Hobson.

At 8 p.m. at the Magic Lantern, Rebekah Wilkins-Pepiton will moderate a discussion on "Artistic Process and Inspiration."

Fiction writer Alma Garcia and poet Luther Hughes will teach craft classes.

A book fair will take place all day Saturday at Montvale Event Center.

"We offer opportunities for attendees to speak and share their work with two open-mics, multiple workshops, a silent reading party, writing time with Spark Central and virtual conversations on books and writing," said Kate.

Carmen Maria Machado, author of the memoir *In the Dream House*, will read at 7 p.m., Saturday, April 13, at the Bing, followed by conversation with Spokane author Sharma Shields. They will discuss women at the

forefront of re-imagining fiction. Sunday events are virtual.

At 2:30 p.m., authors Jeffrey Dale Lofton and Greg Marshall will share about homophobia and ableism.

At 3:30 p.m., writers Sarah Ghazal Ali and Cori Winrock will discuss being a woman, motherhood, erasure, silencing

and telling stories in the midst of violence and grief.

At 6 p.m., authors Sofia Ali-Khan and Jennifer Lunden will reflect on sociopolitical, personal, scientific and historical intersections related to industrial capitalism and social justice.

For information, visit [Get Lit-festival2024.sched.com](http://GetLit-festival2024.sched.com).

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Westminster Presbyterian closes one chapter to be open to the next

Recognizing that there's a birth and death to everything, Sandy Brockway uplifts the vital role Westminster Presbyterian Church has had in West Central Spokane as it prepares to close after 119 years of ministry.

After more than 33 years as pastor, Sandy, 74, will retire.

The final service at Westminster Presbyterian is at 2 p.m., Sunday, April 28.

The church has served the community with a food bank, medical care, job training, after-school programs, young adult mentoring, neighborhood outreach, volunteer services and summer programs, along with worship, Bible study and congregational life.

"Sandy has had a long, amazing ministry," said Sheryl Kinder-Pyle, who, as executive presbyter of the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest, has been consulting with the church on closing.

"The presbytery wants a presence in West Central Spokane and wants to be sure members find a new church home," Sheryl said. "We don't plan to sell the building now and are discerning how we will continue ministry in the neighborhood."

Growing up attending Mission Avenue Presbyterian Church in Spokane, Sandy found faith central in her life. Her carpenter father often did odd jobs at the church.

After graduating in education in 1970 from Eastern Washington State College, she supported herself through school by working three years at Cheney Nursing Home. She then did substitute teaching and supplemented that income working at Sampson-Ayers Music Co., North Central Care Center and the former Custom Glass and Auto.

In 1973, Sandy became church secretary, youth minister and a parish worker at Mission Avenue Presbyterian.

When the Larger Urban Parish of Presbyterian churches started in 1987 with Bethany, Emmanuel, Mission Avenue and Westminster churches, Sandy became its youth director.

"The Larger Urban Parish put small churches together in a larger ministry," she said.

Sandy saw an opportunity and joined studies with three Nimipuu lay pastors from Lapwai to become a commissioned lay pastor (CLP).

After finishing the program in 1990, Sandy became part-time pastor of Westminster Presbyterian, at 2705 W. Boone.

Several ministries were already in place.

The Presbytery Office was at Westminster before Christ Clinic and Christ Kitchen.

The church housed Christ



For 33 years, Sandy Brockway has been pastor of church.

Clinic to provide low-income neighbors with health care. It was run for many years by volunteer doctors who tended to both medical and spiritual needs.

It also housed Christ Kitchen at Westminster to help women seeking to gain job skills so they could escape lives marked by addiction, poverty and abuse. Women came to package dry foods and study the Bible. Now Christ Kitchen also does catering.

Both Christ Clinic and Christ Kitchen eventually moved to 2410 N. Monroe. Christ Clinic has since closed.

"Westminster opened the first food pantry in Spokane," Sandy said. "Others were modeled on it." The Spokane Food Bank, which started in 1971, supplied Westminster and nine other food bank sites with mostly canned goods and some dried beans and fruit.

The Spokane Food Bank became Second Harvest, which is part of Feeding America and supplies food in Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

Second Harvest continued to supply food and to supplement the Westminster Presbyterian Food Bank director's salary until 2023, Sandy said.

"For many years, the food bank gave government-issued surplus food such as flour and cheese," she added. "People lined up around the block to get food."

It also operated with donations from Second Harvest and from other Presbyterian churches, including Emmanuel, Hamblen,

Knox, Northwood, Manito and Shadle Park.

"Those churches provided funding and volunteers, as well as food," she said.

Westminster also participated in founding and supporting Our Place Community Outreach Center at 1509 W. College Ave., sending funds and volunteers. She served on the West Central Ministries group of congregations that founded Our Place in 1988 and supported it for many years.

Our Place provides basic needs and services for West Central neighbors. It has a large food pantry and a loading dock to receive food.

"We transferred our clothing bank to Our Place," Sandy said.

The church, which was also a drop-in center for people needing help, joined six Presbyterian churches in 2002 to build a Habitat for Humanity house nearby and helped start COPS West, a neighborhood police station.

Westminster Presbyterian also had Boy Scout Troop #1.

Each year since 1992, five to six Whitworth University graduates lived nearby at 2612

W. Gardner in Westminster House. They helped with Logos, a Wednesday Bible study for children ages five to 12. They also helped with the after-school program for 40 children from Holmes Elementary School who came for activities and homework help. It was a safe drop-in center for children.

The graduates paid \$50 a month for rent to live in Westminster House. Along with other half-time jobs, they served the church and neighborhood. Several went on into various types of ministry careers.

During the summers, youth groups came from churches in Tampa, Fla., Beaverton, Ore., and other communities around the nation to lead vacation Bible school programs.

Westminster Presbyterian also offered its building for a weight-loss group, a singing group and a Native American neighborhood group led by retired Presbyterian pastor Tom Sutherland. A 2005 Fig Tree article reported that the church also offered cooking classes through Washington State University and Native American worship services.

Sandy said her ministry of presence in the neighborhood has been one of "providing love for the unloved."

The congregation drew both people who needed care and who

would give care to each other.

The West Central area, which once was a middle-class neighborhood, became what was known as "felony flats," with many low-income, marginalized families and people caught in drug addiction and gangs living in deteriorating homes, Sandy said. Now Kendall Yards townhomes border it on the south.

At its peak, Westminster had 199 members. Now it has 26 members, with 15 to 26 attending Sundays, including some from the neighborhood. When Sandy came, there were 85.

Along with Sunday worship, there is a Thursday morning Bible study.

"We went from being a mission church with an active ministry to a church that is struggling," Sandy said.

"I have used my gifts to maintain the ministry through ups and downs, but now the presbytery will close the church and consider options to continue its presence through new use of the building and property," said Sandy, who will help church members find places to worship.

Sandy expects many may attend Emmanuel Presbyterian, because Westminster and Emmanuel worshiped together six times a year for many years.

For information, call 328-5002.

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Spring Calendar of Events

- Apr 20** Earth Day River Clean Up
- Apr 25** 10th Annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival
- June 8** Expo River Clean Up - *details to come*
- Nov 7** Spoken River 2024 - *details to come*

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Vigilance, perseverance, solidarity needed in face of racism, hate

Vigilance, perseverance and solidarity are and will always be needed. We can never assume because of some progress that hate, bigotry, racism, violence or intolerance are fully overcome, although overcoming was the dream, hope and theme song of the 1960s and since.

We always must be ready to take the risk of speaking out and being targeted by consistently raising our voices and putting our livelihoods and lives on the line. We must continue to educate and resist hate like the few who shouted racial slurs, waved a confederate flag and revved their big truck engines to intimidate the University of Utah women's basketball team going to dinner in Coeur d'Alene.

Their voices and intolerance made the headlines even though other voices from the community stood in solidarity with the team that is racially diverse as are most college campuses.

The community is ashamed that image of them went out again. Residents, businesses and government don't want Coeur d'Alene known for intolerance that drives away tourists and does not represent the sentiment of most people in the community.

The hate reinforces the assumption of groups who choose not to meet in Eastern Washington or North Idaho because such racism exists. What solidarity might help overcome the stigma that furthers the image we're in a haven for bigots? What actions, coverage and presence will strengthen area residents who promote diversity and decry intolerance and hate?

In the 1960s, people of faith and conscience went to the South in solidarity

with the civil rights advocates who invited their help. Southern Poverty Law Center attorneys helped drive out the Aryan Nations here in the 1990s.

What solidarity is needed here today?

As human rights leader Tony Stewart said in a press conference, those who hate feel license to act on their hate because of the current tone of national politics in which bigotry is seen as a ticket to power.

It's not freedom of speech when ultra-conservatives seek to ban books, ban Black history, ban indigenous history, ban affirmative action, ban diversity-equity-inclusion, ban LGBTQIA+ voices, ban immigration and silence others.

Those espousing bigotry and hate use racial slurs and threats to silence voices for human rights and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). They threaten, demean and undermine the confidence, safety, rights and livelihoods of people.

Being white does not equate to being white supremacist or white nationalist but calls for responsibility. In a predominantly white area, most of those speaking out against the hate are white. That does not mean they are safe when they speak or that they won't be targeted by the few.

The incident represents why the Gonzaga Center for the Study of Hate, the Human Rights Education Institute (HREI), the Kootenai County Task Force for Human Relations, the Bonner County Human Rights Task Force, Human Rights Spokane, NAACP Spokane—along with the antiracism, antisemitism and anti-islamophobia efforts of faith communities, schools, businesses, human services, non-

profits and governments—must not allow themselves to be distracted by progress or when voices of hate tone down.

It's why the Equal Rights Act, Civil Rights Act, Voters Rights Act, affirmative action and diversity-equity-inclusion efforts were, are and always will be crucial.

We see how backlash to electing a Black president still reverberates in the rhetoric of some political candidates who are trying to silence the efforts needed so our nation and our world can live together in peace and unafraid. We want to be able to celebrate our rich multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural, multifait diversity so we learn from each other and with each other.

That's why schools, universities, businesses, nonprofits, governments and faiths do need diversity training and multiethnic studies.

That's why NAACP Spokane was ready to lead a "Town Hall about Racist Language" in a newsletter sent to parents at Wilson Elementary inviting students to a Jazz Night that would "take a trip back to the times of slavery in America" to discover how jazz grew. It invited students to dress as slaves or hobos.

The NAACP Spokane responded saying this type of entertainment is deplorable, unacceptable and demeaning to African Americans, especially to youth. The town hall addressed what students and teachers of color experience in Spokane public schools when such incidents happen.

The Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane continues to offer BOLD (Building Organizing Leadership Development) to build awareness of race and

class, breaking the silence in the region to reject racism and fearmongering.

The Human Rights Education Institute was also present in Coeur d'Alene to immediately speak up about the racial incident the NCAA visiting college basketball team experienced.

In a statement, they said it stirred "a high volume of challenging and uplifting conversations with community members," affirming that "the actions of a few individuals do not exemplify our region."

They call for rising above the racist rhetoric to say there is no tolerance in Coeur d'Alene or the region for "discrimination or hateful acts that seek to intimidate or cause harm and insecurity within our communities, especially among newcomers and visitors. All are welcome here."

HREI also called for working with local leaders to promote vigilance and education and to bring people together to be part of the change that makes the world just for everyone.

They affirmed their commitment to reflect on such tragedies, fight for equality for all, investigate their own privilege, always speak in love, unity and empathy, offer HREI space for inclusive, safe conversations, work to reduce poverty, train local law enforcement on racial equity, increase understanding to reduce prejudice, equip educators in antiracism and oppose any form of racism.

No place will be safe or welcoming if we cave into the backlash, bigotry and threats that always follow any progress toward becoming the beloved community.

Mary Stamp - editor



Benefit speakers sum up their reasons for supporting The Fig Tree

In my 18-year involvement with homeless services and shelters, I started doing documentaries on homelessness in greater Spokane and wrote a book about Camp Hope that included voices of people I might not agree with. We need to find common ground, so we work together to address community issues. That represents what I call building shalom. Mary says shalom is a goal of The Fig Tree. That's not just peace. It's the wholeness, restoration and well-being for everyone in our community.

Shalom for the homeless is a constant theme of my documentary work.

To show a better optic about people experiencing homelessness, we needed to tell a different story, to set a better tone than "us against them." It's about us working together to build the shalom of everyone in our community, including the homeless. A chapter of my book, *A Place to Exist: The True and Untold Story of Camp Hope*, is on building shalom. What does that have to do with The Fig Tree? In Matt. 25, Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers—or shalom makers.

The Fig Tree helps us find common ground and build shalom. That's why I support it and feel encouraged when they include a story about me. If that contributes to us as a community finding common ground and building shalom, then I'm all in.

The Fig Tree also publishes the Resource Directory. It's absolute gold. Every homeless service provider in our city has a copy on their desk or within reach. It provides hundreds of copies to the Spokane Homeless Coalition and Spokane Homeless Connect. It's an essential resource.



Maurice Smith

We consume the directory on a regular basis looking for resources, so I encourage us to support The Fig Tree, common ground and shalom building as we move into the future.

About 35 years ago, my husband Troy and I came through Fairchild. There was no Spanish newspaper, so I talked with Hispanics here and started La Prensa Bilingue.

When I was out in the community, I often saw Mary taking photos. I learned she published a newspaper. That was inspiring because I was also doing a newspaper. She encouraged me. She gave me hope saying, "You can do it."

Now she has 40 years of doing the newspaper. I have 28 years now. I can look forward to more. She's a good example.

When we came, Spokane was only 2 or 3 percent minorities. When I walk around even now, I hardly see any people of color. One of the things I love about The Fig Tree is all the information about diversity, equity and inclusion, and what we need for the community to flourish. It's important to know we have a multicultural community, so we are able to understand each other. I used to go to places where I was the only minority in the room but there was always Mary.

The Fig Tree is a guiding light, so I definitely think we need to support this newspaper financially and by sharing stories. It is the best thing that we have for this community.

Being Buddhist, I also love that we can talk about any religion in this paper. I love the paper and the resource directory. It has helped me a lot.



Maria Gaines

I'm a sister of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. The Fig Tree is important to the Inland Northwest community as an ecumenical, interfaith, diverse newspaper and other media.

Forty years ago, my community had a dedicated member, Sister Bernadine Casey, who had been a high school French and English teacher. She became convinced about the importance of media, especially radio, as a way to educate in order to shape and inform values.

When she moved from Seattle to Spokane, she met Mary Stamp, who was starting a newspaper. So Bernadine shifted her energies from radio and to The Fig Tree and began to help write for and edit the paper. She was meticulous and never missed anything in editing. Through the years, many sisters have served as writers, editors, board members and volunteers. With the annual financial support of my religious community, we attest to the importance of The Fig Tree.

A prayer I say frequently says, "In the search, a flicker of hope arises, enough to keep me searching for you, God, who are slowly revealed in the tiny sparks of daily encounters."

The Fig Tree provides our community with journalism. Its articles are a tiny spark of hope—or bigger one—but that tiny spark of hope in our daily encounters inspires us.

The faithful people and activities in The Fig Tree feature stories give us examples that motivate us to work for justice, equity, harmony and the common good. Join with the Sisters of the Holy Names in continuing The Fig Tree legacy with your support.



Catherine Ferguson

We need to commit to "the why"—why we do things is more important than what we do.

Great leaders inspire others and are inspired by others.

They give others a sense of purpose, importance and belonging. They acknowledge others' good works. They give others a voice and they share their stories.

Great leaders and organizations start with asking, "Why?" Which is our purpose, cause or belief? Why does The Fig Tree, a nonprofit grassroots newspaper exist? Why should anyone support it?

I believe The Fig Tree starts with why. In everything they say and do the why is clear. We are here today to celebrate the 40th year of The Fig Tree.

I believe the overwhelming majority of us in this room are here because we know and believe in the why of Mary Stamp. At some point along our way, Mary has inspired us to serve on the board, to provide her office and distribution space, and to tell our stories in The Fig Tree.

The why of Mary began with her parents and upbringing, and her early exposure to people of the world, including two from a mission school and hospital in Zimbabwe. She recalled being inspired by their stories. Her interest in listening to the stories of ordinary people, and how their faith and values intersect with what they do inspires her journalism.

Every encounter with another human being, she said, is an encounter with the sacred, with the all-being. Mary continues to be inspired by stories of ordinary people.

Let us celebrate the life of The Fig Tree and support the why of it with our dollars.



Bob Bartlett

Calendar of Events

Send submissions to development@thefigtree.org.
The telephone area code is (509) unless otherwise listed.

- Apr 2** • **WA Covenant Homeownership Act**, Northwest Fair Housing Alliance, virtual, 10 a.m., wshfc.org/covenant
- Apr 2, 4** • **2024 Fair Housing Plan**, City of Spokane Forum, NE Community Center, 4001 N. Cook, Tues 6 p.m. or on Zoom, Thurs noon, execdir@nwfairhouse.org
- Apr 3-25** • **Sing, Say, Dance & Play**, Holy Names Music Center, 3910 W. Custer, 326-9516, dates/times@hnmc.org
- Apr 3** • **Shaping Asian American Wellbeing**, Hemmingson, Gonzaga, 6 to 7:30 p.m., bit.ly/acls-forge
- Apr 3-4** • **International Uranium Film Festival**, Magic Lantern Theatre, 25 W. Main, 5:30 to 9 p.m., 209-2383
- Apr 3, 10, 17, 24** • **Spokane Community Against Racism**, Saranac, 19 W. Main, noon, scarspokane.org
- **Open Meditation**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 5:30 to 7 p.m., 206-979-5570
- Apr 3, 17** • **Spokane Folklore Society Contra Dance**, Woman's Club, 1428 W. Ninth, 7:15 p.m., 838-2160
- Apr 4** • **What's Happening for Expo '74 50th Anniversary**, Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 4 p.m., 444-5390
- **Strengthening Families Coalition**, Human Rights Education Institute, 414 W. Fort Grounds Dr., Coeur d'Alene (CdA), 4:30 to 6 p.m., hrei.org
- Apr 4, 23** • **Medicare Counseling**, Rock Pointe Tower, 316 W. Boone, Ste 260, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., altcew.org > events
- Apr 4, 11, 18, 25** • **ESL Café: A Cup of Conversation**, Literacy Project of North Idaho, CdA Library, 10 a.m., cdalibrary.org
- Apr 4, May 2** • **Lawyer in the Library**, CdA Library, Idaho Volunteer Lawyers, 4 to 6 p.m., register,cdalibrary.org/library-events/lawyer
- Apr 5** • **Spring Resource Carnival**, SNAP, The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 319-3036, snapwa.org/tax
- Apr 5-7** • **Divine Mercy Weekend: Spiritual Warfare**, Divine Mercy and Healing, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, Fr. Ken Geraci, ihrc.net
- Apr 6** • **Standing Like a Tree: Self-Discovery Retreat for Women**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., ruthafletcher.com
- **Free Tax Prep**, Latinos en Spokane, 10 a.m., latinosenspokane.org
- Apr 6, 13, 20, 27** • **Voices Together Children's Choir**, Holy Names Music Center, 1 to 3 p.m., music@hnmc.org
- Apr 6-7** • **National Women's Expo**, Spokane County Fair & Expo Center, womensexpo2@gmail.com
- Apr 7** • **Bachathon**, American Guild of Organists, see p. 3, 402-319-1716
- Apr 7, 14, 21, 28** • **Spokane Community Against Racism** Coffee, Saranac, 19 W. Main, 9 a.m., scarspokane.org
- Apr 8** • **How to Use the Fig Tree's Resource Directory**, Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 5:30 p.m., 535-4112
- To Apr 8** • **Family Promise Match Madness Fundraiser**, 747-5487, familypromiseofspokane.org
- Apr 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, May 1** • **Prevent Falls with A Matter of Balance**, philip.helean@dshs.wa.gov
- Apr 9** • **Family Law Clinic**, MIA Spokane, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., 869-0876
- **Peace and Justice Action Committee**, Zoom, 5:30 p.m. ucarter@pjals.org
- **Freedom of the Press** in Indian Country, Kenworthy, 508 S. Main, Moscow, 6:30 to 9 p.m., (209) 669-4080
- **Spokane Symphony: Chamber Soiree**, Rockwood Retirement, 221 E. Rockwood, 7 p.m., 838-3200
- Apr 10** • **Executive Director Coffee Hour**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, online, 10 a.m., nonprofitwa.org
- **Working Families Tax Credit Assistance**, Colfax Library, 102 S. Main, 1 to 6 p.m., cydney@whitcolib.org
- **History Hour Lecture: Wilderness Cathedral: Idaho's Oldest Building—Cataldo Mission**, CdA Library, 5:30 p.m.; 1213 W. Railroad, 7:30 p.m., (208) 465-3591
- Apr 11** • **Reuse Workshop**, Mobius Discovery Center, 331 N. Post, 10 a.m., 321-7137
- **Free Immigration Clinic**, Latinos en Spokane, 1502 N. Monroe, 5 to 7 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- **CDAIDE Care Affair**, The Coeur d'Alene Resort, 5 to 8:30 p.m. auctria.events/CDAIDECareAffair
- **General Meeting, Spokane NAACP**, Location TBA, 6 p.m., spkncpbr@gmail.com
- Apr 11, 25** • **Showing Up for Racial Justice**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS), Zoom, 5:30 p.m., slichty@pjals.org
- Apr 11-14** • **GetLit! Festival**, see p. 12, getlitfestival.schedule
- Apr 12** • **Expo '74: 50 Years of Environmental Justice**, Gonzaga School of Law, 721 N. Cincinnati, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., 747-3304
- **Fair Housing Overview Training**, Northwest Fair Housing Alliance, Better Health Together, The Hive, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 325-2665
- **Pamyua**, Inuit Music, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts, 211 E. Desmet, 313-2787, mwpac@gonzaga.edu
- **Chocolate and Champagne Gala**, Lutheran Community Services Northwest, Historic Davenport Hotel, 6 to 8:30 p.m., amarinoni@lcsnw.org
- Apr 13** • **Tools for Running an Effective Nonprofit**, Nonprofit Association of WA, 900 W. 4th, Newport, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., nonprofitwa.org
- **Holistic Festival**, CenterPlace, 2426 N. Discovery, Spokane Valley, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 468-9001
- **Community Baby Shower**, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, 500 S. Stone, 12 to 2 p.m., for new and expecting parents, and parents of children 3 or under, tinyurl.com/4ht7b287
- **Medical Lake Geo-Walk & Water Sampling**, with Chad Pritchard, EWU geologist, Waterfront Park, 1386 S. Lefevre, Medical Lake, 1 to 3:30 p.m., 869-0205
- **April Showers Auction**, The Land's Council, Barrister

- Winery, 5 to 9 p.m., aparrish@landscouncil.org
- **Spokane Symphony Pops 5: Bugs Bunny** at the Symphony, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m., 624-1200
- **Sing the World Awake**, Moira Smiley and choir, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts, 211 E. Desmet, 7:30 to 9 p.m., 313-2787
- Apr 13, 14** • **Palouse Patchers Quilt Show**, Latah County Fairgrounds, 1021 Harold, Moscow, Sat., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., palousepatchers.org
- Apr 14** • **Sharing the Dharma Day**, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Ln, Newport, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 447-5549
- Apr 16** • **Communities in Schools/Bite2Go** Stuffing, Second Harvest, 1234 E. Front, 3 to 5 p.m., spokane.ciswa.org
- **PJALS Member Meeting**, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., imoore@pjals.org
- Apr 17** • **Awareness Town Hall** for Aging Adults, Corbin Center, 827 W. Cleveland, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., bit.ly/3OKiWIL
- **Free Legal Clinic**, Latinos en Spokane, 5 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- Apr 18** • **Remembering Fr. Armand Nigro, SJ**, A Day of Healing, Fr. Michael Maher SJ, 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., RSVP, 448-1224, ihrc.net
- **Mental Health First Aid**, Providence Community Wellness, 1313 N. Atlantic, Ste 4900, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., register at 473-6007
- **Thursday Night Live**, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. First, 5 to 8 p.m., 456-3931
- **Han-Luen Kantzer Koline Speaker**, Weyerhaeuser Hall, Whitworth, 7 p.m., see p. 3
- Apr 19** • **Diversity & Social Justice in Education**, Hemmingson, Gonzaga, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., bynum@gonzaga.edu
- Apr 20** • **Sandy Williams Justice Center** Free Drop-In Legal Clinic and First Anniversary, Carl Maxey Center, Justice Mary Yu, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., shayla@carlmaxeycenter.org
- **Walk for Autism Acceptance 2024**, Kootenai County Fairgrounds, CdA, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.,
- **Earth Day River Cleanup**, Spokane Riverkeeper, High Bridge, Latah Creek, 10 a.m., 464-7614
- **Earth Day Celebration**, "The Planet vs. Plastics," CdA Library, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., jsmithson@cdalibrary.org
- **Earth Day with the Symphony: Children's Program**, CdA Library, 11 a.m., jsmithson@cdalibrary.org
- **Scripture Circle** with Tara Owens from Anam Cara, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 3 to 6 p.m., harmonywoods.org
- **Spokane Symphony Masterworks 8: Power to the People**, The Fox, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m., 624-1200
- **Learning from the South: The Black Experience and Reform in Republican China**, University of Idaho Student Union, 875 S. Line, Moscow, (208) 885-7110
- Apr 21** • **Earth Day Clean Up Hike**, Church of Gaia, 2 to 4 p.m., hello@churchgaia.org
- **Earth Day Centennial Trail Clean-Up**, 2176 N. Barker, Spokane Valley, 2 to 3:30 p.m., 903-0440, shawna@greenlightning.llc
- Apr 23** • **"Without Them, I Am Lost,"** film and conversation, Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, Hemmingson, Gonzaga, 6 to 7:30 p.m., climateinstitute@gonzaga.edu
- Apr 25** • **SFCC Job Fair**, 3410 Whistalks Way, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 533-3521, sfcc.careers@sfcc.spokane.edu
- **Building Bridges to Equity: Maternal Health in Communities of Color**, YWCA, The Hive, 5 to 7 p.m., virtual.ywcaspokane.org/equity4all
- **Wild and Scenic Film Festival**, Spokane Riverkeeper, The Garland Theater, 924 W. Garland, 5:30 p.m., katie@spokaneriverkeeper.org
- Apr 26** • **A Woman's Worth Annual Gala**, Hemmingson, Gonzaga, 6 p.m., gghallman@aww.community
- **Evening with Jess Walter** and Spokane Symphony, The Fox, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m., 624-1200
- Apr 26-27** • **"Faith, Science and Beauty in the Stars,"** Astronomy Retreat, see p. 2, ihrc.net, 448-1224
- Apr 26-28** • **Getting Honest about Attachment**, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Ln, Newport, 3 p.m., 447-5549
- Apr 27** • **El Mercado**, Latinos En Spokane, West Central Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- **All That Jazz**, North East Youth Center Dinner & Auction Fundraiser, Doubletree, 322 N. Spokane Falls, 5:30 p.m., 482-0708, sheilag@spokaneeyc.org
- **Bach to the Future: Musical Journey from Classical Roots to Rock Revolution**, Holy Names Music Center, 7 p.m., hnmc.org
- Apr 27, 28** • **Whitworth Polynesian Club** Dinner and Luau, Hixon Union Building 5 p.m., and Field House 7 p.m., Sun, 1 p.m.
- Apr 28** • **"Sharing Stories: Empowering People,"** The Fig Tree 40th Anniversary Gala, St. John's Cathedral, 5 to 8 p.m., for tickets call 535-4112, or email event@thefigtree.org
- Apr 29** • **Gonzaga Symphony Orchestra** Concert, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts, Gonzaga, 7:30 to 9 p.m., mwpac@gonzaga.edu
- May 1** • **NAMI Walks Spokane**, Riverfront Park, 1 mile, 7:30 to 10 a.m. namiwalks.org/index.cfm
- **The Power of Connection**, SNAP Fundraiser, Central Library, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., snapwa.org
- May 2** • **The Fig Tree Benefit/Development Committee**, Zoom, 12 to 1 p.m., development@thefigtree.org
- **The Fig Tree Board**, Zoom 1 to 3 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org
- May 4** • **Spring Fling Bazaar**, Millwood Presbyterian, 3223 N. Marguerite, sfetcho2000@yahoo.com

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Stories on organizing in Preston, UK, raise questions of approach

Stories of communities organizing

Column by Cameron Conner

For the last 14 years, while many of England's policies slashed tax rates, gutted social systems and eroded corporate regulation, progressive local governments tacked to the center, except for one.

Nearly 10 years ago, the city of Preston embarked on a program of ultra-localism that sought to redirect wealth back into the local economy and place control into the hands of people.

These policies kept hundreds of millions of pounds in the local economy, strengthened small businesses and improved the standard of living. PricewaterhouseCoopers named Preston the UK's "most improved city" in 2018.

Today the "Preston Model" has been used as a template by city officials from Cleveland to Sydney. It sparked an international movement for a people-centered approach to economic development, but sailing against the tide of national policy hasn't been easy for Preston, and they have faced challenges.

Since I applied for the Watson Fellowship, visiting Preston was at the top of my list. I spent four weeks there as my last stop in the UK.

Preston was a place to see where policy and organizing met.

My question was, in a community-focused economy, what is the role of community organizing in developing people who want to be and are capable of being at the table?

I offer two stories from Preston. One showcases the potential for a community-focused economic development approach. The other is a cautionary tale about what happens when such an approach puts creating programs ahead of developing people.

Story 1: A new way of economic development began with the banking crash. In the early 2000s, the Preston City Council planned to build a massive shopping mall, the Tithebarn, replacing the city center of empty shops. Tithebarn was also to be the lifeline for the city with



Cameron Conner

England's highest suicide rate.

When the 2008 recession reached Preston, cranes stopped, and businesses pulled out. By 2011, the plan was dead.

The crisis created an opportunity. A new council member, Matthew Brown of the liberal Labor Party, had an unusual idea.

He proposed paying people in Preston a fair living wage and putting the government's support behind local businesses to grow and reinvest in local people, not in outside businesses.

In 2012, Preston became the first living wage employer in Northern England. The council helped families sign up for community credit unions that invested savings locally. It began organizing other major area economic actors—a hospital, regional university, public housing association and the municipally owned Harris Museum.

These "anchor institutions" are tied to the community and unlikely to leave.

The team began working with them to increase local purchasing. As more institutions joined the alliance, local procurement in the county increased from 39 percent of funds spent in 2012 to 79.2 percent in 2017. An additional £200m stayed in the county.

The county's pension fund moved from the stock market to local investments, like building student accommodations.

In 2015, the county wanted healthier meals for school children and asked local businesses

to make bite-size contracts with local suppliers and farmers, providing a £2m boost.

In the first months of COVID, 80 employees were to be laid off from a local manufacturing plant. The council asked the employer to repurpose the plant to make masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) that was purchased by the anchor institutions, especially the hospital. The company made money, people kept their jobs and the spread of the virus was slowed.

The economy in story 1 worked for the people. On the other hand, story 2 asks, "Where are the people?"

Matthew eventually realized the average resident of Preston had no clue about the Preston Model or the philosophy of community wealth building. He realized this was a problem for an economic idea that said it puts people first. The council succeeded in organizing anchor institutions to keep money local but struggled to engage local people and form co-ops.

While some new cooperatives started, there was resistance to co-ops.

Chris Davis, a community leader, launched co-ops out of the community center he co-founded. He and working-class neighbors had a co-op that improved the energy efficiency of local buildings and created new employment and skills for local people.

Local builders learned about retrofitting. They had a grant to retrofit in their own community center as a model. They trained folks in highly skilled, high-wage jobs.

Chris used the "if you build it, they will come" fallacy.

It involves well-meaning experts coming up with a program to address a community need

only to find when everything is in place that nobody wants it. They created a program before they built a constituency.

A better axiom is: "if they come, you should build it." Start where people are. If there is energy, move forward together. One co-op development consultant turned the corner by asking, "What are the challenges in your community? Maybe a cooperative is a tool that you can use to fix it."

The Preston Model is not the answer.

Comparing Preston and Barcelona, which I reported on in an earlier column, both have the same goals: use corporate investment to strengthen the common good, enable people to have a larger say in politics and the economy and invest in what people actually need.

How they go about it differs.

In Barcelona, organizers asked neighbors, "What issues does your family face?" In Sants, it was childcare and fresh groceries. Organizers then asked, "Do you want to do something about it?" When people emerged, they presented the co-op as one tool.

Now, there are more than 35 community-run co-ops in Sants.

In Preston, people learned the limits of their top-down approach. There is a growing interest in the slow, relational work of community organizing.

A community-focused economy is not possible without the political education and agency community organizing provides. Yet the Preston Model offers organizers a vision for new policies with potential dividends in local contexts.

The existence of that model speaks to one city's courage to do things differently.

Cameron Conner's columns for The Fig Tree are selected from blogs he is writing during his Watkins Fellowship stays in Spain, the UK, South Africa and Mongolia. To follow his stories of communities organizing around the world visit cameron-norbuconner.com/blog.

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