

42ND YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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FEATURES 85+ EVENTS



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

# Ecumenism links rural churches

By Mary Stamp

With funding from Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, clergy, deacons and lay leaders in rural and small towns of Idaho, Central and Eastern Washington and parts of Oregon have been gathering since fall of 2025 to explore how their common understandings of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and their ministries can be built on for deeper collaboration.

They are discovering how ecumenical ties can have an impact in their communities, said Bishop Meggan Manlove of the Northwest Intermountain Synod (NWIM) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The synod overlaps geographically with five Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) presbyteries, two United Church of Christ (UCC) conferences, two dioceses of The Episcopal Church and several districts of the Greater Northwest Area of the United Methodist Church (UMC).

The ELCA has several “full communion” agreements formalizing their shared understandings of baptism, Eucharist and ministry. It has had such relationships



Lutheran Bishop Meggan Manlove values unity in small and rural towns.

Photo courtesy of Northwest Intermountain Synod

with the UCC, PCUSA and Reformed Church in America since 1997, with the Moravian Church in America since 1991, with the Episcopal Church since 2001 and with the UMC since 2009.

Meggan’s heart for rural communities comes from growing up in Custer, S.D., a tourist town in the Black Hills surrounded by ranching, logging and mining. After graduating from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 2002, she did an internship in 2003 and 2004 at Emmanuel Lutheran and campus ministry in Cheney. From 2004 to 2010, she served the Lutheran church in Soldier, Iowa, a village of 200 near the border with Nebraska. She then served in Nampa, Idaho, until she was elected bishop three years ago.

Meggan is aware that “in rural and small-town America, churches, like schools, are a third space beyond work and home where people find interaction that is the glue of the community.”

Churches offer childcare, food banks, space for AA groups, voting, mammograms, health clinics, senior gatherings, monthly meals and more, so it’s important for

*Continued on page 4*

## Utility helps 50 organizations meet energy needs and serve their clients

Ana Matthews, customer engagement manager at Avista Utilities, co-manages Avista’s Named Communities Investment Fund (NCIF) with Kristine Meyer, Avista Foundation executive director and NCIF program manager.

The competitive grant program is one way for Avista to ensure customers benefit equitably and meet state clean energy requirements.

The program has supported more than 50 organizations

since it started—including several faith-based and nonprofit groups—by addressing their energy needs so they can direct more resources to serving their clients.

Ana joined Avista in 2011 to manage the company’s bill assistance program. In that role, she led a collaborative effort with key partners to redesign the program and make it more accessible.

After the Washington Legislature passed the Clean Energy

Transformation Act (CETA) in 2019, requiring all electricity to be carbon free by 2045, she shifted in 2022 to work with Kristine and others to launch Avista’s initiative to ensure equitable distribution of energy benefits to underserved customers through NCIF.

Avista is the state’s only investor-owned utility with a program like this, Ana said.

“The law designates certain groups as ‘named communities,’ based on areas identified by the Department of Health’s Environmental Health Disparities map and vulnerable populations recognized by Avista’s Equity Advisory Group,” she said.

That group, created under CETA, advises the company how to design and carry out clean energy programs to advance equity.

Ana said energy efficiency is central to Avista’s clean-energy strategy.

“Conservation, which results in using less energy, is the most cost-effective way to achieve clean energy,” said Ana.

*Continued on page 6*

## Benefit participants donate and network

The joy of the annual Benefit Lunch in person and Breakfast-Time Benefit online is that they are times to gather face to face with the many people who make The Fig Tree possible, said editor Mary Stamp.

“There are so many smiling faces, so many warm hugs, so many brief conversations that come from a depth of relationships,” she added. “I love what I do, but I love it that so many people appreciate what our staff and volunteers do, and that it makes a difference for their lives.”

The speakers and a video focus attention on the theme. This year it was “Persist Together: Inspire Miracles.” That provides an opportunity to reflect on what is happening in the community, region and world.

“The theme is food for thought, which we hope each issue of The Fig Tree is, too,” Mary continued.

She admitted it’s a lot of work to plan the Spring Benefit, but it is work well worth it to participate in such events.

Spring Benefit proceeds for sponsors for 2026 were at \$42,520 as of press time, plus pledges. Seventeen attendees volunteered to help mail, deliver, write, edit and plan events.

“A big thank you to everyone for coming, for smiling, for conversing, for sharing ideas, for giving, for volunteering, for making The Fig Tree better,” said Mary.

“The thematic video is posted on YouTube, along with the videos of each speaker. We will also have some of the extended comments from those who participated in making the thematic video,” she explained, “and we will continue to ask for funds to meet what it takes to publish the newspaper and directory.”

For information and to make donations or volunteer, visit [thefigtree.org](http://thefigtree.org) and click on Support Us to send donations or volunteer and on Videos to see and share The Fig Tree story.

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## Religion News Briefs

### Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100  
 CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111  
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#### Global Christians challenge war in Middle East

The World Council of Churches, Middle East Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Methodist Council, Mennonite World Conference, Christian Conference of Asia and ACT Alliance joined to voice concern about the humanitarian and social impacts of conflict in the Middle East, and the threat it poses to the peace and security in the region and world.

"Having endured years of complex political, economic and social challenges, Iran's 92 million people now face the conflict and an uncertain future," they said. "Humanitarian risks and suffering will escalate the longer the conflict continues."

**The groups are concerned about violations** of international humanitarian law in the military operations.

"As a matter of moral and legal obligation, all conflict participants must protect civilians from harm and refrain from targeting civilian areas and infrastructure," they said. "We fear the conflict may lead to prolonged violence and instability."

"Along with society in Iran and the region, churches and Christian communities face dangers," they add. "The joint Israeli and U.S. attacks are illegal under international law."

**The partners urge Israel and the U.S.** not to create desolation and call it peace. They must take responsibility for their actions and the future of the Iranian people whose freedom they claim to promote.

As Christians, they do not recognize any divine license to kill, destroy, displace or occupy, they affirm that "war is incompatible with God's nature and will for humanity and against Christian principles."

**They lament the absence of morality and legality,** the arrogance and ideologies of power and the replacement of conscience with political utility. "We proclaim the God-given human dignity and rights of all people, equally and without discrimination and reject the brutal logic of war and domination. We seek the gift of peace."

#### WCC dialogue looks at risks, possibilities of AI

In February, the World Council of Churches (WCC) hosted an online discussion on "The risks of artificial general intelligence: how should faith communities respond?"

The dialogue involved 200 scientists, ethicists and theologians who focused on risks of AI. They examined risks of an AI arms race between the U.S. and China, whether an international rules-based order can limit these developments and how faith communities can respond.

**Stavros Kofinas, moderator** of the WCC Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing, said AI already affects "health systems, research, governance and people's daily lives. These developments should not be dismissed lightly."

**Peter Kuhnert, co-chair** of the Working Group for Faith and Science, of the WCC Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing, asked "How do you understand this time in the history of humanity's development of technology—and how might faith traditions respond?"

**Max Tegmark, president** and cofounder of the Future of Life Institute, likened the question, "Are we for or against technology?" to asking if "we are for or against fire, noting, "We're for fire to feed the hungry and we're against fire if it burns down a house." He said the question is: "Can we provide leadership to make sure technology is used for good not evil?"

**Antje Jackelén, former archbishop** of the Church of Sweden, said, "if we see technology as helping the blind see, the lame walk and the deaf hear, it may be a mark of the messianic age.

"We should welcome technological progress that alleviates suffering, but technological progress is not morally neutral," she said, asking, "Who benefits from a certain technological advancement in the short run, and who in the long run?"

The webinar is part of an ongoing series on AI.

## REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

### Directory updates, support are coming in

Support of community partners, advertisers and donors is coming in for The Fig Tree's annual Resource Directory, a comprehensive source of information on organizations and people serving other people in Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

"We expect to print 22,000 copies depending on income, which we are still confirming," said Malcolm Haworth, directory editor.

"I enjoy compiling the data, preparing the pages and deliver-

ing copies as a way to give back, make a difference, network organizations and transform lives based on 19 years in this role since January 2007," he said.

"We are the only ones in the region doing a directory with our level of expertise," he commented. "Some groups start a directory on one service but eventually realize there is already our directory. We now can help focused service groups represent small sections for clients."

Malcolm added that the Re-

source Directory is not a siloed or niche effort but covers the broad scope of faith, nonprofit and social service agencies.

"Not only do we publish the data, but also we respond to multiple requests a week from people looking for resources to fill their need," he said.

As other Fig Tree staff attend and cover community events, they help keep data current.

For information, call 535-1813 or email [resourcedirectory@thefigtree.org](mailto:resourcedirectory@thefigtree.org).

### Group plans Way of the Cross pilgrimage

Christians and others will join a group reflection and action walking to places in Spokane where violence has been experienced as part of The Way of the Cross, a Spokane Pilgrimage.

Participants will meet at 4 p.m., Friday, April 3, at Salem Lutheran, 1428 W. Broadway, and process less than a mile, reflecting on the stations of the cross in the current local context.

At 5 p.m. the group will gather at the Rotary Fountain in Riverfront Park for lament, prayer

and witness.

While the event is held on a Christian holy day, Good Friday, and will use Christian texts, it is open to people of any faith.

The event will focus on injustices and violence recently imposed on immigrant and refugee neighbors. Organizers said it seeks to build awareness that Jesus' followers refused to ignore Christ's suffering.

"We see Christ in our immigrant neighbors. We will not ignore their suffering now," said

the walk organizers.

In case of bad weather, the event will be held indoors. Participants should rsvp so they can be informed of changing plans.

The ecumenical gathering is hosted by Bethany Presbyterian, Westminster United Church of Christ, Salem Lutheran, St. Mark's Lutheran, the West Central Abbey, Grace Commons and Faith Action Network.

For information, email [dilts@fanwa.org](mailto:dilts@fanwa.org) or rsvp at <https://tinyurl.com/GoodFridaySpo>.

### Habitat welcomes another new homeowner

On March 26, Calvin and his family entered a new home he helped build with Habitat for Humanity Spokane in the Airway Heights Highland Village.

For 15 years, the single dad dreamed of owning a home. Even though it seemed out of reach, he applied to Habitat, started saving for closing costs, took classes and completed the partner hours. He is the first Habitat-Spokane homebuyer to receive down payment assistance through the Washington Covenant Homeownership Program.

Habitat-Spokane has seen how stable, safe, affordable homeownership changes a fam-

ily by making housing costs predictable so parents can focus on work and education, children can thrive in school, and families experience better health and well-being, said Michelle Girardot, CEO of Habitat-Spokane.

In today's housing market, stability is rare. The cost of a first home in Spokane County averages \$400,000, out of reach for many working families, she said. Through the Habitat Homeownership Program, homes are built and sold at cost. Monthly mortgages are no more than 30 percent of a buyer's income, making homeownership accessible to buyers earning below 80 percent

of the area median income.

"Habitat home dedications celebrate extraordinary work and commitment," said Michelle. "Stable, safe, affordable homeownership is how families can build a different future."

Calvin's family is one of 36 homebuyers Habitat-Spokane is walking with to purchase homes by June 2026.

Michelle said every closing represents years of hard work by homebuyers, volunteers, staff and partners. Since it was founded in 1987, Habitat-Spokane has completed more than 450 homes.

For information, call 863-6759 or visit [habitat-spokane.org](http://habitat-spokane.org).

### FailSafe for Life marks 10th anniversary

FailSafe for Life's Spring for Hope 10th anniversary event will raise funds and awareness from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., Friday, April 24, at the Centennial Ballroom of the Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

Sabrina Votova, a licensed mental health counselor and educator on suicide prevention and intervention, founded FailSafe for Life to build hope and promote resiliency by training individuals and organizations to learn how to connect better with the goal of ending suicide in the

community.

FailSafe for Life educates professionals, parents and community members on suicide prevention, warning signs and resources.

A virtual auction begins Monday, April 20, and ends April 24.

For information, call 475-7334 or email [info@failsafe4life.org](mailto:info@failsafe4life.org).

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**Yom HaShoah theme is ‘Courage and Resistance’**

The 2026 Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust on the theme “Courage and Resistance” will be held at 7 p.m., Tuesday, April 14, at Temple Beth Shalom, 1322 E. 30th Ave.

The annual Holocaust remembrance will include reflections Dutch Holocaust survivor and educator 102-year-old Carla Peperzak will share in a conversation with Raymond Sun, professor of history at Washington State University in Pullman. The focus of his research and teaching has been on Holocaust and genocide studies, rescue and resistance and the history of the World Wars and Nazi Germany.

Awards will be presented to the middle and high school student winners of the Jessica Stein Memorial Art Contest, held in partnership with the Seattle Holocaust Center for Humanity. Their art will be on display.

The service will include a candle lighting ceremony and music from the Ferris High School and Peperzak Middle School orchestras and the Spokane Jewish Community Choir.

The Holocaust Remembrance Day or Yom HaShoah is a day to honor the 6 million Jews killed by Nazis and their collaborators in World War II. Since 1995, Temple Beth Shalom has invited Jewish and non-Jewish residents to the annual Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust.

For information, visit [spokanetbs.org/yomhashoah](http://spokanetbs.org/yomhashoah).

**PJALS organizes several events during April**

Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) will host several training events in April leading up to their Annual Membership Meeting on Thursday, April 23.

These include 1) People Power: Organizing Against Authoritarianism 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 4; 2) Nonviolence in Action: Peacekeeping and De-Escalation Skills for Protests and Events 1 to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 18; 3) Protesting 101 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Wednesday April 22, and 4) Nonviolent Direct Action 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Saturday, April 25.

“Connecting for Community,” PJALS Annual Membership Meeting on Thursday, April 23, will be a time for members, volunteers, partners and supporters to gather, share a meal, connect across work and reflect on the current moment.

The annual meeting will include updates from program areas and campaigns, connections with members and organizers, small group conversations about the work ahead, financial and organizational updates, and celebrating accomplishments.

For information, visit [pjals.org](http://pjals.org). PJALS provides the time and place of events to those who register.

**Refugee group holds art, music festival**

Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS) and Spokane Public Library will hold Hope in the Community: An Art and Music Festival Celebrating Community, at 6 p.m., Saturday, April 25, at Spokane’s Central Library, 906 W. Main.

Families may bring young artists for a watercolor painting activity. The evening includes music and a guided Paint & Sip led by local artist Nicki Coburn.

There will be information on Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane’s work to support refugee and immigrant communities.

“We’re in a difficult season, and refugee and immigrant communities are impacted,” said Renee Kenney, development director for RICS. “This is why it is more important than ever to come together as a community. We believe everyone belongs, we are stronger together and shared experiences unite us. Music and art have the power to connect and uplift, and we invite everyone to experience that with us.”

For information, call 209-2384 or visit [ricspokane.org](http://ricspokane.org).

**NAACP seeks to build restorative communities**

NAACP Spokane Branch Initiative Building Restorative Communities (BRC) is holding several events in April.

There will be a book conversation on *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, with conversations led by Indigenous educator Tamika LaMere from 4:30 to 5:45 p.m., Mondays, April 20, 27 and May 4, 11 and 18, at 808 E. Sprague Ave.

This is an opportunity to ex-

plore the vision for how to orient lives around gratitude, reciprocity and community, based on lessons of the natural world.

“A Circle Centering Hope” takes place from 4:30 to 6 p.m., Wednesday, April 29, at The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague.

A “Language of Life,” non-violent communication (NVC) practice group meets from 10 to 11:30 a.m., Tuesdays, at Liberty Park Library or 12:30 to 2 p.m., Fridays, on Zoom.

Sessions foster connection,

compassion and understanding by shifting focus from blame to shared human needs, helping people resolve conflicts, improve relationships and create collaborative solutions through honest expression and empathetic listening.

Groups meet weekly to learn and practice ways to express feelings and needs clearly, hear others’ feelings and needs and have more fulfilling interactions.

For information, email [BRC-spokane@gmail.com](mailto:BRC-spokane@gmail.com).

**Partnering for Progress will visit Kenya**

Partnering for Progress (P4P) is offering an immersion trip from May 29 to June 6 for a community experience in rural Kenya for people who want to expand their understanding of Kenyan culture, community development and partnership-building.

P4P has worked for nearly two decades alongside rural Kenyan

communities through long-term, relationship-based development in health, education, water and economic development. The trip is an opportunity to see sustainable community partnership in action—as a learner, not a tourist.

There will be opportunities on the trip to visit and interact with P4P programs that up-

lift community, to learn how dignity-centered collaboration works through P4P’s local team members and community volunteers and to explore community culture, strengths, resilience and opportunities that emphasize a hand-up rather than a hand-out.

For information, email [info@partneringforprogress.org](mailto:info@partneringforprogress.org).

**KSPS sets spring series on documentaries**

The first KSPS PBS Indie Lens Pop-up screening on March 27 at the Magic Lantern Theater included a panel discussion with Spokane City Council President Betsy Wilkerson, Black Lens Editor April Eberhardt, Aerius Franklin of Disability Action Center NW and Kiantha Duncan, KSPS PBS board member and Spokane NAACP leader.

“The Inquisitor” was the first of three “Docs with KSPS PBS” with discussion by local leaders.

The doc highlights Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan’s influence on U.S. politics and

struggles with her intersectional identity as a Black woman in politics, a hidden lesbian and person with disabilities. Her intellect and moral clarity transformed U.S. politics as she demanded accountability from Nixon’s impeachment to civil rights.

“For her, knowledge was not simply power, it was a responsibility,” says April. “She believed if one sought to challenge injustice, they must understand the structure, rules and mechanisms of systems. Becoming an expert in law, she showed that transformative change requires moral

courage and intellectual preparation. She changed the face of who could hold power in America—an unapologetic challenger who did not ask for permission.”

Two other films in the series are 1) “Make A Circle” on Wednesday, April 22, following childcare providers determined to change how society values educating young children, and 2) “The Grocery List,” on Wednesday, May 27, following “Top Chef” contender Chrissy Camba on a trip to five international grocery stores in the U.S.

For information, visit [ksps.org](http://ksps.org).

**Committee presents Black Earth Day**

Duaa-Rahemaah Hunter, Black Earth Day Committee chair is collaborating with Carl Maxey Center and Growing Neighbors to present Black Earth Day: Seed to Soul from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, April 18, at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, 500 S. Stone.

“Black Earth Day highlights the unique environmental chal-

lenges and leadership within Black communities. It calls for an inclusive environmental movement that centers Black experiences, addresses disproportionate impacts from pollution and climate change, and honors traditions of land stewardship,” said Duaa-Rahemaah.

There will be interactive workshops, hands-on activities,


free seeds, gardening information and advocacy opportunities.

Black Earth Day is a space to learn, connect and cultivate power through food, sustainability and community, she said.

Agencies and individuals can participate as vendors, volunteers or donors.

For information, visit [carlmaxeycenter.org/blackearthday](http://carlmaxeycenter.org/blackearthday).

**2026 SPOKANE COMMUNITY OBSERVANCE OF THE HOLOCAUST**



**COURAGE & RESISTANCE**

Join us for our annual Holocaust remembrance featuring reflections from survivor Carla Peperzak in conversation with Dr. Raymond Sun, student awards and gallery from the Jessica Stein Memorial Art Contest Gallery, candlelighting ceremony, and music from the Ferris High School and Carla Peperzak Middle School Orchestras and Spokane Jewish Community Choir.

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# Project links region's rural and small town churches ecumenically

Continued from page 1 congregations to connect and partner with each other.

Meggan pointed out that there are different types of rural and small towns. Leavenworth, Chelan, Sandpoint and Jackson are resort rural. Kamiah, Burley, Odesa and Oakesdale are agricultural rural. Lewiston, Clarkston, Pullman and Moscow are rural, small college towns. Quincy has a big data center bringing new wealth that has funded new buildings and a new school.

"As a bishop and as a pastor to rural churches, my role is to listen, learn and encourage," said Meggan. "Where are they engaged? What is on their hearts? What do they love about being church? How are they the wellspring of God's love in their communities?"

Because "full communion" recognizes the validity of each other's sacraments and the ordination of clergy, clergy can serve each other's churches, and regional and national churches have common ministries. Full communion ties are not mergers. Each church has autonomy in structure and liturgy.

Mutual recognition began after the World Council of Churches (WCC) Faith and Order commission in 1982 in Lima, Peru, adopted the Lima Document, also known as Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM). That led to further ties among Protestant churches, as well as Catholic-Orthodox and Catholic-Protestant dialogues.

Those dialogues have explored areas of agreement and differences, leading to agreements for shared ministries.

That might seem distant and theoretical for small communities, but those are where full communion is lived out in practical ways.

The NWIM ELCA Synod received a grant of \$20,000 for 2025 and \$30,000 for 2026 to host gatherings of clergy, deacons and laity through the Country and Small Town Lived Ecclesiology Project (CaSTLE) to promote ministries that empower people through their congregations "to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in all aspects of their lives" so congregations thrive regardless of the community or congregation size.

"Ecumenical relationships need to be tended for the sake of the gospel," Meggan said.

In 2025, clergy and lay leaders met for sessions called "United at the Font: Partnering for the Future" in Clarkston, Moses Lake and Pocatello. Their discussions were guided by Lauren

Hackman Brooks and Rebecca Hoyt, formerly with Gonzaga University and now independent facilitators.

Participants prepared for the gatherings by reading the BEM document, which is the basis for full communion relationships.

While many churches think of their differences as denominations, BEM points to "what we share as the body of Christ," Meggan said, adding that it was written before some area pastors and lay members were born.

She first studied it in seminary.

"The goal of our CaSTLE grant is for Christians to recognize what they share with their siblings from these various denominations when it comes to the sacrament and the life-giving Gospel we proclaim," said Meggan.

"Since COVID, we realize we had not worked on our relationship muscles," she noted. "This is an opportunity to remember what it is like to get together and engage in conversation."

Since the sessions, the teams have worked with coaches to keep them accountable to what

they decided to do.

The Synod will also host half-day follow-up events in 2026.

Additional gatherings will take place in North Idaho, North Central Washington and the Southern Idaho/Oregon border area during 2026.

In December 2025, regional church leaders met for a three-day retreat at St. Gertrude's Benedictine Monastery in Cottonwood, Idaho—Episcopal Bishops Gretchen Rehberg (Spokane) and Jos Tharakan (Idaho), ELCA Synod staff Liv Larson Andrews and Phil Meisner, Inland Presbytery Executive Sheryl Kinder-Pyle, Kendall Presbytery Stated Clerk Cathy Chisholm, UMC District leaders Geoff Helton and Sheila Miranda (Inland and Seven Rivers) and Rob Walters Southern Idaho District, Central Pacific UCC Conference Minister Tyler Connelly and Bishop Meggan.

"We already work together, but the retreat was a time to pray and worship together, to become better acquainted so we understand each other and how we are already partnering and

might further our partnerships," said Meggan. "We discussed our commonalities and what each denomination brings to the ecumenical table."

For example, most Washington denominations cooperate in advocacy with the Faith Action Network and have common actions on immigration and other issues.

"Full communion gives us permission and encouragement," she said, noting the shared ministry, Cultivating Justice, with ELCA and UCC churches in Wenatchee and Sunnyslope.

She also named several federated churches sharing a minister or ministries. There are Presbyterian-Lutheran churches in Potlatch, Fairfield, Star Valley and Wilbur. The Kamiah Presbyterian and Lutheran churches share a pastor. Grandview Emmanuel Lutheran and Sunnyside Presbyterian churches share a pastor.

Some congregations are also studying Mark Elsdon's book *Gone for Good and the Coming Wave of Church Property Transitions* to see where the Holy Spirit takes them.

Six teams from the gatherings in Pocatello, Moses Lake and Clarkston are building relationships and setting goals.

New cohort meetings of "United at the Font: Partnering for the Future" will focus on worship, conversations, scripture, prayer and the future. They will be Saturdays, May 16 at Lake Chelan Lutheran, June 27 at First Lutheran in Sandpoint and Oct. 10 at St. Paul Lutheran in Ontario, Ore.

For information, call 838-9871, email bishopmeggan.manlove@nwimsynod.org or visit thecastleproject.org.



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# Garden connects Lidgerwood Presbyterian with its neighbors

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Given that Lidgerwood Presbyterian Church has been planting seeds in Northeast Spokane for nearly 120 years, it was not a stretch for it to start Garden o' Feedin,' a community garden project it shares with Growing Neighbors, If You Can Save Just One (Just One) and neighborhood residents.

Since joining the Ezra 3 Project with other congregations in the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest, church leaders fostered understanding around the Old Testament scripture from Ezra 3, when the Israelites returned home from exile back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple and city walls.

"Spiritually our community was coming back home and needed to rebuild doing ministry in the 21st century," said Mark Wheeler, who has been pastor there 32 years.

"There was awareness of God's calling us back into outreach ministry as an Ezra 3 community. Five churches were in the original cohort. Since fall 2025, four other churches have started another cohort in the program to rebuild themselves and their ministries on their physical properties out of their faith and spiritual understanding," he said.

The Presbytery's Ezra 3 Project is part of a multi-year \$800,000 Lilly Endowment Thriving Congregations Initiative grant.

Lidgerwood started in 1907 as a Sunday School outreach ministry of Fourth Presbyterian Church to serve children and youth in North Spokane. Sixty years ago, the church had a membership of 600 with an average attendance of 300, said Mark. Now it has a membership of about 40, and an average of 50 attend on Sundays.

"When I came in 1994, about 80 percent of the congregation were 80 years old or older, and that's still true, but we also have several families with children who are kindergarten to junior high age," he added.

"We are reclaiming our call to work with youth in our support of If You Can Save Just One (Just One), located in the church's garage across from the church, which is at 4449 N. Nevada.

Just One empowers youth and their families with hands-on activities and resources to build strong futures together, exploring their creativity to discover their passions and helping youth feel seen, valued and supported.

"Just One engages at-risk teenagers in low-income families," said Mark, adding, "Na-



Mark Wheeler, pastor, and Linda Tuinstra, member, sit beside the Lidgerwood Presbyterian Church's garden.

talia Gutierrez, the director, is one of my heroes. She has created and sustained the program through COVID and beyond."

"In 2016, Natalia and her children started attending our church about once a month on Sundays, so when she saw neighborhood kids and her own kids struggling, she asked if she could use the garage across from our church and one of our rooms to help at-risk youth," he said.

"It took her a few months to figure out how that would work before they started in 2017," said Mark.

Just One is mostly self-funded, through grants, donations and support from Whitworth University, which provides volunteers. The church received a seed grant of \$11,000 from the Presbyterian Church (USA) to build on or help improve its ministry with Just One, which now envisions building a small community center beside the garage.

The program walks alongside families, children and youth in the neighborhood in a unique way, said Mark.

In the process, members have realized that "we do not do God's work on our own. We need to partner with others. That is part of spiritual growth across the board, and a new understanding of how we do church, beyond a focus on practical, spiritual growth," he explained.

"We are an elderly congregation that is not growing in leaps and bounds. We struggle with finances and energy levels, so we depend on other partners to work to serve in the community," he said.

Mark came to Lidgerwood Presbyterian after serving a Presbyterian Church in Tacoma. He earned a bachelor's degree in religious studies at California State University in Fullerton and attended Fuller Seminary for a year before transferring to San Francisco Theological Seminary, where he earned a master of divinity in 1989.

The church's idea for the community garden originated in 2021 during COVID to provide safe, fresh food as one more way to serve its neighbors and the community more effectively.

Church members built a little food pantry before Growing Neighbors, which started in 2016 at Shadle Park Presbyterian Church, began building food pantry boxes.

"We moved our indoor food pantry outside during Covid to continue people's access to food when we were not in the building," said Mark.

Now the church has one of the Growing Neighbors' food pantry boxes outside, and it works with Growing Neighbors, a program that collaborates with community agencies and congregations to help build healthy neighborhoods through community gardens and community development.

"We recognized that when our church office was closed, there were still people who were hungry," Mark said.

The church also decided to transform a plot of land with dead grass into a community garden.

That small act transformed the congregation, as it created

a space for church members to partner with others, to reach our neighbors and "to go where God is calling us to go," Mark said.

"We couldn't do it alone," he added. "So, we partnered with Growing Neighbors. They provided us with the supplies and helped us set up the garden, the watering system and starter plants. They also advised us how to care for the garden."

Growing Neighbors has also taught parishioners and neighbors how to cook the fresh produce in the church kitchen.

During the first three years, there were six regular gardeners from the church doing the gardening and greeting neighbors. In the last few years, as the aging members are less able to help, ten to 40 youth from Just One and other neighbors have pitched in. Just One youth help after school and in the summer.

"The youth have been recruited to help with the garden, planting and turning the soil, weeding and partaking of the garden harvest," said Mark. "They also helped create scarecrows, which were up during the summer."

Mark said that the neighbors know that when they see pumpkins or other vegetables, they did not need to ask permission but could just take what they needed.

"Some neighbors also come and help church gardeners weed, so the garden gets us out of our

shell into ministry in the world," he said.

The food pantry, which offers nonperishables, and the garden, which offers perishables, are both visible to the neighbors.

"We want to serve and be present with our neighbors. The garden is available for anyone who drives or walks by. It supplies the food pantry used by neighbors. It shows a model of neighbors looking after each other. That is a beautiful gift," he said.

"By partnering with Just One, we are also able to continue to be a presence with the families in the neighborhood," Mark said. "It's exciting to see God working in our midst," he added.

For information, call 487-4667 or email lidgerwoodoffice@gmail.com; for Growing Neighbors, call 541-286-5059 or visit growingneighbors.org, or for Just One, visit ifyoucouldsavejustone.org.



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# Avista describes some of the various ‘named communities’ projects

*continued from page 1*

An early grant application came from St. Ann’s Catholic Church in East Central Spokane. It partners with the Career Path Services Dignified Workday Project to help unhoused neighbors gain job skills, find living-wage jobs and access wraparound services to build their life skills so they can move into homes.

They needed a place to do laundry, so St. Ann’s received a grant to create a laundry corner with three stacked high-efficiency washers and dryers. They also installed a new heat pump for heating and cooling and replaced windows in its parish hall.

Ana receives requests from many faith-based and nonprofit organizations for grants to assist with new windows, insulation, lighting, and heating and cooling (HVAC) system improvements that conserve energy, increase comfort and save costs.

Many faith and nonprofit groups bring some of their own resources to a project through fundraising, donations or other grants. With the NCIF and its other programs, Avista helps bridge the remaining financial gap and “braids” funding together so these organizations can make their projects happen.

When it partners on clean energy projects for faith and nonprofit groups, it asks how they serve the community.

“We help those that offer community programs—meals, food banks and services to support stability,” Ana said.

Through its NCIF, Avista serves vulnerable groups affected by environmental or economic challenges—such as inadequate housing, low wages or unstable employment. These people often lack resources to make efficiency improvements on their own.

“While this grant program is new, Avista has supported customers throughout its 137-year history,” Ana said. “Its bill assistance efforts began in the 1980s, when the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) was established. Working with Spokane Neighborhood Action Partnership (SNAP)—then part of Catholic Charities—Avista helped launch Project Share, a community-supported fund to help customers pay their bills. SNAP continues to administer Project Share, along with other community action agencies.”

Helping customers experiencing financial hardship, she added, is both the right thing to do and essential for maintaining access to energy services.

“Beyond bill assistance, we offer programs to help customers save energy effectively and efficiently,” Ana added. “These include weatherization, rebates and incentives for improvements, such as lighting and insulation.”



**Kristine Meyer, left, and Ana Matthews, right, of Avista visit Family Promise of Spokane major gifts officer AJ McGourin.**

*Photo courtesy of Avista*

Ana said her commitment to giving back to the community was shaped early in her life as “a military brat.” She moved every few years as her father was stationed in Georgia, Panama, Texas, Germany and Kansas. After serving in the Army, where she met her husband in Heidelberg, Germany, she earned a bachelor’s degree in health education from Sam Houston University and a master’s degree in public administration at Eastern Washington University.

“My values come from the sense of community in the military where everyone helps one another,” she said, recalling her volunteer work at an Army Community Service Center as a teen. “People from different backgrounds come together and rely on each other.”

“So, I love this work. It’s an opportunity to serve the community by meeting customers where they are,” she said, telling of other faith-based organizations that have applied for funds to support energy-efficiency improvements.

For example, Family Promise of Spokane requested support to replace the old, inefficient windows in their shelter and upgrade their HVAC systems to increase efficiency. Staff said the windows were in poor condition and the rooms were uncomfortably cold.

“New windows improved their comfort, reduced energy use and brought cost savings, so more funds could go to direct services,” Ana said.

Two years ago, Westminster

Congregational United Church of Christ received Avista’s assistance to put in new windows to save energy for the congregation and prepare for a second-floor respite care center for unhoused people needing a safe place to convalesce after being released from a hospital. The program opened in February 2025 in partnership with the City of Spokane, Providence, Jewels Helping Hands and Empire Health Foundation. In 2025, Westminster received an NCIF grant for HVAC upgrades, too.

Christ Kitchen, a training program to help women gain skills to find dignified living-wage jobs, received support for its operations and help to expand economic opportunities for income-constrained women.

“We ask interested parties how they will serve a given population in ways that align with our clean energy goals. We send a team to analyze the facility’s energy needs so people can decide about improvements in lighting, windows, HVAC or insulation,” said Ana.

She listed other programs that have received NCIF grants.

- The food bank in Loon Lake rebuilt its cooler to preserve perishable food.

- Savings from the Springdale Food Bank lighting, window and HVAC upgrades went to more fresh produce.

- The Kettle Falls Community Chest used both a USDA grant and an NCIF grant for extensive building renovations.

- NCIF supported the Spokane

Tribe in Wellpinit in a grant application to Washington Commerce with an energy audit to identify efficiency upgrades to its administration building. In addition, NCIF helped cover the cost to install a new HVAC system at their Indiana TANF building in Spokane.

- Side-by-Side, a nonprofit serving individuals with disabilities, received NCIF help for energy efficiency improvements in the former Westminster Presbyterian Church.

- Colfax’s Hill-Ray Plaza senior affordable housing needed new windows for common areas so seniors could comfortably gather and to reduce energy use.

- NCIF has helped people in Takesa Village co-op manufactured homes in Mead with weatherization. Each year NCIF provides Spokane Co-Housing Works with four affordable, efficient manufactured homes that make home ownership possible for local families.

- NCIF provides efficient HVAC systems for Habitat for Humanity Spokane homes and solar panels for Palouse Habitat for Humanity homes.

Other nonprofits that received grants for HVAC systems include Whitman County libraries in Farmington, Tekoa and Oakesdale, the AHANA-Multiethnic Business Association Center, Lilac Services for the Blind, Salem Lutheran Church’s Walnut Corners Apartments and Volunteers of America’s Alexandria’s House.

The program covers Avista’s service territory in Eastern Washington, emphasizing rural communities, energy savings and workforce development.

“We’ve done some solar panels with batteries, such as at the Martin Luther King Jr Community Center, which has an innovative clean energy project with battery and natural gas backup. Started in 2022 along with lighting and windows upgrades, it will be completed in May,” said Ana. “It makes the center a safe place neighbors can go in a catastrophe like a windstorm or wildfires.”

About 20 nonprofits a year qualify for partial funding by Avista’s Small Business Lighting Program. When groups can’t cover their share of the project costs, NCIF may help, because lighting upgrades bring major savings.

Agencies using that program in 2025 included Catholic Charities House of Charity, Calvary Chapel of the Palouse, Salem Lutheran, Soul Patrol Ministries, Heritage Church of Odessa, the West Central Abbey, Crestline Church of the Nazarene, North Hill Christian, Colfax Community Church and St. Mary’s Catholic.

For information, email [CE-TANCIF@avistacorp.com](mailto:CE-TANCIF@avistacorp.com) or visit [myavista.com/NCIF](http://myavista.com/NCIF).

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# Spiritual and worldly intersect in life, ministry of Amos Atkinson

While the worldly and the spiritual are often seen to be colliding, the two intersect in the life and ministry of Amos Atkinson, Jr., pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Spokane.

As an extension of his ministry at Calvary, he is involved with AHANA-Multi-Ethnic Business Association and Carl Maxey Center, advising entrepreneurs, supporting their paths to succeed in business so they can support themselves and their families.

He reminded that churches have their spiritual side and business side.

**“God is part of planning** for all ministries, be it Christian education or the Trustees. They are God’s ministries,” he said.

At AHANA, for example, he assists people as they apply for Small Business Resiliency Loans and then helps them evaluate the impact of those loans.

“I love working with folks,” he said. “When you love doing what you are doing it’s not a job. I get to do what I enjoy, which is working with folks. I consider it an extension of my work at Calvary, where I have been in ministry for 24 years.”

**Along with advising** others on starting businesses, he plans to start Tree Top Men’s Fashion at Northtown Mall in April.

“As with everything I do, I prayed about starting it, asking if it’s God’s will,” he said, noting he’ll keep doing the other work he is doing.

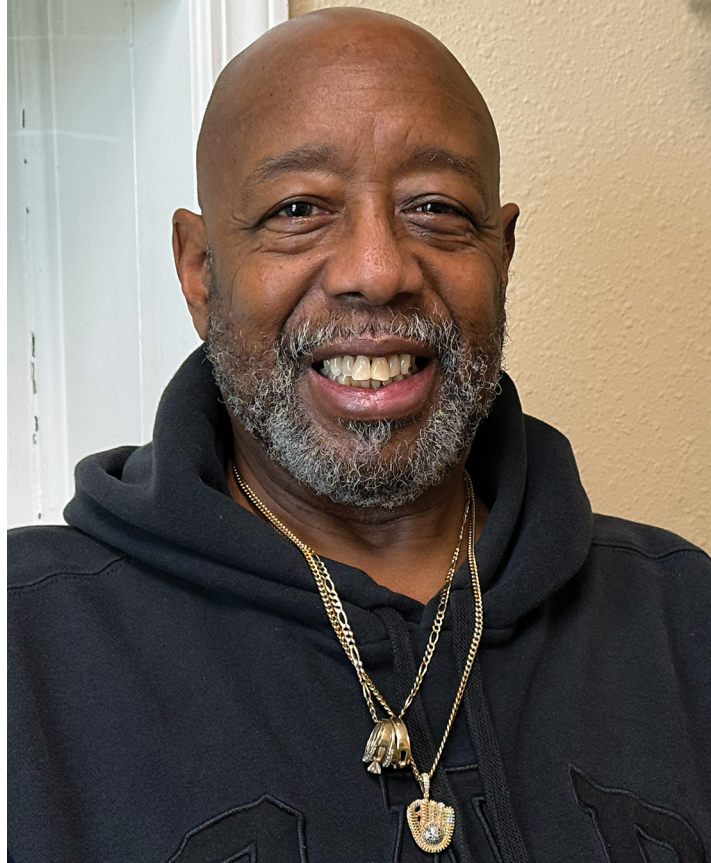
Bringing insights from the business world to his role as pastor, Amos said his journey into ministry began with growing up in the church in Compton, Calif., and continued when attending just on Christmas, Easter and Mother’s Day while in the Army and the National Guard Reserves.

**His career also included** work with Labor and Industries at the Washington Department of Revenue, Geiger Corrections Center, the Spokane County Sheriff’s Office and Walmart.

“Spiritually, my message to the congregation is to build up Christian love and fellowship,” he said. “We have to trust, show love, communicate and be honest one to another to edify God’s kingdom building.

“I seek to instill unity and fellowship in the church, so they show love—loving our neighbors as we love ourselves,” he added. “We are to act on love, hope, peace, joy and forgiveness to help each other in our daily walks. First, we have to live it, because actions speak louder than words.”

**Amos attended church** regularly until high school and thought he might go to seminary, but he detoured. He had a part-



Amos Atkinson is a pastor and an entrepreneur advisor.

time job, was on the streets and ran track at a community college when the Army recruited him.

After the army in 1997, he worked with Labor and Industries (L & I), which moved him to Spokane to manage its offices in Spokane, Colville and Pullman, where he oversaw 32 employees.

**When Amos settled** in Spokane, he returned to church at Calvary in 1998. There, he met Dana Andrews, the daughter of Calvary’s long-time pastor, C. W. Andrews. They married in 2000 and were together for 25 years until her death in 2024.

With L&I until June 2001, Amos oversaw business license renewals and restitution payments on expired licenses. He was recognized for his work on a four-member team that created a process to reduce the renewal time from six to eight weeks to two weeks or less—meaning contractors no longer lost bids on projects. They rolled the more efficient process out to six field offices in the state.

In 2002, Amos became booking manager at Geiger Corrections Center and that April was called into ministry.

**“Before I was deployed** to Iraq with the National Guard in Nov. 2003, I was ordained by the Eastern District Association of the Baptist Church to serve Calvary Baptist Church,” he said.

In Iraq, Amos preached at Sunday evening services for 500 in his battalion and occasionally preached at the main service to 5,000.

On returning from Iraq, he became a deputy sheriff and started studies online for a bachelor’s degree in business administra-

tion and business law at Kaplan University in Orlando, Fla. After completing it in 2013, he became assistant store manager at Walmart, while continuing as a deputy until he retired in 2017 from both jobs.

Now retired, he sees his work as doing what he loves.

**In 2013, he began** assisting his father-in-law in ministry at Calvary.

“I never changed my values. I came from a religious background and was raised to be in the church,” he said. “I realized Jesus brought me through trials and tribulations and I owe everything to Jesus, so I rededicated myself to him.”

“Ministry is not easy work. I’m able to do ministry because I know if it were not for God, I would not be here. Many did not come back from war,” he said.

**On April 1, 2025,** Amos became minister, serving the 100-member Calvary Baptist Church, Spokane’s first African American church.

“As pastor, I am a shepherd, spiritual leader and guide. I learned from my experience in business not to micro-manage. My job is to impart the Word to the congregation and allow opportunities for the other ministers, trustees, deacons and deaconesses, choir and education ministers to be in charge of the church,” he said.

While Amos preaches many Sundays, he has other ministers preach as part of their training.

**“Part of my role as a leader** is to train them,” he said.

Each has other work to support them. Lynn Andrews Watkins, assistant pastor, works with

Child Protective Services. Mark Neufvil, associate minister, is a professor at Spokane Community College. Joseph Harris, a minister on staff, is an investment advisor. Etienne Nizerimana also works in janitorial services.

Amos said that one of the church’s outreach ministries, The Soup Kitchen, has been going strong for 16 years. It is led by parishioners Betty Dumas, Nora Scott and Donita White.

“I lead, but I am not in charge. Others are empowered to do the work and let me know what they are doing,” he said.

**“I believe love empowers** people to do what they are elected to do without a minister standing over them to make them do his vision. I instill empowerment and trust for the ministers to care for the church’s finances, building, education and more,” he explained.

“If something is not going well, I’ll make a suggestion,” he said. “My job is to lead the flock, let others do their jobs and keep me posted.

“I’m not into power. I lead the church where they want to go and where God would have us go,” he affirmed. “We are all in this together. We need to put aside differences and come together as one. We are stronger as one than as individuals.”

**Amos found an outlet** for his business skills in 2023 when he became involved in the Carl Maxey Center after the late Sandy Williams, who started it in April 2022, invited him to apply his skills as business services coordinator to advocate for Black businesses in the community.

“I help BIPOC entrepreneurs obtain business licenses, develop business plans, set up marketing and find finances,” Amos said. “Among nearly 200 businesses I helped start from 2022 to 2025, were 48 women-run businesses.

“My role helping businesses start and grow fits in with my love for the business world and for people trying to achieve something,” he added. “I know the ins and outs, the do’s and don’ts for a business to be successful.”

**Amos’ goal has been** to share tools to help clients succeed. About 85 percent of the businesses he has advised have succeeded. He encourages many to continue their full-time jobs until their new businesses can support them and their families, because there are ups and downs for small businesses.

Absorbing federal budget cuts, the state made cuts that hurt many new small businesses, he said. The budget for training new small businesses went from \$1 million from the Department of Commerce to \$17,000 at the end of 2025. His job ended in October with those cuts, but he returned to the Carl Maxey Center in February.

His goal at Carl Maxey Center and AHANA-MEBA is to help people improve their quality of life and follow their dreams, desires and ideas.

That is coupled with forwarding the church’s mission to bring in a new day of love, harmony, peace, fellowship and trust.

For information, call 990-1980 or email amosatkinson67@gmail.com.

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## Laurel Fish uplifts value of persisting

Laurel Fish, senior organizer with the Spokane Alliance, said:

My formation as an organizer comes from a few different places: from being the granddaughter of Jewish refugees, working in solidarity with communities in El Salvador and organizing alongside immigrant workers in the labor movement.

The Spokane Alliance is a broad-based coalition of 38 institutions—faith congregations, labor unions and nonprofits. We’ve been organizing for the common good in Spokane for over 23 years. But a lot of people don’t know about our work because it’s not always flashy.

**Developing everyday people** as leaders in our democracy, bringing institutions together to live out their values and figuring out what people want to do about pressures in our community—that is not headline-grabbing work.

It’s about persisting together. The Fig Tree is geared to share such stories.

For example, housing is a major pressure. Our Housing Team has spent more than a year researching solutions, meeting with developers, studying policy, talking with businesses and wrestling together with how to create publicly financed housing.

In our work with immigrant communities, you might have read about the event at First Presbyterian in February, where over 450 people turned out to



Laurel Fish knows stories build relationships.

hear testimony from the Haitian community. That public moment was preceded by months and years of relationship building with leaders like Pastor Emily Kuenker, Pastor Luc Jasmin, Pastor John Sowers and others.

That moment itself didn’t solve anything. The real work is the persistence that comes afterwards, meeting the next day, the next week and the next month.

**That’s why I appreciate** the work of The Fig Tree. They don’t just cover the flashy stories. They write about people and the institutions we’re part of.

During the 20th century, organizations stood up for reforms like child labor laws, a living wage, and workers compensation. People were concerned about the everyday miracles of sheltering, nourishing and hu-

manizing each other.

My own family has weathered some storms recently and it has taken both strong public policies and strong communities to keep us intact. It has taken paid family medical leave, union health coverage, childcare subsidies and grandparents helping raise our kids, friends picking them up from school and colleagues reminding me to eat.

Institutions and families are how we shelter, nourish and humanize each other.

**Relationships begin** with knowing each other’s stories.

That’s what The Fig Tree does. Its stories are like a “resource guide” for the gifts and talents in this community. They are a starting point for stirring our curiosity about each other, which inspires us to act together.

## LaRae Wiley speaks in Salish



Chris Parkin translates so audience can hear sounds of Salish.

LaRae Wiley, founder and elder at the Salish School of Spokane, called up Chris Parkin, her husband and Salish School of Spokane principal, to translate.

“I really want you to hear our language because it’s beautiful. It’s really critically endangered, so I want you to be able to hear it and how it sounds.

Translation: I am a leader at the Salish School of Spokane.

**The Fig Tree has really helped** us, even when we were small and there were just a few of us down in that basement with a few kids. Mary and The Fig Tree have helped me and they’re still helping me and helping the school.

They are helping us tell our story and get the word out. So, thank you so much. You’ve done well by us.

**I’m going to sing** for you an honor song to honor your good heart at The Fig Tree.

Earlier, LaRae also wrote

the following comments: I am honored to speak about The Fig Tree and its impact on our organization, Salish School of Spokane. In the Native community, our traditional stories are an incredibly important way we pass down knowledge, shared values and connect to each other through our own humanness.

**By sharing stories**, The Fig Tree creates bridges between people and organizations. It weaves together a brilliant tapestry about the work that is going on in our community.

The Fig Tree, through the persistent sharing and advocacy of our successes, has opened doors to new relationships and steadfast partnerships.

We are grateful to the Fig Tree for all the stories that create all the little miracles and connections that support our mission of keeping our language alive.

Llimlmtx

## Luc Jasmin knows power of seeing a face

Luc Jasmin III, Eastern Washington Governor’s representative, opened his speech: I’m not supposed to be here.

I remember sitting in a high school class when a teacher told us that most Black men do not make it past 26 without being dead or incarcerated.

Remember, I was an adolescent hearing this.

**That comment felt** like the heaviest weight ever, laying on top of me.

It felt that way until I got home. I remember asking my parents, “we are black, immigrants and everything is so hard, even though we’re good people.

The statistics show that we will not make it, so why do you keep going? Why don’t we give up?”

**My mom without hesitation** in Creole said, “Bondye ak kominite” (God and community). Then she walked off.

Fast forward to today, I fully understand what she meant. There is so much to fear right now. There is so much to be exhausted by. There are so many moments when giving up feels like the only logical choice. I look around rooms like this and see people



Luc Jasmin III is energized to persist.

like you showing up, supporting organizations like The Fig Tree.

**It energizes me** and brings me back to that persistence my parents have modeled.

Persistent in work, persistent in faith and persistent in love.

Somewhere today, a kid will

walk into a church, a clinic, or a food bank. They will pick up a copy of The Fig Tree. They will see my face, someone who looks like them, someone who keeps going. That kid will know they can keep going too. That moment will happen because of you.

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The Fig Tree 2026 Spring Benefit Speakers

# David Gortner said stories bring people together to make miracles

David Gortner, pastor at St. Luke's Episcopal Church Coeur d'Alene and Fig Tree Board member, expressed joy in gathering "as people eager to make a difference, to become leaven in the dough and make small miracles through steady perseverance.



David Gortner appreciates sharing as Fig Tree columnist.

I've had the honor and joy of serving on the board of the Fig Tree for four years. I continue to be impressed with the care, dedication and energy of its staff and volunteers. I am grateful for the stories they share, the connections they build and strengthen, the resources and good work they highlight and the positive influence they nurture here in our strange little corner of the world.

I want to focus on those first two words of our theme: Persist Together. These are essential for the good of our world. To persist is to continue firmly and resolutely on a path through thick and thin, not just when it's smooth sailing but also when it's hard, when there is opposition, when there are barriers or challenges or intermittent failures.

wide range of organizations and groups making a difference in people's lives – spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally, environmentally, economically, educationally. A key part of our work is persistence—the dogged showing up and offering what we can steadily and consistently, building and rebuilding, strengthening and growing, where we can.

The Fig Tree has provided us at St. Luke's Episcopal Church

in Coeur d'Alene with opportunities to share stories of some ways we are trying to make a difference as we persist in a challenging region—by how we model and provide space for courageous, caring conversation, by how we build purposeful partnerships with other organizations like North Idaho College and the Human Rights Education Institute and by how we help people follow Jesus' profound example of unwavering self-giving. We

persisted as the only church visibly supporting NIC faculty and staff through what we might call the "recent unpleasantness." I'm grateful for the ways the Fig Tree has highlighted our work—and the work of so many others. There is a community being built through these shared stories, so we can know we're not alone, so we learn from each other, so we can form partnerships to persist together with creative passion.

The Fig Tree and its comprehensive Resource Directory lay out before us a menu of possibilities, but it's up to us to take the next step—to reach out and connect with others we haven't met yet, to encourage each other and explore ways we can strengthen our impact together.

My wife and I experienced life-changing encounters with leaders of faith-informed organizations during our sabbatical in countries around the Mediterranean. We are happy to talk with you more about the amazing work being done in Morocco, Spain and Albania that involves dedicated interfaith and intercultural partnership and collaboration. The post-communist resurrection of religions in Albania is miraculous and beautiful. We came back inspired and eager to

build similar partnerships here. You'll see more columns from us in the Fig Tree in the months to come, as we share insights and highlight organizations to support, especially with the disappearance of USAID funding. These organizations in other countries are models for us—persisting, forging new partnerships together and adapting to new realities. They are not giving up!

Persisting together begins with getting together and building relationships. Yes, we need courage, passion and confidence to step forward. Yes, we need to stick to it and keep going. Even more, we need each other. So, we need to bring a mix of curiosity, humility and respect to every encounter with each other, to build new relationships, create and sustain partnerships, and keep coming to the table and inviting others to the table. Together is a big word. Let your tents stretch wide!

Let's continue to support the Fig Tree in its persistence of giving voice to the good work being done across our communities, so people will know they are not alone. There are partners for the good work we are all trying to do. We are together in seeking to make miracles possible.

## Erica Salkin boosts support of newspapers

Erica Salkin, professor of journalism and communication studies at Whitworth University and Fig Tree board member, loves newspapers and always has.

I've studied them, I've written for them, I've argued with them and more importantly FOR them for most of my adult life.

Lately, I worry about them. These vehicles of democracy and community stories are disappearing all across the country. According to Northwestern University, close to 3,500 newspapers have vanished since the year 2000, leaving one in every four Americans with limited access to a local print newspaper. Researchers call these newspaperless areas "news deserts," and the description is apt.

A newspaper has the power to both inform and connect. It sheds light on the real stories of the area and the readers it serves. Make no mistake, good journalism is an act of service, and empowers people to work together to solve problems, spark opportunities and inspire hope.

Today, we have welcomed you together to share your stories, your opportunities and your inspiration for the Fig Tree. While our overhead expenses are extremely low, advertising revenue covers less than half of the cost



Erica Salkin invites people to donate to support The Fig Tree.

of writing, editing, producing, printing and distributing this community newspaper and the Resource Directory. Our media are available free. We need the support of our community, so we can continue to support the region with stories of faith, hope and resilience, and so communities of faith and nonprofits can be in solidarity as we Persist Together and Inspire Miracles.

This room today can make that happen. Your gifts will help

secure another year of the Fig Tree and the Resource Directory. The goal is to raise \$40,000 with the Benefit Lunch and the Breakfast-Time Benefit.

Our ongoing goal is and continues to be to break through divisions among people of faith to build understanding, and to promote unity and action for the common good.

See videos of the speeches at [youtube.com/user/thefigtree1323/videos](https://youtube.com/user/thefigtree1323/videos)



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## INUUC partners to explore 'meta-modernity'

With a grant from the National Unitarian Universalist Church in America (UUA) to explore new faith projects, the Inland Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church (INUUC) will host a "Metamodern Spirituality" study and practice group, partnering with Clear Sky Meditation and Study Center in Cranbrook, BC.

The INUUC embraces people of many backgrounds, orientations and identities. Its members draw from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan and other traditions committed to love, justice and peace, said Mariah McKay, a member of the INUUC.

Clear Sky Meditation Center is a retreat center in the British

Columbia Rockies dedicated to conscious community and contemplative practice. Founded by Acharya Doug Duncan (Qapel) and Catherine Pawasarat, it offers retreats, teachings and programs grounded in Buddhist and cross-traditional wisdom.

When Mariah sought new sources of inspiration to speak to "the issues in our times," she found a global network of theorists and practitioners in "meta-modernity," about people holding multiple truths at once.

As a lifelong UU member, she saw similarities in practices explored in these circles and at the Clear Sky Retreat Center.

To introduce these perspectives to faith audiences in Spokane,

Mariah wrote and received a "New Communities Partnership" grant from UUA for INUUC and Clear Sky to support a project named Lighthouse Spokane.

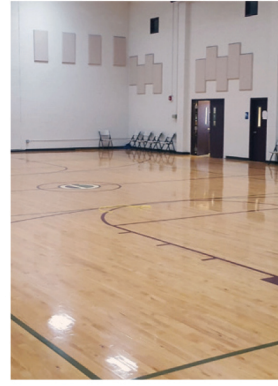
She described this experimental collaborative as a monthly "study and practice group" to explore techniques such as the "metacrisis," irony and play.

The series started in March with visiting Buddhist teacher and author Catherine Pawasarat Sensei, co-founder of Clear Sky, speaking of weaving spiritual traditions together across a common set of values.

For information, call 939-0015, email mariah.mckay@gmail.com, visit inuuc.org or clearskycenter.org.

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# Emma Hoagland strengthens nonprofits because of ways they serve

By Kaye Hult

When Emma Hoagland joined the Idaho Community Foundation (ICF) in November 2025 as the community engagement associate for North Idaho, it was the answer to a prayer.

“This is a job I’ve been waiting for, for a long time, three years of searching for the right job,” she reflected.

**Her work is three-pronged.**

First, she supports nonprofits in North Idaho through the Nonprofit Center, formerly the Idaho Nonprofit Center, which merged into ICF in 2024, to build strong relationships with nonprofits and businesses in this region.

Second, Emma also leads efforts to expand ICF’s collective giving programs for regional affiliates and giving circles.

Third, she helps local nonprofits learn about and participate in ICF’s Idaho Gives, a four-day fundraising event in May that connects the state’s nonprofits with donors throughout Idaho.

When the Idaho Nonprofit Center merged into ICF, they created a new vision that “Idaho is a place for possibility where everyone contributes to thriving communities.”

**Their mission is** “to strengthen communities through philanthropy, elevating nonprofit impact and connecting Idahoans.”

The theme for Idaho Gives from May 4 to 7 is “When Idaho Gives, Idaho Thrives!”

Created by the Idaho Nonprofit Center in 2013, Idaho Gives “allows us to show up for the organizations that show up for us,” she said.

**Emma invites people** to imagine their communities without nonprofits.

“Who would keep the children fed, for example, through Backpacks for Kids? What about the Music Conservatory? Or those who keep the trails in the area open through the Trails Association? How about all the services for seniors?” she asked.

“Without those entities, what does the community look like? It’s pretty grim,” she said.

“I help nonprofits learn about Idaho Gives,” she continued. “I help them register. We provide toolkits for them, and we help them with aspects of implementing the tools.

“For example, if a nonprofit seeks to raise \$25,000, I may ask them, ‘How many donors do you plan to have visit your Idaho Gives page? Who are they? How do you make your company visible to them?’ I deal with funding strategy, marketing strategy and donor engagement,” said Emma.

Idaho Gives is not simply about receiving big gifts. It’s about broadening participation in the program, which helps with funding, but also fuels the nonprofits’ realization that they are part of ICF. They are part of and supported by their communities



**Emma Hoagland loves empowering nonprofits.**  
Photo courtesy of Emma Hoagland

and supported statewide. They are not alone.

Early Giving for Idaho Gives opens on April 14, but the main fundraising campaign takes place from May 4 to 7. Community members can access nonprofit donation pages through [idahogives.org](http://idahogives.org), she said.

**The nonprofit support** Emma makes available includes advocacy for nonprofits, as well as several levels of education—from baseline introductory webinars on how to be an exemplary board member to marketing or fundraising, the nonprofit middle-management leaders program, the leadership development program and an in-person cohort for executive directors.

“The programs run a membership model,” she said, “which offers reduced rates to participate, as well as providing opportunities for community-building.”

The Nonprofit Center also helps build relationships with business affiliates helpful to these organizations.

As Emma straddles the line between the work of the Nonprofit Center and that of the foundation side of ICF, she helps manage collective giving programs and affiliates.

**Two affiliates** are the Greater Coeur d’Alene Community Foundation (GCCF) and the Women’s Gift Alliance, a membership organization that pools fees and shares them for different projects through annual grants.

“ICF partners with the affiliates to offer support to them with strategic planning and implementation of their grant cycles for which we receive a management fee,” she said.

In addition, ICF supports affiliates and fund holders with the accounting management and investment of their charitable funds so the organizations can focus on the fund part of distrib-

uting grants in the community.

“I come alongside these groups as a way to give back to the community,” she continued. “I care about the community and the nonprofits here.”

The passion Emma expresses for supporting nonprofits developed out of a dramatic change in her understanding of the challenges so many people experience that she had no idea existed.

“I grew up in a Christian bubble,” she reminisced. “I was born and raised in the small town of Shelton, Wash., by Puget Sound.

“My parents both were teachers at a small Christian school for K-8 grade there. Dad was my teacher from fifth through eighth grade.

“My whole world was school and church. My grandfather and my uncle were pastors. My dad is an elder. I sang in the choir, taught Sunday school and led mission trips,” Emma continued.

“Growing up in the school and church taught me the divine importance of people and caring for them. Caring for them was the best thing I could do. I took that seriously. I now realize we helped the same people all the time. I was sheltered,” she said.

Emma attended Northwest University in Kirkland, Wash., a small private Christian university, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in secondary education in English in 2008. She began teaching at a private Christian school, Cedar Park Christian, near Mountlake Terrace.

“I loved my upbringing and was strong in my faith,” she said. “It was my whole life. I felt competent in my faith.”

However, that Christian bubble had to burst, she said. In 2018, she and her husband moved to Coeur d’Alene and she took a break from teaching to focus on raising their three children.

“When I returned to work, I began working at Safe Passage

as an advocate at the domestic violence and sexual assault shelter,” she said. “For the first time, I saw real pain perpetrated.

“I remember sitting across from a woman brought into the shelter when her life was threatened,” Emma said. “She had left the house with nothing but her children, but she felt she had to go back to her husband because she belonged to him.”

Emma began to realize the Bible and faith can be weaponized.

“Nonprofit space allows us to care for everyone. At Safe Passage, I could do impactful work with people who really needed it. That was it for me,” she said. “Now I will always be in a place where I can help someone.

“Through ICF, I’m able to support people who sit across from that woman every single day,” she explained. “I get to care for the nonprofits doing that kind of work and do my best to ensure they have everything they need.

Her focus on strengthening nonprofits was not a move away from her faith but grew out of her growing awareness of marginalized communities.

Emma realized that helping nonprofits strengthen board

members, raise financial support and find volunteers were means to show up for neighbors.

“One way I made it through having my bubble burst was to focus on the work of nonprofits and all they give,” she said. “Being a part of that nonprofit community allows me to focus on the good that’s in each of us who are here on the ground.”

Emma sees people at their best, trying their best. She sees how they live that out through justice, mercy and service.

“The Idaho Community Foundation has been faithfully supporting nonprofits for nearly 40 years,” she said. “Money comes in and goes back out. We make more possible for our communities. I’m honored to serve and support those who are doing nonprofit work every day.”

For information, call (208) 342-3535, email [emma@idahohocf.org](mailto:emma@idahohocf.org) or visit [idahogives.org](http://idahogives.org).

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# Dayton UMC members choose to use reserve to feed hungry people

Dayton United Methodist Church (UMC), a community of about 25 members, made a difference for hungry people in the community through their donation to the local food pantry.

Like other very small churches concerned about long-term viability, Dayton UMC recently made a unanimous decision to free up \$5,000 of its reserves and raised an additional \$3,400 to help the Dayton Food Bank fill empty shelves and keep the doors open.

**“Members heard stories** of greatly increased need from the food bank operators and volunteers at Project Timothy, a mini-thrift store that hands out vouchers for gas or hotel stays,” said half-time pastor Tanya Sorenson.

“We need to do something,” the members said. So, they challenged other churches to consider opening their reserves.

“Churches are getting smaller and older, so naturally churches like ours are concerned about our financial future, but people are hurting now,” said Tanya. “We felt that we were working as the hands of Jesus.

**“Instead of making a one-**



**Eighteen Dayton UMC members with their pastor, Tanya Becker, center back.**

Photo courtesy of Dayton UMC

time donation from the reserves, church members went above and beyond. For a church this small, it’s a big deal. I was astonished and thrilled, when the church also came up with the extra funds to share along with the reserve funds. It was an amazing level of doing Christ’s work,” she said.

“In the Gospels, Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep, feed my lambs.’ It was pretty much that simple, no deep theology: Blessed are the poor, feed my lambs,” Tanya said.

**Aware of the likelihood** of small, rural hospitals like Dayton Hospital closing because of future Medicaid cuts, church members are considering how the church can help make a dif-

ference to people losing their insurance and their local hospital.

“What can we do that is of viable help, regarding Jesus’ teachings about healing the sick?” she asked. “We look forward to working with other local churches to solve this.

**“We don’t have answers** yet, but that’s a new focus. We normally concentrate on children, holding an ecumenical vacation Bible school in the summer with the Dayton United Church of Christ and Episcopal churches.

In addition, with other local churches, Dayton UMC supports Young Life for middle schoolers and high schoolers in Dayton.

“We also support a United

Methodist missionary, Katherine Parker, in Nepal,” said Tanya.

**Previously, Tanya served** at Pioneer UMC in Walla Walla for several years after retiring from work in higher education. Pioneer UMC housed the Men’s Christian Aid Center when their building was being remodeled. The church also held a biannual optical clinic offered by a retired optician for immigrants to come and be fitted for free glasses.

In her 20s, Tanya started teaching writing at Columbia Basin College in Tri-Cities. At 40, she went to seminary, working full-time as visitation pastor at Kent UMC while earning a master of divinity from Seattle

University in 2004.

When she married Joe Becker in 2003, she became half-time stepmother of children who were 11 and 13. After the oldest had open heart surgery at 16, she focused on being a mother.

**Tanya eventually taught** in Tacoma at two technical colleges, where she became dean and earned a doctorate in education.

Choosing to live in Eastern Washington after she retired, she and her husband, a hydrogeologist, who arranged to work remotely, settled in Walla Walla. She served Pioneer UMC there half time two years, until she was assigned to Dayton UMC in July.

“I believe ministry is service to others,” Tanya said. “Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, preached the good news of God’s kingdom and restored people into community. He told us to go and do likewise. I serve God through serving a church to help others increase their faith, build community and act their faith as far as possible in a very hurting world.”

For information, call (253) 970-3110 or email [sorenson.daytonumc@gmail.com](mailto:sorenson.daytonumc@gmail.com).

## GU president’s panel tackles higher ed issues

A Gonzaga Presidential Speaker Series panel discussion, “Caring for Our Common Home: Turning Local Action into Global Impact,” is being hosted by Gonzaga President Katia Passerini at 6 p.m., Wednesday, April 8, at Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet Ave.

It will explore how Catholic universities can drive meaningful societal change.

The featured speakers from the Catholic University of Portugal are sustainability scholar Wayne Visser, professor at the business school, where he directs the Catholic Center for Thriving Futures, and Isabel Braga da Cruz, president of the university’s Regional Center and an associate professor in biotechnology.

As higher education faces increased scrutiny, U.S. universities are wrestling with such questions as: Are institutions reinforcing elitism or helping overcome class divisions? Are they overly politicized or not engaged enough? Are they agents of capitalism or catalysts for a better society? Are they enabling dialogue or are they reinforcing silos?

These tensions shape how Catholic, Jesuit, humanistic institutions like Gonzaga consider

their role in confronting climate change, advancing sustainability and addressing social inequities.

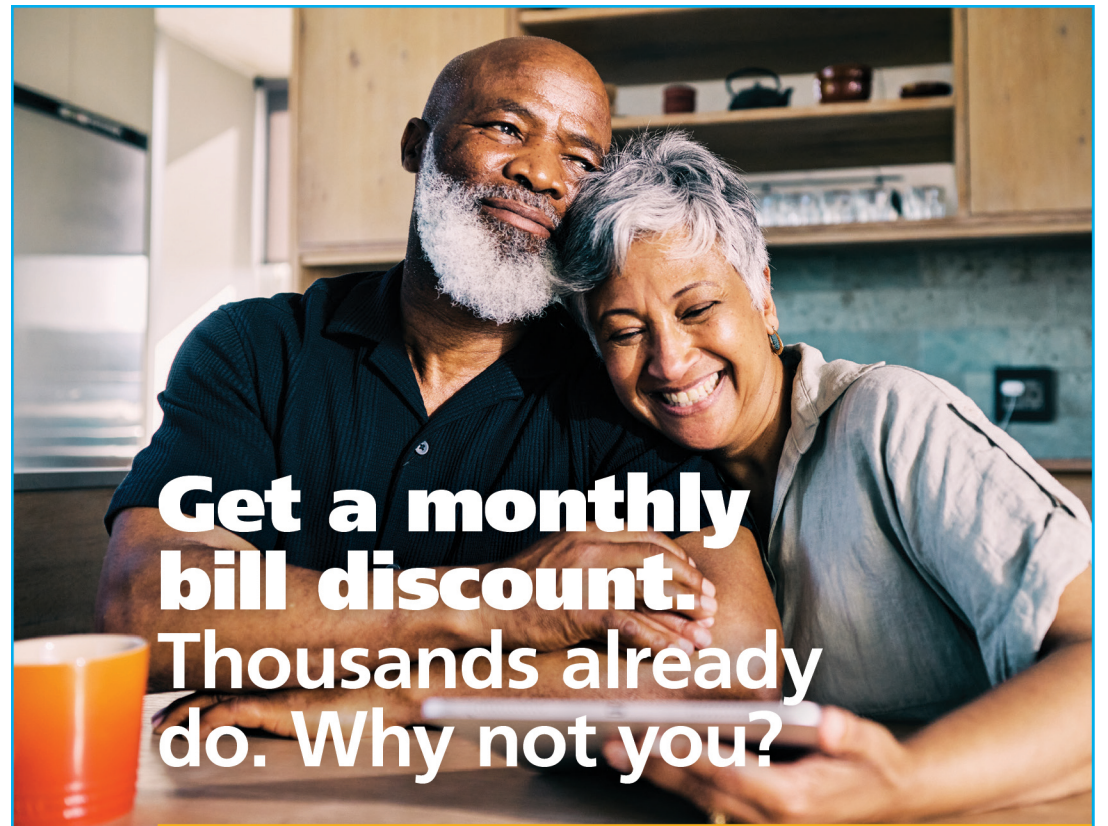
“The challenges facing our world require universities to tackle questions on how we can best prepare our students to understand and engage with challenges,” Katia said. “Our guests will remind us that Catholic higher education is uniquely positioned to lead in this educational endeavor.”

She will moderate the panel, which will also include Brian Henning, director of Gonzaga’s Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, and Jim Simon, director of Gonzaga’s Office of Sustainability.

Wayne and Isabel will explore how universities can become powerful drivers of social and environmental transformation, not only through teaching and research, but by scaling partnerships, cultivating innovation, and reaching out to interconnected networks of local and global communities.

A screening of Wayne’s film “Closing the Loop” will be at 7 p.m., Thursday, April 9, in Hemmingson Auditorium.

For information, call 313-2787 or visit [gonzaga.edu/ticketcenter](http://gonzaga.edu/ticketcenter).



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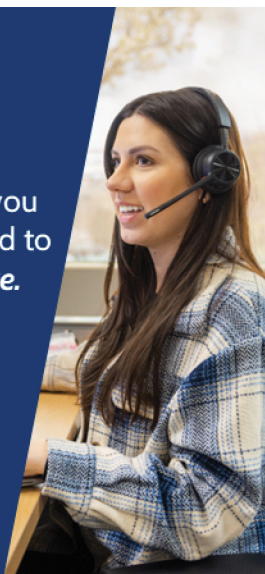
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## Partners Inland NW opens new building

Volunteers who sort food, stock diapers, hang clothing and greet families who access services at Partners Inland Northwest recently joined a behind-the-scenes tour of the new building that opened in March at 17002 E. Sprague in Spokane Valley.

The new location doubles their capacity to provide food, clothing and diapers.

The expansion into a 60,000-square-foot former Ziggy's store allows them to increase efficiency, serve more families and create a better experience

for both clients and volunteers.

"This building isn't just square footage. It's growth. It's dignity. It's hope," said Cal Coblenz, executive director.

For information, call 927-1153, email [admin@partnersinw.org](mailto:admin@partnersinw.org) or visit [partnersinw.org](http://partnersinw.org).

## Shalom Ministries seeks new location

Shalom Ministries celebrated its ministry at its annual St. Lucy's Breakfast in March at the Rockwood Retirement Communities with guests sharing stories of how the program has changed their lives.

For 32 years Shalom Ministries' Dining with Dignity has served breakfast from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m., Mondays to Fridays, and a 4:30 p.m. Monday dinner

to vulnerable people downtown.

"We are grateful for our supporters providing radical hospitality to women, men, teens and children who have found tools to rebuild their brokenness to gain a sense of worthiness," said event organizer Deidre Jacobson.

The board is looking for a new home to keep their doors open because New Community Church, at 518 W. Third Ave., is

selling the building.

Shalom Ministries invites financial support, prayers and volunteers so it can keep serving more than 84,000 meals each year. Volunteers from those served receive job and life-skill training, case management, mentoring, housing assistance and a monthly stipend.

For information, visit [shalommeal.org](http://shalommeal.org).

## St. Mary's announces Art Walk on April 26

St. Mary Catholic Parish will host an Art Walk from 6 to 8 p.m., Saturday, April 25 and 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., Sunday, April 26, at 304 S. Adams Rd. in Spokane Valley.

Entitled, "Portraits of Our

Mother in Sacred Art," the art walk includes dozens of prints of famous works of art, an I-Spy game and crafts for kids, an exhibit of rosaries and a display about major Marian shrines from

around the world—including

two Lego models—a walking labyrinth and a catalog of exhibited art visitors can take home.

For information, call 928-3210 x 111, email [mbricher@dioceseofspokane.org](mailto:mbricher@dioceseofspokane.org) or visit [stmaryspokane.org](http://stmaryspokane.org).

## UGM celebrates 75 years serving Spokane

As Union Gospel Mission celebrates 75 years of serving the Spokane community, they honor men and women who worked tirelessly to begin the ministry, investing in a vision bigger than themselves.

UGM was among the first in Spokane to address homelessness, the first to open a women's

shelter. It is one of the longest-serving nonprofits in the city.

From the beginning, UGM has not waited on government solutions or accepted government funds but relied on God's provision through supporters.

UGM was founded in 1951 by a group of businesspeople to provide food, shelter and individual

ways out of homelessness for men, women and children.

It includes addiction and trauma recovery, legal and financial services, jobs and job training and one-on-one counseling and is based on the belief that only God can change a life.

For information, visit [uniongospelmission.org/75years](http://uniongospelmission.org/75years).

## Be the Change plans to honor two groups

Be the Change 509: Eastside Gladiators, which celebrates the good things ordinary people are doing, is holding an Earth Day Celebration to recognize people at the Department of Ecology who protect the environment.

The group will gather at 3:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 22, at the Department of Ecology, 4601 N

Monroe St., followed by a rally from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the corner of W. Wellesley and N. Monroe.

In addition, the East Side Gladiators is supporting survivors of domestic violence with a tour at 3 p.m., Friday, April 10, at Mujeres in Action (MIA), 318 E. Rowan Ave. From 4 to 5

p.m., they will hold a peaceful sidewalk rally at E. Rowan and N. Division. Participants may donate sheets and towels.

MIA began in 2018 when founder Hanncel Sanchez began offering culturally responsive services to Latine families.

For information, visit [mobile.us/indivisible/event/875670](http://mobile.us/indivisible/event/875670).

## Gonzaga presents event on AI responsibility

Gonzaga University's Institute for Informatics and Applied Technology will host the Value & Responsibility in AI Conference for regional and national leaders from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Thursday, April 23, on campus.

Business leaders, technologists, policymakers, researchers and entrepreneurs will discuss innovation, leadership and responsible AI adoption.

The conference looks at how

artificial intelligence is transforming industries and the need for ethical standards and economic responsibility, said Jay Yang, director of the institute. "The Inland Northwest has an

opportunity and a responsibility to shape AI's future in our region with purpose and benefit for all," he said.

For information, visit [gonzaga.edu/AIConference](http://gonzaga.edu/AIConference).

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## Groups protest war in Iran

Spokane Veterans For Peace (VFP) and other groups plan a peaceful protest at Fairchild Air Force Base over military operations and the role of Fairchild-based refueling planes in the Middle East at 3 p.m., Saturday, April 11, at the Rambo Rd. Gate.

They seek to raise awareness that mid-air refueling of fighter jets enables sustained combat operations. They call for an end to the violence, diplomatic solutions and de-escalation.

Veterans for Peace report that hundreds of in-flight refueling missions in the Middle East reveal the scale and intensity of U.S. military operations and help escalate tensions and civilian harm in conflict zones.

The protest will include speakers, veterans and community members sharing perspectives on war, military service and the human cost of ongoing conflicts. Organizers say the demonstration will be peaceful and focus on education and engagement.

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Join us at our new location: Spokane Friends Meeting, 1612 W Dalke Ave, Spokane, WA 99205.

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## To persist over 42 years of difficult times is The Fig Tree's strength

To persist through 42 years of “these times”—whatever the times are—is The Fig Tree’s strength. We have not persisted alone, but with you, The Fig Tree family.

Sometimes in the worst of times, support has been strongest.

Today The Fig Tree faces rising prices for printing, mailing and everything, but anticipate—as with public broadcasting—our supporters will rise to the occasion, knowing we will carry on.

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to create community for common action. We’ve seen it over and over through the centuries as people of faith are empowered to counter hate and fear that fuels empires with that love that frees people and inspires miracles.

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We need wisdom to discern as those in power seek to divide us based on whether we are Black, Brown or white; Indigenous, citizen or immigrant, women or men, LGBTQ, cisgender or straight, young, middle-aged or old and other polarities—inviting us to distrust, even hate each other.

We invite you to discern nuances

and recognize an individual’s humanity over various identities, so we can come together in solidarity, persist together, understand and respect each other in ways that create miracles.

Fig Tree stories help us see beyond divisions to overcome systems of power, violence and inequity.

You, The Fig Tree family will keep our voice alive and thriving.

We will adapt as needed to the financial uncertainty—perhaps printing fewer copies as our online readership increases. Like public broadcasting, we are available for free, but your donations keep us inspiring miracles.

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Keep us connected, communicating and circulating so we persist in providing a voice of healing and reconciliation by informing, inspiring and involving you with the stories of everyday miracles happening all around us.

**We invite you to donate with the form on p. 2 or at [thefigtree.org/donate.html](http://thefigtree.org/donate.html).**

**Mary Stamp - Editor**



## Presbyterians, Earth Ministry, World Council of Churches share messages

**We are deeply troubled** by the expanding military assault on Iran and the widening regional war it now threatens to become. As Christians shaped by the reconciling love of Jesus Christ, we grieve every life lost and every family now living in terror. Decisions of war and peace are measured not in political claims but in human lives.

**The General Assembly** of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has repeatedly affirmed that war must never be entered into lightly. Military force must be a last resort, and international disputes must be addressed through sustained diplomacy, accountability, and multilateral engagement grounded in international law. Our General Assemblies have called for negotiated agreements that constrain nuclear proliferation, reduce regional tensions, and prioritize civilian protection.

**We are gravely alarmed** that this expanding military campaign is already resulting in civilian casualties and retaliatory strikes across the region. Reports that civilian infrastructure, including schools, has been struck heighten our alarm and underscore the devastating human cost of escalation.

**The people of Iran**, many already living under repression and economic hardship, will bear the brunt of destruction, displacement, and fear. Families across neighboring countries now face renewed instability and the prospect of a widening war. Civilians, not political leaders, will suffer first and longest.

**History warns us** that regime-toppling interventions and open-ended military campaigns often unleash consequences far beyond what leaders anticipate.

**We affirm clearly:** the Iranian government’s repression, corruption and human rights abuses are real and grievous. Our opposition to this escalating military action is not a defense of authoritarian rule. Nor does our concern end with another nation’s abuses. Every government, including our own, is accountable for how it wields power, and democracies must guard against actions that erode the rule of law and constitutional restraint.

**Rather, our opposition** reflects our conviction that bombs do not create democracy, and airstrikes do not build just societies. Lasting peace and freedom require sustained diplomacy, support for civil society, regional de-escalation and accountability under international law. Our church has long urged:

- renewed diplomatic engagement rather than military brinkmanship,
- congressional oversight and adherence to constitutional war powers,
- protection of civilians as a moral and

legal priority,

- serious investment in nonproliferation and multilateral agreements and
- a foreign policy that reduces, rather than expands, cycles of retaliation.

**As Presbyterians, we confess** that true security does not come through military might but through justice, restraint and accountability. We call for an immediate cessation of further military escalation and for a return to sustained diplomacy grounded in international law. The stakes are too high for impulsive action or open-ended conflict.

**We pray for wisdom** and courage among leaders, for the people of Iran, for Israelis and Palestinians, for U.S. service members, and for all who may suffer as a result of this decision.

And we recommit ourselves to Christ’s call to be peacemakers in a world too quick to reach for war.

**Presbyterian Church USA  
Office of Public Witness  
Statement on War in Iran**

**Link provided in newsletter of the  
Presbytery of the Inland Northwest**

**The World Council of Churches** Easter message reflects on how to celebrate Easter in a time in which shouts of joy are so often drowned out by cries of despair.

How can we celebrate Easter in a time in which shouts of joy are so often drowned out by cries of despair? So many victims of war, economic injustice, sexual violence, political oppression, climate disasters and religious persecution are to be mourned. Can we authentically celebrate Easter without addressing these sufferings?

**Easter is the cornerstone** of Christians’ faith. It is a source of hope in these troubled times. Jesus inspired people of his time when he spoke words of love and words of hope, when he touched people with his healing hands, when he led together people from very different backgrounds into one loving community. They could feel the presence of God.

**In a time of occupation** and political oppression, Jesus opened a window into a world, in which every human being, created by God equally, would live in dignity. Hope began to spread. Yet then, came the big disappointment. They arrested Jesus. They tortured him. He was put to death and he cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It was a situation of despair. Another inspiring moral and spiritual leader in the history of the world who, in the end, failed. One more disappointed hope as we have seen it so many times and are seeing it so clearly before our eyes in these days of wars, conflicts, violence, and a climate catastrophe.

On the third day, the experience of the women at the tomb changed everything. When they came with their tears to mourn, the tomb was empty. They encountered the living Jesus. They told the disciples. They overcame their disbelief and spread the good news into the world, so an innumerable number of people today, many also in desperate situations, celebrate Easter, the feast of Jesus’ resurrection and trust in his promise to be with us “always, to the very end of the age.” Death will not have the last word. The last word is life.

**Easter does not promote** spiritual pacification in the face of suffering that is otherwise unbearable. Jesus’ death and resurrection is inseparably connected with his life of love, reconciliation and justice. Therefore, our Easter belief in resurrection is not only a big source of hope but also a protest against the denial of dignity and humanity, expressed in aggressive warfare, the spreading of hate and contempt against whole groups of people, and sins such as racism, antisemitism, nationalism, or xenophobia.

**Christians live from a message** that leads into life....May we celebrate this Easter as a time of reassurance that in all the abysses we presently experience in the world, there is more to come. That it is not a dark hole that we are walking into but a new heaven and a new earth in which all tears are wiped away. This outlook continues to unite our global church community. It connects us with all people on this earth, who are together with us created in God’s image.

**Heinrich Bedford-Strohm  
WCC Central Committee Moderator  
Jerry Pillay - WCC General Secretary**

**The following is an update** on the future of Earth Ministry, a partner of The Fig Tree, Faith Action Network, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington and NAACP Spokane in planning the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference.

After the board of Earth Ministry/WAIPL voted to shut down last year, a small, dedicated group of founders, friends and long-time champions asked for the opportunity to explore options to keep the organization alive. We had hoped that a time of fallowness might allow for a new expression of the good work of faith and environment in a new time.

**Despite diligent effort to find** a path forward, we found that the financial and administrative situation we inherited was more complicated than we had anticipated or had the capacity to pursue. Therefore, with deep sorrow, we made the difficult decision to continue the process to dissolve the organization. This is a poignant

time for us, and we expect many of you are feeling the weight of it as well.

Nonetheless, we have an opportunity now to honor and recognize Earth Ministry, and to celebrate what we achieved together over its 33-year history. Our work was powerful, unique, and transformative thanks to our community.

**Earth Ministry was among** the first organizations in the U.S to bring the theology of caring for creation to a congregational level, first in Christian churches and later in multi-faith communities.

- “Earth Letter” was an award-winning and inspiring journal.
- Our books and curricula reached a wide audience.
- Our “Greening Congregations Program” was the first in the nation and encouraged more than 100 faith communities and many denominations to practice environmental stewardship.
- Our Colleague Network connected members across faith traditions to share experiences and resources with each other.

**Evolving the work of faith** and environment, Earth Ministry launched a robust Faithful Advocacy program that connected faith communities with environmental organizations to add power and depth to legislative priorities.

Through campaigns against coal, oil, and gas across the Northwest, Earth Ministry supported tribal treaty rights and sacred sites of Indigenous Nations against fossil fuel incursions. We are proud of our history of legislative success in limiting toxic chemicals and in supporting climate protection in Washington State.

Throughout the years, Earth Ministry has mentored clergy, lay leaders and young adults, shaping their lives and careers. Their work continues in differing expressions of faithfulness to this day. Through them, the spirit of Earth Ministry continues.

**The theme is relationship-building.** Earth Ministry was, from the beginning, people. Together we fostered relationships of mutual encouragement, spiritual growth and joy in the creation.

We thank supporters for their commitment to our work through many seasons. Their generosity with money, time, talent and heart made our shared ministry not only possible, but also fabulous. We raise prayers of thanks for good work, by and for good people, and for a vision that was born, evolved and endured.

We may send emails with opportunities to opt in for email lists with partners in ongoing faith and environmental efforts. Plans are in the works to celebrate Earth Ministry’s 33 years in the fall.

**Carla Pryne and Ruth Mulligan co-founders with the late Jim Mulligan**

# Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed  
Submit events to [development@thefigtree.org](mailto:development@thefigtree.org) by the third Fridays

- Ongoing • **Second Harvest** food sorting shifts 9-2:30, 2-harvest.org
- Mons • **Culture Nights**, American Indian Community Center, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., aiccinc.org
- Tues/Fri • **Non-Violent Communication Practice Group**, NAACP Spokane Chapter, Tues 10 a.m., Liberty Park Library, Fri 12:30 p.m. zoom, [brcspokane@gmail.com](mailto:brcspokane@gmail.com)
- Apr 2 • **Fig Tree Benefit/Development Committee**, online, noon; Board, online 1 to 3 p.m., [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto:mary@thefigtree.org)
- Apr 2-4 • **Spokane Quilt, Craft & Sewing Festival**, The Quilting Bee, Spokane County Fair and Expo Center, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., [quiltcraftsew.com/spokane.html](http://quiltcraftsew.com/spokane.html)
- **Men's Holy Week Retreat**, Fr. Michael Maher, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 4:30 p.m. to 1 p.m., [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Apr 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 • **Taizé Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., [bartletts@gonzaga.edu](mailto:bartletts@gonzaga.edu)
- Apr 3 • **Giving Joy Day**, on Eastern Washington University's 144th Birthday, PUB, Nysether Community Room, 926 Elm, Cheney, 12 to 1 p.m., [ewu.edu](http://ewu.edu)
- **The Way of the Cross**, Spokane Pilgrimage, Salem Lutheran, 1428 W. Broadway, 4 p.m., public witness Rotary Fountain, Riverfront, 5 p.m., [dilts@fanwa.org](mailto:dilts@fanwa.org)
- **Easter Vignette**, Walk with Jesus Christ Art Gallery, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1670 N. McGuire, Post Falls, 4 to 8 p.m., (208) 667-0467
- Apr 3, 4, 5 • **Journey to the Cross**, Spokane Valley Adventist Church, 1601 S. Sullivan, Spokane Valley, Fri 6 to 8 p.m., Sat/Sun 4 to 8 p.m., [valleyadventist.church](http://valleyadventist.church)
- Apr 4 • **People Power: Organizing Against Authoritarianism**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS), 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., register for place, [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- Apr 4, 11 • **Core Training in Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Advocacy**, Mujeres in Spokane, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 869-0876, [miaspokane.org](http://miaspokane.org)
- Apr 4, 11, 18 • **Sustainable Sewing Classes**, Spokane Zero Waste, 2026 N. Hamilton, 1 to 3:30 p.m., [spokanezerowaste.org](http://spokanezerowaste.org)
- Apr 5 • **Easter Sunrise Service**, Greenwood Memorial Terrace, 211 N. Government, 6:30 a.m., 326-3800
- Apr 7 • **Conversation with Terry Tempest Williams**, environmental advocate, Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, 4 p.m., [gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents](http://gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents)
- **Curiosity: The Key to Connection**, Tenzin Tsepai, North Idaho College (NIC) Cardinal Reads, NIC Student Union, 495 N. College, 6:30 to 8 p.m., (208) 769-3300
- **Q&A Series**, Manzanita House, Zoom, 5:30 p.m., [mhsokane.org](http://mhsokane.org)
- Apr 8 • **ED Coffee Hour**, Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA), online 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., [nonprofitwa.org](http://nonprofitwa.org)
- **Peer-to-Peer Fundraiser**, Idaho Gives 2026, Idaho Community Foundation (ICF), Zoom, 11 a.m., [idahononprofits.org/events](http://idahononprofits.org/events)
- **Water Wise Wednesday Workshops: Irrigation**, Shadle Park Library, 5:30 p.m., [telref@spokanelibrary.org](mailto:telref@spokanelibrary.org)
- **Free Legal Clinic**, Mujeres in Action and YWCA Spokane, 5:30-7:30 p.m., [miaspokane.org](http://miaspokane.org)
- **Caring for our Common Home**, GU 2026 Presidential Speaker, Myrtle Woldson Center, 211 E. Desmet., 6 to 7:30 p.m., 313-2787
- **Discovering Shared Values**, Buddhist nuns, NIC Student Union, 6:30 to 8 p.m., (208) 769-3300
- Apr 9, 23 • **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733
- Apr 10, 23, 30 • **Idaho Gives Office Hours**, ICF, Zoom, 9 a.m., [idahogives.org](http://idahogives.org), [idahononprofits.org/events](http://idahononprofits.org/events)
- Apr 11 • **Warrior Walk**, Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition, Thornton Murphy Park, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Southside Community Center, thewarriorwalk.org
- **Holistic Festival**, Center Place Regional Event Center, 2426 N. Discovery Pl, Spokane Valley, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 468-9001, [holisticfestivals.com](http://holisticfestivals.com)
- **Regenerating Community**, Meaningful Movies Spokane, Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, The Carl Maxey Center, 3114 E. 5th, 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Veterans for Peace Protest**, Fairchild AFB, Rambo Rd. Gate, 3 p.m., [jguerrero8388@gmail.com](mailto:jguerrero8388@gmail.com)
- **Ho-Ika**, Washington State Kaiulu 'I'Imi Hawai'i, Luau, Cub Senior Ballroom, 5 to 8 p.m. [wsu.edu/event](http://wsu.edu/event)
- **April Showers**, The Lands Council, Riverside Place, 1110 W. Riverside, 5 to 9 p.m., [landscouncil.org](http://landscouncil.org)
- Apr 12 • **Ramen Fest**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., [spokanebuddhisttemple.org](http://spokanebuddhisttemple.org)
- Apr 13 • **Divestment as Mission Fidelity: Catholic Fossil Fuel Divestment**, Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, and Office of Mission Integration, Gonzaga, Zoom, 5 p.m., [gonzaga.edu/climateinstitute](http://gonzaga.edu/climateinstitute)
- Apr 14 • **Idaho Gives**, Register, ICF, [IdahoGives.org](http://IdahoGives.org)
- **David Folkenflik**, NPR Media Correspondent, Bing Crosby Theater, 7:30 p.m., [spokanepublicradio.org](http://spokanepublicradio.org)
- **From Bystanders to Belonging: Building Inclusive Volunteer Ecosystems that Stick**, Idaho Nonprofit Center, webinar 11 a.m., [idahononprofits.org](http://idahononprofits.org)
- **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference Planning Team**, 1 p.m., Zoom, [kaye@hefigtree.org](mailto:kaye@hefigtree.org)
- **Water Wise Wednesday Workshops: Green without Grass**, Shadle Park Library, 5:30 p.m., 444-5300
- **Yom HaShoah Service**, Temple Beth Shalom, 1322 E. 30th, 7 p.m., [spokanetbs.org/yomhashoah](mailto:spokanetbs.org/yomhashoah)
- Apr 16 • **CD Aide Care Affair**, Coeur d'Alene Resort, 115 S. Second, 5 to 8 p.m., [jasonn@cdaide.org](mailto:jasonn@cdaide.org)
- **Sabes Que**, Hispanic Business Professional Assn, Max at Mirabeau, 1100 N. Sullivan, 6 p.m., [hbpaofspokane.org](http://hbpaofspokane.org)
- **Evening of Stories**, Colombian dinner and three refugee neighbors' stories, World Relief Spokane, <https://forms.office.com/r/TG0f6pg2mW>
- **NAACP Spokane Branch**, General Meeting, SCC Building 6, The Lair, 6:30 p.m., [naacpspokane.org](http://naacpspokane.org)
- Apr 17 • **Be a Willow Warrior**, The Lands Council & Spokane Conservation District, Thompson Creek at Newman

- Lake, 16108 Northwest Newman Lake, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., [landscouncil.org](http://landscouncil.org)
- Apr 17-18 • **Foundations of Community Organizing**, Spokane Alliance, Spokane Education Assn, 230 E. Montgomery, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., [spokanealliance.org](http://spokanealliance.org)
- Apr 17-19 • **Get Lit! Festival**, Eastern Washington University, [getlitfestival2026.sched.com](http://getlitfestival2026.sched.com)
- **Native Youth Leadership Camp**, The Native Project, Medical Lake, 325-5502, [nativeproject.org](http://nativeproject.org)
- Apr 18 • **Nonviolence in Action: Peacekeeping & De-Escalation for Protests & Events**, PJALS, 1 to 5 p.m., [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- **Heroes Walk 5K, 10K Fun Run**, "Fortify Families of Veterans and Military," Riverfront Park, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 821-8305, [heroeshomestead.org](http://heroeshomestead.org)
- **Earth Day River Clean Up**, Spokane Riverkeeper, Highbridge and People's Park, 212 S. A, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., [spokaneriverkeeper.org/calendar](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org/calendar)
- **Seed to Soul: Black Earth Day**, Growing Neighbors, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, 500 S. Stone, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., [duaahunter@outlook.com](mailto:duaahunter@outlook.com)
- **Spring Tea and Silent Auction**, Spokane Youth Symphony, Southside Community Center, 3151 E. 27th, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 448-4446, [spokaneyouthsymphony.org](http://spokaneyouthsymphony.org)
- Apr 19 • **"Celebrating 100 Years"**, Spokane Melody Singers, Men of Faith, Southside Community Center, 3151 E. 27th, 2:30 p.m., [MelodySingers100@gmail.com](mailto:MelodySingers100@gmail.com)
- **All-Community Hymn Sing**, Spokane First Nazarene Theatre Organ Society, 9004 N. Country Homes, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 464-1928, [sftos.org](http://sftos.org)
- Apr 20, 27, May 4, 11, 18 • **Conversation on The Serviceberry: Abundance & Reciprocity in the Natural World**, NAACP Spokane, Building Restorative Communities (BRC) Initiative, 808 E. Sprague, 4:30 to 5:45 p.m., register at [brcspokane@gmail.com](mailto:brcspokane@gmail.com)
- Apr 21 • **CHAS Mobile Clinic: Downtown Spokane**, Goodwill Industries of the Inland Northwest, 130 E. 3rd, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 838-4246, [discovergoodwill@giin.org](mailto:discovergoodwill@giin.org), [discovergoodwill.org](http://discovergoodwill.org)
- **Deadline Idaho Leads Application**, <https://web.idahononprofits.org/events>
- Apr 22 • **Between Two Worlds**, Exploring Jewish Culture and Religion Through Yiddish Literature, Virtual Book Club: Salt Houses by Hala Alyan, 12 p.m., [spokanelibrary.org](http://spokanelibrary.org)
- **Happy Earth Day Rally**, Eastside Gladiators, tour 4601 N. Monroe, 3:30 p.m., rally at S. Wellesley and N. Monroe, 4:30 p.m.
- **Water Wise Wednesday Workshops: Fire and Water Wise Design**, Shadle Park Library, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., 444-5300, [telref@spokanelibrary.org](mailto:telref@spokanelibrary.org)
- **Protesting 101**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., register location, [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- **"Make A Circle"**, KSPS Documentary Indie Lens Pop-up, Magic Lantern, [kspss.org](http://kspss.org)
- Apr 23 • **Executive Director Gathering**, NAWA, online 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., [nonprofitwa.org](http://nonprofitwa.org)
- **PJALS Connecting for Community and Annual Meeting**, 5:30 p.m., register for location, [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- Apr 23, 24 • **Value and Responsibility in AI Technologies**, GU Institute for Informatics and Applied Technology, Th 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., 313-5601, [informatics@gonzaga.edu](mailto:informatics@gonzaga.edu)
- Apr 24 • **Spring for Hope Anniversary Auction for FailSafe for Life**, Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls, 4:30 p.m., 475-7334, [failsafeforallife.org](http://failsafeforallife.org)
- **A Woman's Worth**, fundraiser, DoubleTree by Hilton 322 N. Spokane Falls, 6 to 8:30 p.m., 385-7074, [awomansworth.co](http://awomansworth.co)
- **"Courage and Resistance"**, Communal Grief Retreat, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, [harmonywoods.org](http://harmonywoods.org)
- Apr 25 • **Nonviolent Direct Action**, PJALS, register for time/place, [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- **Community Garden Plant Sale**, Millwood Community Garden and Growing Neighbors, 3800 N. Argonne, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., [millwoodimpact.org](http://millwoodimpact.org)
- **Earth Day Block Party**, River City Youth, Spokane Zero Waste, Tamale Box New Love Coffee, Better Health Together, West Central Abbey, 1832 W. Dean, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 703-7433, [rcyouth.org](http://rcyouth.org)
- **Asian American & Pacific Islander Cultural Festival**, Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., [aannhispokane.org](http://aannhispokane.org)
- **Earth Fest at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge**, The Lands Council, 26010 S. Smith, Cheney, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., [landscouncil.org](http://landscouncil.org)
- **Hope in the Community**, Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane, Central Library 906 W. Main, 6 p.m., [ricspokane.org](http://ricspokane.org)
- Apr 25, 26 • **"Portraits of Our Mother in Sacred Art Walk"**, St. Mary Catholic Parish, 304 S. Adams, Spokane Valley, Sat 6 to 8 p.m., Sun 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., 928-3210 x 111
- Apr 26 • **The Journey Within**, Student Concert Series, Holy Names Music Center, 2910 W. Custer, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., 326-9516, [hnmc.org](http://hnmc.org)
- **Taizé Evening Hour of Prayer**, IHRC, 5 p.m., 995-0987
- **Between Two Worlds**, Exploring Jewish Culture and Religion, Central Library, 1 p.m., [spokanelibrary.org](http://spokanelibrary.org)
- April 29 • **"The Power of Connection"**, SNAP's 60th Anniversary, Spokane Central Library, 906 W. Main, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., 456-1111, [snapwa.org](http://snapwa.org)
- **A Circle Centering Hope**, NAACP Spokane BRC Initiative, The Hive, Spokane Library, 2904 E. Sprague, 4:30 to 6 p.m., [brcspokane@gmail.com](mailto:brcspokane@gmail.com)
- May 2 • **Pacific Voyage**, EWU Pacific Islander luau, Reese Court, 4 to 7:30 p.m., 359-4109
- **Flowers of the Pacific**, Whitworth Polynesian Club Lu'au, dinner at HUB 4:30 to 7 p.m., show at Fieldhouse 7:30 p.m., [hleovao26@mywhitworth.edu](mailto:hleovao26@mywhitworth.edu)
- **Spring Gala**, Lake City Meals on Wheels, 1916 N. Lakewood, CdA, 6 to 8:30 p.m., (208) 667-4628
- May 5-July 28 • **Global Food and Art Market**, The Gathering House, 733 W. Garland, Tues
- May 7 • **Fig Tree Benefit/Development Committee**, online, noon; Board, online 1 to 3 p.m., [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto:mary@thefigtree.org)

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# Demographics at Thrive center in Spokane have changed since 2025

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

According to Mark Finney, executive director of Thrive International, the demographics of its Spokane facility have completely changed since the beginning of the current U.S. administration.

“Prior to this administration, we were completely full and had a waiting list. Ninety percent of our residents then were Ukrainians. Today in Spokane we are 90 percent full, with no waiting list and we are truly international, with residents from about 20 different nationalities all over the world.”

“Since 2025, no Ukrainians have been admitted to the United States so now Ukrainians only make up about only 30 percent of our residents. The others have moved on, becoming independent, finding work and housing,” said Mark.

“I am surprised the press hasn’t picked up on the fact that no Ukrainians are being allowed in the U.S., but the administration has been quiet about it. In fact, about the only immigrants being allowed to enter the U.S. at this time as refugees are white South Africans—7,500 of them—and the rest of the world doesn’t even recognize them as refugees,” he explained.

Mark has always felt the need to understand what refugees experience and to understand what special needs they might have and how better to be able to provide for them.

Over the past 10 years, he has visited refugee camps throughout the world. He visited in Ethiopia, Malawi and Bangladesh. In 2022, he visited a camp in Slovakia just after the invasion of Ukraine. He has also visited shelters in the borderlands of Texas and California—El Paso, Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana. His learnings there have impacted his actions as executive director of Thrive and his desire to provide as many services as possible at one site.

Since its founding in 2022, Thrive International has become Washington State’s largest provider of supportive housing for migrants. Its facilities in Spo-



Mark Finney gives update on Thrive International.

kane and Tacoma provide shelter for approximately 220 residents in Spokane and 370 in Tacoma.

“Because we no longer have a waiting list in Spokane,” Mark said, “we can allow residents to stay until they feel ready to move on and become independent. We don’t have to try to hurry them through this initial period of getting acclimated to the U.S. If they need it, we can give them a longer time to experience the stability, safety and the pathway to belonging that we provide under our one roof.”

The mission of Thrive International hasn’t changed since the current U.S. administration initiated “its various draconian policies towards immigrants and refugees” in the last year, said Mark.

It still aims to empower multicultural communities to thrive while providing housing and on-site programming and education tailored to their needs. Other elements of how they carry out this mission, however, have adapted to the changing situation.

Thrive never relied on federal funding for its operations. It did, however, get about half of its funding from state and local governments. This funding source has been much reduced owing to the state’s budget crunch, and currently Mark estimates that about a third of their funding now comes from private sources and about 35 percent from program fees.

“Our goal is to eventually grow the private funding so that very little relies on government sources, which change depending on who is in office,” he explained.

“I believe that many of the people in Spokane underestimate the impact of the immigrant community. We have more than 10,000 immigrants living here, and they keep a low profile, especially in this time with ICE activity in public spaces and in the workplace. The immigrant community is constantly experiencing fear and uncertainty,” Mark said. “Regardless of their documentation, which ICE seems to ignore when it carries out a raid, they don’t know from one day to the next if they will be picked up and detained, if they will have a job, if they and their families will be safe.”

An American Immigration Council analysis says that immigrants in Spokane County significantly boost its local economy, contributing \$1.8 billion to the GDP—6.1 percent of the total—in 2024 while making up 5.4 percent of the population.

As of 2019, immigrants and refugees in Spokane were 20.7 percent more likely to be of working age—77.5 percent—compared to the U.S.-born population—64.2 percent—helping fill regional labor needs. They comprised 12.7 percent of manufacturing, 8.7 percent of educational services and 7.8 percent of healthcare workers.

In that same year, taxes and spending power added to the city of Spokane’s economy, holding \$307.6 million in spending power, paying more than \$116 million in taxes and contributing nearly \$44 million to Social Security and Medicare in 2019. They also are strong contributors to the local economy as small business owners, startup founders and workers in STEM industries.

However, to be a refugee or an immigrant in the U.S. at the present time is expensive.

Mark cited a case where a family of three were applying for a two-year extension of their visa and had to pay \$7,000 but they still had no guarantee that it would be granted or even acted upon prior to the expiration of

their current visa.

According to a recent report on public radio, the Department of Homeland Security is implementing a policy of inaction on application requests from immigrants from certain unnamed countries. The immigrants send in their paperwork with the proper payment, but no response is given.

Mark is pleased with the recent action by Spokane’s Mayor Lisa Brown and the City Council to offset some of the costs incurred by those who have been detained by ICE. They have set aside \$100,000 for these needs to be administered by the Spokane Immigrant Rights Coalition with the hope that this will also be seed money for other donations.

The significant decrease in funding has led to other less desirable changes in the program at Thrive.

Many of the programs—like the Youth Program—continue with the existing staff, but some programs have been cut.

“We have had to let about half of our employees go, and this has impacted the services we can offer,” Mark explained. “We used to have a cultural integration program that was important to help refugees move out into the community here and feel comfortable at home.

“We would take them out to different significant sites in the city and county, like Riverfront Park, when there were cultural events or up to Mount Spokane or other outdoor sites. These field trips really helped give them a feel for the vibrant life of Spokane,” he said.

Mark encourages people to do anything they can to show they stand with refugees and immigrants—even something as simple as smiling and being friendly to them, and also actions like volunteering and donating to

the various local agencies.

Thrive itself needs volunteers for tasks, from interacting with young children to assisting at the reception desk.

If anyone speaks a language of the many folks present at Thrive—among them Venezuelans, Colombians, Sudanese, Eritreans, Afghanis—this is especially useful, according to Mark. He also notes that some receptionists and residents have become adept at using the Google Translate app to understand each other regardless of their first languages.

For information, email mark@thriveinternational.org or to volunteer connie@thriveinternational.org.

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The Native Project is planning the 2026 Native Youth Leadership Camp for American Indian/Alaska Native middle and high school students April 17 to 19 in Medical Lake.

The 2026 focus is on basketball and volleyball, healthy active lifestyles, cultural re-

vitalization and immersion, suicide prevention, drug and alcohol abuse prevention and unifying tribal communities by challenging young people to see themselves as warriors, nurturers, community activists and scholars.

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