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## Reading builds bonds

By Mary Stamp

A special education teacher at Sprague Elementary School volunteers in a literacy program promoting reading and positive relationships for children of inmates at Airway Heights Correctional Facility.

The Words Travel program of Volunteers of America in Spokane is based on the idea that "if Daddy says reading is good, it's good."

Debbie Reisenauer, the program's volunteer coordinator, has been involved since it started in March 2002.

After 11 years of working with Keytronic in Cheney, Debbie accepted a layoff offer that allowed her to earn an elementary education degree in 2001 from Eastern Washington University.

She decided to teach special education because of the help one of her children received from a teacher when he was struggling. She also prefers one-to-one and small-group teaching.

After working four years as a substitute teacher for the Cheney school district, she went to the Airway Heights prison seeking ways to be involved. There were

*Continued on page 6*



Debbie Reisenauer sorts through books in her office at the VOA.

## Grants support Fig Tree's media and justice ministry

The U.S.-Ontario Province of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary recently gave The Fig Tree a \$4,000 grant in support of its communication ministry.

"Please accept our blessings for this ministry," wrote the Province Leadership Team.

The Fig Tree has also received a grant of \$1,500 from the Neighbors in Need offering of the national United Church of Christ to assist with its justice ministry.

"We appreciate recognition of the SNJM and UCC that our ministry of informing people inspires others to become involved in overcoming hunger, homelessness, hostility and hate," said editor Mary Stamp. "Our role is to provide a model of responsible media that uplifts voices of those not often heard in mainstream media, people working for human rights, healthy relationships and healing reconciliation.

"Just as violence begets violence, stories of hope, caring, love and solidarity beget more actions that move us to peace, justice and respecting creation," she said. For information, call 535-1813.

## Chewelah women pray for recipients of the shawls they knit and crochet

About 12 women from Chewelah United Church of Christ and St. Mary of the Rosary Catholic Church in Chewelah have been knitting and crocheting in the Prayer Shawl Ministry they started in February 2005.

They have made more than 150 shawls, which they knit or crochet while in prayer for the person who will be warmed by the shawl.

The women have given shawls to people in Chewelah and around the world, including three delivered in New Orleans when five members of the United Church of Christ (UCC) joined a Pacific Northwest Conference work team assisting the Little Farms UCC with cleaning out and reroofing homes as part of Hurricane Katrina cleanup in October.

The Rev. Nell Lindorff, the former pastor of the Chewelah church, is also a former pastor of Little Farms. Some of her relatives from there spent time in Chewelah.

The 12 women meet monthly at 5:30 p.m., on second Tuesdays or Wednesdays in the homes of members to knit or crochet, and to pray over shawls they create before they give them away. They also knit or crochet on their own time.

Prayer Shawl Ministry members make the shawls as an expression of God's love for people needing comfort in any kind of crisis or time of loss, illness, recovery or bereavement, as something to wear for meditation or as a gift for a rite of passage such as marriage or childbirth.

"Whenever we hear of someone in need, someone in our group knits a shawl and prays for the person," said Verna DuBois, a member of the Chewelah UCC who is involved, but does not knit or crochet.

"We pray over the shawls for those who receive them and those who make them," she said.

"We are also starting a hat project," Verna said, supporting member Debra Morgan in making

25 hats and three pairs of mittens, which she delivered to the Vanessa Behan Crisis Nursery in Spokane.

Joan Blubaugh and Pam Vilchiz donated cards that are used for presenting the shawls. Others help by donating yarn and money.

Barbara Kurtak, a member of St. Mary of the Rosary Parish and former secretary at the Chewelah UCC, said that in the fall of 2004 she was looking on the internet for sources of novelty yarns to use in knitting fashion scarves. She found an ad for a book about making prayer shawls, *Knitting into the Mystery* by Susan Jorgensen and Susan Izard.

"The idea was intriguing, so I ordered the book," she said. "The idea of making prayer shawls appealed to me because the project is easily portable. A shawl can be picked up and put back down as time permits. Making a shawl provides a tangible focus for prayer as the shawl is made to comfort the recipient."

Her church had a prayer quilt

**Knitting is a source of comfort**

## Encounters transform leader's understandings

Encounters with a malnourished boy in Tanzania, a Pentecostal pastor in Chile and an Orthodox woman in Albania transformed Marion Best, lending insights to her 15 years of leadership with the World Council of Churches.

She shared those stories and related them to the 9th Assembly in February at Porto Alegre, Brazil, and to the life of that ecumenical organization for The Fig Tree's Faith in Action Dialogue in November at Whitworth College.

- In Tanzania, her inability to help a shirtless, barefoot boy in torn shorts left Marion in tears when she learned that giving him her extra T-shirt would mean others would fight him for it.

Feeling powerless, she questioned the unjust global economy that left him so malnourished he was mentally challenged.

- In Chile, she found Catholic cell groups had faded. The groups had empowered women through Bible studies to march for human rights and start businesses to support themselves after men disappeared under the Pinochet regime. She heard that as men returned and women sought to retain their financial independence, domestic violence and divorce rose.

She met Pentecostal pastors working with blue-collar workers, garbage collectors, peasants, the socially marginalized, alcoholics and ethnic minorities to renew them as individuals, so they could change their lives and communities.

- In Albania, she felt a sense of urgency about mission and evangelism. Of 440 priests 50 years ago, only 22 frail, elderly priests remained after years of repression, and only 80 of 1,200 church buildings were still standing.

Marion saw signs of the church's resurrection at a seminary training 150 men and 50 women, people restoring and rebuild-

*Continued on page 8*

**Religion News Briefs**

**Around the World**

*Ecumenical News International, PO Box 2100  
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111  
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**Micro-credit is a key to human development**

Geneva (ENI). Lutheran German Bishop Baerbel Wartenberg-Potter of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church says the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize this year to micro-financier Muhammad Yunus is vital recognition for kick-starting the smallest businesses. She spoke on the 60th anniversary of the founding of one of the world's first international micro-credit institutions for the poor, Geneva-based ECLOF, the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund.

**Christian agencies seek action on climate change**

Nairobi (ENI). Some Christian relief and development agencies at a United Nations Conference of Parties to the Climate Change Convention in Nairobi in November hailed progress in negotiations. Others criticized the lack of urgency. Margaret Mwaniki, the Africa director of Caritas International, said some countries had selfish ends because reducing greenhouse gas emissions could mean shutting down some industries.

Civil groups lobbied to have human rights, ethics and justice considered in negotiations. The coordinator of an ethics program accused governments and other parties of sticking to old arguments on economics, science and national self-interest.

A Christian platform of Caritas International and the All Africa Conference of Churches urged industrial nations to compensate poor countries for damage caused by high carbon emissions.

Indigenous peoples backed by international church groups demanded recognition, saying they live in fragile ecosystems vulnerable to climate changes but are often not consulted. "The prolonged droughts in the Amazon Basin and Africa and the melting of the polar ice caps are threatening the survival of indigenous peoples and causing a planetary crisis," said Lucy Mulenkei, a Maasai from Kenya.

Churches in Britain plan to mobilize Christians to take stewardship of a threatened earth as critical. The Anglican Bishop of London led churches' Operation Noah supporters bearing banners to a rally at London's Trafalgar Square where thousands of people gathered. He said: "This is not a political campaign. It is something that springs out of the Bible. We are all participants in the web of life. This is a deeply spiritual initiative."

**Bishops urge responsible approach on Iraq**

Oxford (ENI). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged both the main parties in Congress to cooperate with each other to secure peace in Iraq. Meeting in Baltimore, Md., for a twice-yearly national conference, the bishops urged the Democratic and Republican parties in Congress to set aside what they said was previously loud and superficial debate over the war and to work together in a frank assessment of how best to promote peace.

**U.S. churches call for Iraq withdrawal**

New York (ENI). The main governing body of the National Council of Churches has called for "an immediate phased withdrawal of American and coalition forces from Iraq." The resolution was approved with an overwhelming majority of votes by members of the NCC's general assembly, meeting in November at Orlando, Fla.

**Norwegian churches move toward unity**

Oslo (ENI). The (Lutheran) Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway negotiated an agreement of full recognition and cooperation to come into force once approved by synods of the two denominations. "We can serve each other as churches with the experiences we have from our different church structures," said the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, ecumenical officer for the Church of Norway. "One plus one is more than two in this context."

**REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS**

**Tree of Sharing brightens Christmas for 6,000**

The Tree of Sharing, a volunteer-run nonprofit organization, has trees with tags for shoppers to pick off the tree as a guide to their purchase of gifts for 6,000 individuals in need.

Trees are open during mall hours—10 a.m. to 9 p.m.—now through Sunday, Dec. 10, at Riverpark Square, Northtown and Spokane Valley malls.

The Tree of Sharing originated in 1982 as an outreach program for the Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ.

Donations to the Tree of Sharing are now distributed through more than 50 community service

agencies in Spokane, such as Head Start programs, community centers and senior services.

Last year, it provided holiday gifts for more than 8,000 individuals. Gifts go to clients of participating social service agencies. They talk with someone at the agency to decide on appropriate gifts.

Gifts are often clothes, books and toys for children and grocery store gift certificates, books on tape, music and something warm to wear for elderly people.

Westminster Congregational UCC, along with partners KREM and Asuris Northwest, plus hun-

dreds of volunteers and thousands of people who fill the tag requests each year make this program possible.

Volunteers serve two-hour shifts at the trees, prepare tags for the trees beforehand and work in warehouses to sort and match gifts for distribution to agencies. About 50 members of Westminster are joined by volunteers from participating agencies.

The Tree of Sharing also accepts cash donations at tree locations for tags not taken.

For information, call 624-1366 or visit westminsterucc.org, or krem.com.

**Spokane Alliance continues work for jobs, health care**

Sustainable jobs, affordable health care and tax reform remain at the top of the agenda for the 30,000 people involved in 34 organizations that comprise the Spokane Alliance.

Tom Robinson, co-chair of the Strategy Team, reported on some of the current efforts and the beginnings of a new Youth and Education Team.

The Jobs Team is working to secure funding through a revolving loan fund in Seattle, along with \$30,000 from three unions, to support the alliance-initiated Sustainable Works Corporation.

That project will do energy audits for churches, nonprofits and small businesses to identify ways their buildings can be retrofitted for energy efficiency.

Once an energy audit is done, the church, agency or business will take funds from the revolving loan fund. That loan will be repaid over two to three years out of the savings made to the energy bill.

"So if new windows and insulation bring a savings of \$400 out of

a usual \$1,000/month energy bill, once the loan is repaid the church, agency or business benefits from the savings, freeing more funds to put into their missions, services and business activities," Tom said.

"In the process, it will also create jobs in the retrofit industry," he added.

The Health Team is raising \$750,000 to fund Project Access in 2007. Project Access is a Spokane program providing uninsured people with free medical care that focuses on early intervention and prevention, to save the costs of people with limited funds going to emergency rooms with more serious ailments.

Tom said the alliance is talking with mayors and city councils, the county commission, hospital CEOs and local businesses to raise \$500,000 for free services and medications. Then it will ask the state for \$250,000.

"For every \$1 in the program, it provides \$10 of medical services," he said.

The team is also in consultation

with health services providers about providing a program of medical screenings.

The Tax Team has been holding tax forums in the city to educate people on the impact of the state's having the most regressive tax structure in the nation, Tom said, and to determine if people will support tax reform to make the system more progressive.

Half of the organization members are churches. Other members are labor unions and education associations. Through leadership training programs, the alliance helps to strengthen the participating organizations.

Wim Mauldin continues as lead organizer, working out of the Spokane office. His colleague, Joe Chrastil, has left Spokane to develop the Sound Alliance for the Puget Sound area. There is also an alliance for Central Washington with an office in the Tri-Cities.

The goal, Tom said, is to have member institutions in 33 of 45 legislative districts statewide.

For information, call 532-1688.

**Church World Service aids flood victims**

Neil Molenaar has been commissioned by Church World Service and the Washington Association of Churches to coordinate response by the faith community through the Washington Volunteer Organizations Assisting in Disaster (WAVOAD).

The governor has requested a federal declaration of a disaster in areas flooded in western Washington in November.

Faith-based long-term recovery organizations are preparing themselves for action in five Western

Washington counties, Neil said.

He will be working with the Skagit Interfaith Flood Recovery, the Interfaith Association of Northwest Washington for Snohomish County, the Church Council of Greater Seattle for King County, the Associated Ministries of Pierce County and the White Pass Community Service Center for Lewis County.

Long-Term Recovery Organizations identify needs, seek donations, receive material resources, assess needs, manage cases, re-

spond to unmet needs, coordinate volunteers, oversee construction, inform the public and generate major funds, Neil said.

"They also respond to emotional and spiritual needs," he said. "That includes providing opportunities for disaster-impacted persons and families to bond through social gatherings, celebrations, storytelling and other community building events."

For information, call 360-710-7248 or email neilmolenaar@aol.com.

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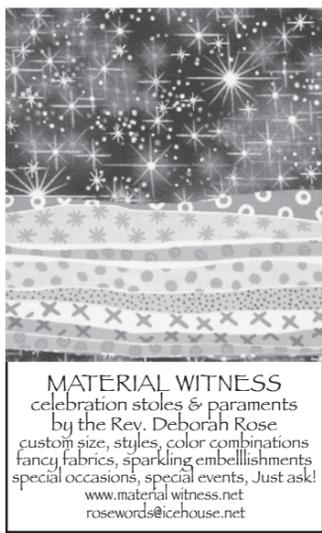
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**The Fig Tree, 1323 S. Perry St., Spokane, WA 99202**

The Fig Tree is published 10 months each year, September through June.  
Deadlines:  
COPY - 3rd Fridays ADS - 4th Tuesdays  
It is published by The Fig Tree, 1323 S. Perry St., Spokane, WA 99202, a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization.  
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# More than 2,200 volunteers stretch food banks' ability to feed people

Most critical to efforts of Second Harvest Northwest is the assistance of more than 2,200 volunteers. They give more than 40,000 hours a year to facilitate distribution of food to more than 300 food banks and outlets in Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

There are about 65 volunteers for every paid employee, said Jason Clark, executive director of Second Harvest.

Volunteers range from short-term helpers with events such as Tom's Turkey Drive—which provided more than 6,000 turkeys before Thanksgiving to families in need in the community—to those filling ongoing roles sorting and packing donated food at the warehouse.

"We help the volunteers find a meaningful way to be involved that also serves us," Jason said. "In addition to volunteers for Second Harvest itself, the food banks we serve rely on thousands more volunteers.

"We have relied heavily on individual and private donors throughout our 35 years of operations," he added, noting that they take into account the dips during election years when people are distracted and mailings may be buried in campaign promotions.

Other challenges to Second Harvest in 2006 are the rising costs of freight and fuel.

Given those costs, Jason seeks more local sources of food, aware that most food is manufactured in other areas of the country. So he brought in more fresh produce from the Columbia River Basin—potatoes, onions, carrots and apples.

To help Second Harvest, located at 1234 E Front in Spokane, keep perishable foods fresh to feed more hungry people, a 100,000-cubic-foot cooler-freezer was built with funds from a Washington State Capital Budget Appropriation.

Its recent survey of 814 clients at 21 emergency food outlets in Spokane County confirmed that the rising number of working families are in food lines because they work at low-paying jobs. In addition, there are more seniors.

"The increase in seniors may



Victoria Hanko of the warehouse staff in the new cooler/freezer. Photo by Kathleen Hedgecock

be because baby boomers' parents are aging and because the oldest baby boomers are entering retirement age without an adequate nest egg," Jason said.

"From our outlets, we hear stories of people juggling the cost of housing and prescriptions with the cost of food, so they are using the food banks to bridge the gap," he said.

The 2006 client survey is Second Harvest's 20th annual survey, the longest-running food bank survey in the nation. Volunteers also help compile it.

From the surveys, Second Harvest learns stories of people coming to outlets—their hopes, their piecing together full- and part-time jobs, their meager pension checks, their rising utility and fuel and other bills increasing the cost of living.

Contrasting figures in the mid-1990s with those of 2006, the survey found that children are now 42, rather than 47 percent of clients, and 59 percent of parents go without food so their children can eat, compared with 48 percent 10 years ago.

In 1991, 82 percent were renters, compared with 73 percent today; 30 percent received food stamps then while 61 percent do now, and 42 were single parents then, in contrast with 24 percent in 2006.

In 1997, the emergency food box lasted at least five days for 34 percent, and in 2006, for 78 percent.

That year, 45 percent were heads of households who had been employed in the past year, com-

pared with 66 percent in 2006. For 2006, the survey also found that 91 percent of households received food within 24 hours of their request.

Jason added that he also keeps up with what is happening at outlet meetings, where representatives from Spokane's food banks share statistics and anecdotes.

Recently several reported seeing more new families, people who had never come before. One said half its clients were new.

"The average number of visits, four and a half per year, remains constant, and is usually driven by a crisis. Most food banks set a limit that people can be served only once a month. That way they can stretch the food to have enough for everyone who comes," Jason said.

Second Harvest serves outlying areas, but some areas are too remote to be cost effective.

Thrivent Financial for Luther-

ans funded a new delivery truck and has helped with arrangements to fill it with fresh produce and perishables to deliver to Wenatchee, Clarkston, Post Falls, Tri-Cities, Spokane Valley and Stevens County.

In those communities, local Thrivent chapters provide volunteers who spend about two hours helping distribute about 10,000 pounds of food from the truck

outside a food bank. They do that about four times a month.

"Our mission is to feed hungry people, to be sure those in need have food," Jason said, pointing out that Second Harvest's lobbyist in Olympia focuses on food-related legislation—such as food stamps, free and reduced lunches and WIC supplements.

For information, call 534-6678 or visit [www.2-harvest.org](http://www.2-harvest.org).

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## Cathedral's Aspen Project likens parish to aspen grove as one organism

From understanding that a grove of aspen trees is one organism connected through its root system, the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes named an outreach to parishioners with small, neighborhood groups the Aspen Project.

The aspen image also speaks of how the cathedral's life of liturgy, art and music intertwine with its feeding homeless neighbors in downtown Spokane.

This year, the parish celebrates its 125th year, with roots starting in 1881 in a carpenter's shop at Main and Bernard as St. Joseph's. It became Our Lady of Lourdes when it moved into a brick structure there in 1891. In 1903, the cornerstone was laid for the present building, at Madison and Riverside, completed in 1913.

Within and emanating from that structure is a life of nurture of individuals, including distribution of about 1,300 sandwiches a month from the rectory by staff and volunteers.

**Father Steven Dublinski**, the rector, sees tension among parishioners between their desire to respond to the call to holiness and the demands of life that pull them in many directions.

"Americans are busy people, involved in activities, often making it difficult to live reflective Gospel-centered lives," he said. "Many people in the pews and priests are pulled by these dynamics. We need to live with these tensions as Christians. It is part of the tensions of our times."

Father Steve said both good and harm can come from the tension.

"Many people are compassionate and willing to make extraordinary efforts to care for the poor, volunteering through Catholic Charities at St. Margaret Center, at the Women's Hearth, at the House of Charity or at St. Anne's Children and Family Center," he said.

"Being too involved sometimes competes with family life, which can be harmful," he said. "As part of American culture, Catholics are not immune to the struggles. So we seek to nurture families through small groups and liturgical life to help them live their calls in healthy ways."

Liturgy and religious education introduce and nurture faith.

**So does the Aspen Project.** "Aspen tree growth is a singular organism. It appears to be many trees, but the roots are one body," Father Steve said. "Similarly, the body of Christ appears to be individuals, but it's one body in Christ and the interconnections need nurturing."

The Aspen Project is organizing groups throughout the city and



Father Steven Dublinski serves as rector at Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral in Spokane.

county to strengthen both neighborhood bonds and families by helping people pay closer attention to the people around them.

"It's easier to know if a neighbor family or individual is in need if we are connected," Father Steve said. "If we know each other, we can be more effective at reaching out to others."

**After a year of planning**, the project began a test run with 15 groups in October. Those groups will meet for a while to learn what issues there are, what works, what does not work, what refinements are needed.

Participants start with learning about each other and then strengthening their bond in Christ to see how that compels them to move out of themselves to reach out to others.

To set up groups, organizers plotted on a map where the parishioners live. Reports come in after meetings. Each group decides how often they will meet—monthly or weekly—and what they want to study—Scripture, doctrine, issues or history. Outreach will grow from the group, rather than from a particular model.

**While the cathedral's parish** is from downtown west to Airway Heights, it draws people from around the region because of the cathedral's liturgy, music tradition and setting.

Some attend Sundays only. The Aspen Project seeks to increase participation in liturgy and the full life of faith.

Lourdes offers 6:30 a.m. and noon Masses daily, drawing Catholics from downtown. There are five weekend Masses—one Saturday evening, three Sunday morning and one Sunday evening.

There are also evening prayer services during the week, study of Scriptures and personal prayer times.

Father Steve celebrates two weekend Masses.

Also helping celebrate Masses are Father Vincent Van Dao, Father Patrick Baraza, Father Stan Malnar, Msgr. Robert Pearson and sometimes the bishop.

**Living in the rectory** with Father Steve is a mini international community with Father Vincent, who is Vietnamese, and Father Patrick of Kenya, who teaches Islam at Gonzaga University.

Father Steve continues international ties he began when he studied as one of 200 Americans at the North American College in Rome, attending different universities. He studied theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas with people from around the world—Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, Central America.

"It gave me a broader vision of the Catholic Church, in touch with its being the universal church of many cultures and languages. It's a challenge for us in the United States to realize there are challenges elsewhere in the world, often more fundamental challenges than our own."

Father Steve said it affects even now how he preaches.

"I try not to present the faith as America-centric, but preach the

Gospel from a worldwide perspective related to issues of justice and poverty," he said.

"Anything we do to keep our perspective broad makes us better Catholics. Narrowing our concerns makes us less effective Catholics. People always tend to look at things from their own perspectives. The Gospel calls us out of that perspective. It's a natural dynamic and struggle. We constantly need to be pulled back into the Gospel perspective."

**Even in pastoral care**, as one-to-one individual attention, he seeks to pull people out of their self-focus. He realizes that Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a slave.

"Looking from the perspective of the other is the constant call of the church," Father Steve said.

**From growing up** in Walla Walla, where he went to high school and his first year of college, he completed studies in philosophy at Gonzaga University in 1981 before he went to Rome.

He first considered becoming a priest after he graduated from high school.

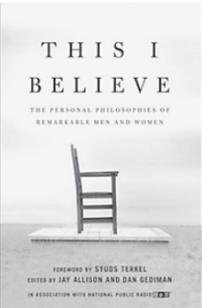
"It came with a shift from the faith I grew up with to a faith I took responsibility for—from childhood to adult faith," Father Steve said. "Given the gift of faith in God, I then asked what my responsibility was. Exploring my call, I saw my gifts and talents could be of use to the church."

Returning from Rome, he was ordained at St. Patrick's Church in Walla Walla and began serving St. John Vianney in Spokane in 1985. In 1989, he went to St. Charles; 1996, to St. Mary's in Spokane Valley, and in 2002 to parishes in Rosalia, Tekoa, Oakesdale, Rosalia and St. John.

While serving at St. Mary's Parish, he began assisting Bishop William Skylstad as vicar general. During his first months assisting the bishop, the sexual abuse crisis began to unfold. After a year of pastoring a large parish and working for the bishop it became clear that a smaller pastoral assignment was necessary. Serving the rural parishes allowed Father Steven to focus five days a week on needs of the diocese and left the weekends for pastoral ministry in the rural communities.

In the summer of 2004, Bishop  
*Continued on next page*

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

## Gratitude is integral to Islamic daily prayers and daily life

The Qur'an mentions the word for thanks, "shukr," many times, Mamdouh El-Aarag of the Spokane Islamic Center said at the Interfaith Council's Community Thanksgiving Service at St. Aloysius Church in Spokane.

"If we look around us we can find many, many blessings Allah—Arabic for the God—has given us," he said.

"Allah has given us our intellect and made us better than the rest of the animals. Allah has given us our health, our eyes, our senses and the ability to communicate with each other. Allah has created this earth for us to live in and filled it with everything we might need," he continued.

"Allah created the sky and placed in it the sun, moon, stars and planets to give us light, heat and beauty. They were created with an ability that we cannot comprehend. We cannot count Allah's blessings," he said.

Mamdouh described shukr as a quality of human beings and it is also a quality of Allah.

He said scholars describe it as the human means of recognizing the favor of all Allah has provided. Shukr from Allah means God's reward and appreciation.

Shukr is a quality of the believers and a source of goodness.

Sometimes it is used in the Qur'an as equivalent to faith, because the faithful

are thankful people and the unfaithful are ungrateful people, Mamdouh explained. Prophets Noah, Abraham, David and Muhammed were all grateful, he said.

"For a Muslim, every moment of life is filled with gratitude and praise to Allah. We do not only thank Allah one specific day of the year. Allah says: 'Remember Me. I will remember you, and be grateful to Me for My countless favors on you and never be ungrateful to Me,'" Mamdouh said. "Any matter not begun with praise be to Allah is defective."

"The Messenger of Allah—peace be upon him—said, 'If prosperity attends a believer, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him. If adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him,'" Mamdouh said.

Islam has many prayers to keep believers on the path of thankfulness. On rising in the morning, when eating or putting on clothes, believers should express their gratitude to Allah, for the new day, the food and the clothes.

Beyond thanking Allah, Islam teaches people to thank their parents, spouses, friends, neighbors and all who do good to them.

"The Prophet—peace be upon him—said: 'Those who do not thank people, do not thank Allah,'" Mamdouh said.

In Islam, thanksgiving is not only a religious act or service but also one's whole life, he said, "lived in obedience

to our Ultimate Benefactor, Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala. God has been good to us and so in our thankfulness we should worship God, obey God's commands and orders."

Mamdouh said that obedience is seen in the five pillars of Islam:

1) The first pillar—to testify there is only one God and Mohammed is his slave and messenger—is a way to thank the one God who created everything.

2) The second pillar is to pray five times a day—morning, noon, afternoon, sunset and night for 17 units each day. In each unit, the believer recites the first verse of the first chapter of the Qur'an, "Praise due to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds."

"When prayer time comes, we leave everything we are doing," he said. "We thank Allah in our obligatory prayers."

3) The third pillar is Zakahat, a prescribed charity paid by the rich to the poor. Mamdouh said through this pillar, "Muslims learn everything belongs to Allah, to be more giving and to be grateful for what Allah has provided for us."

4) The fourth pillar, to fast from dawn to sunset in the month of Ramadan, helps Muslims appreciate what they have.

5) The fifth pillar, to make Hajj—a pilgrimage to Makah—means a believer leaves everything behind to focus on the creator and recognizes the blessings.

"We regard all benefit, goodness and

pleasant conditions as the bounties of Allah and greater in measure than what one deserves," Mamdouh said, aware thanksgiving unaccompanied by thankful obedience is just lip service.

"Along with verbal expression of thanks, the body, mind and soul of a Muslim should display thanks by surrendering oneself to the obedience of Allah and His prophet," Mamdouh said.

He closed with a story about a man who was stranded on a boat and was going to die. He promised God if he was saved he would spend the rest of his life worshipping Allah. He was miraculously saved and he did fulfill his promise. He spent the next 30 years worshipping Allah.

On the Day of Judgment, the man came, proud of his deeds and thinking he is going to heaven for sure. Allah said he would "enter heaven because of my mercy." The man was puzzled that it is not because of his deeds.

Allah asked angels to put his good deeds on one side of a scale and his eye on the other. One eye outweighed his good deeds. The man realized he enters heaven only because of God's mercy.

"We will never be thankful enough for Allah's blessings. So let us not restrict thanking the Almighty on one special day, but fill our lives with shukr and praise for Allah's countless bounties," Mamdouh said.

## Lourdes started centennial celebration with feeding hungry neighbors

Continued from previous page  
Skylstad reassigned Father Steve to be rector at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, across the street from the diocesan office.

"Our diocese is small, so priests help in diocesan administration as well as pastoral ministry," he said. "We bring a pastoral perspective to administration. I see myself first as a pastor, asking how decisions affect other pastors and people in the pews. I care about people and connect administrative decisions to people's lives."

Father Steve said that for Catholics, there are many aspects of spiritual life, but "the source and summit is the celebration of Eucharist. We start meetings with prayer, reflection on Scriptures and dialogue. As Catholics, spiritual life is part of our whole life."

Because of his passion for liturgy, he completed a four-summer-long degree in liturgy at Notre Dame University in 2002. He is also on the board of directors for the national Federation of Diocesan Liturgy Commission.

That passion is accompanied by his passion to serve the poor—inspired through involvement with St. Charles' Christmas dinner,

which serves about 300 homeless and poor people each year.

At the cathedral, he helps parish volunteers and staff who served four meals for homeless people downtown.

For example, for the Feast of St. Joseph, the cathedral served hot dogs and chili for five hours. Staff sat, ate and talked with homeless people. In August, they held a bluegrass festival in the parking lot, again serving hot dogs and chili while several blue grass groups played. They served 500 hot dogs, 20 gallons of chili and 30 gallons of lemonade.

"When we ran low, we ran to the store," he said.

For a fall Homeless Barbecue, the cathedral served 500 hamburgers.

"Jesus said when you have a party, invite everyone, the poor, lame and blind," he said.

Some volunteers help serve. Others sit with and listen to the stories of the people who come, many of whom struggle with mental illness or just need companionship.

"Cathedral staff love it when they have such opportunities to do the mission of Jesus, breaking bread in an open, inviting way. It inflames our faith to connect with people around us," said Father

Steve, who has heard some homeless refer to the cathedral as "the party place."

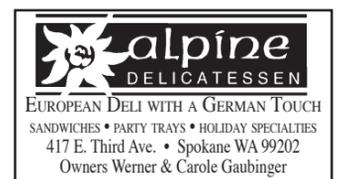
Caring for people because they are people—not to evangelize—is basic Gospel, reaffirmed in Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, Deus Caritas.

"God's loving us in Jesus inspires us to reach out in care and love to others," Father Steve said. "While there's a potential evangelistic effect, that's in God's hands. It's the Catholic approach and the approach of Catholic Charities."

Father Steve finds ecumenical relationships important for building understanding and unity.

"We act together where we can do that, but we still have a long way to go," he said.

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## Words Travel improves literacy and builds parent-child bonds

*Continued from page 1*

no jobs, but on a tour she learned that Words Travel was starting and seeking volunteers.

VOA's Words Travel works with men and women in correctional facilities to improve literacy and keep parents in touch with children.

"I was not naïve enough to think this program could necessarily change the lives of prisoners or keep them from returning to prison, but I thought if their children could become more interested in reading and stay in school, I was interested," Debbie said.

She attended the orientation workshop for volunteers and decided to do it.

"Words Travel helps fathers connect better with their children and strengthen their relationships long distance," she said.

The idea is simple. The father reads stories on a tape and sends the books and tape to his child. The children hear their father's voice. In addition, the fathers are encouraged to talk about the stories and relate them to real life.

VOA director Marilee Roloff said that even though some young men in prison may be cons, many are courteous and genuine when they are off drugs.

"Many are vulnerable and honest

about their parenting or lack thereof. Those who feel they have not been good fathers begin rethinking about being better parents," she added.

Each year, VOA of Spokane holds five eight-week Words Travel sessions for two to 16—an average of five—prisoners. Sessions are from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Mondays, usually with two volunteers.

Recent volunteers who have assisted Debbie are Donna Roloff—Marilee's mother—Gloria Stronks, Patricia Luce and Jim Uhlenkott. Gloria and Patricia plan to take some time off for a while, so Debbie seeks more volunteers.

The first night of a session is for orientation. The next six evenings are for reading and recording. In the eighth session, the inmate does a project, personalizing a pillowcase or a book bag. Anyone who misses two sessions without excuse has to leave the program. Participants are chosen according to prison criteria.

Participation is not simple to arrange, because prisoners need the permission of the mother, who may not want the father to have contact with the children. There may be a court order because of domestic violence or drugs.

"We hear what they record and say. Everything sent out of the prison is

censored," Debbie said.

To protect privacy for families who don't want to receive a package from a prison, VOA mails the boxes with tapes, books, a tape player, extra books and school supplies twice each session.

The books selected promote values—such as cooperation in family and school relationships, or dealing with playground bullies, racial prejudice and speaking out.

"The Little Red Hen" is a familiar fable about a hen who asks for help. She finds no one willing to help her bake a bread, so she eats it herself.

"A father converses with his child as he reads, encouraging the child to think creatively, to anticipate what may happen next or to discuss if the little red hen should have eaten the bread alone," Debbie said. "We hope a caregiver or the parent at home will also engage the child in conversation."

Another story, "Sometimes I'm Bombaloo," tells of a girl with a younger sibling, frustrated that he messes up what she is playing with or doing. She wants to scream and needs time out to settle down.

One father used it to talk with his child who did not like to share with his new sibling. The father asked how his son

felt, and advised walking away until he was calm.

The father continued, saying, "When I was your age, I acted like that. I did as an adult, too, and wound up in prison."

Debbie said the father heard that his child changed his behavior.

Some pick up a picture book and make up a story. Some like to teach rhyme through poetry.

"The fathers make it fun by using inflection and surprise," Marilee said. "Many have never read to their children or even ever read a book out loud."

Now when talking with their children on the phone, they make up stories.

"Many learn how much they miss," Marilee said, expressing the hope that some will change, but aware there is no way to track the effect because of privacy requirements.

She has heard feedback directly from some inmates.

One learned his son went to bed every night listening to the stories.

Another took the bag with books and recordings to class for show and tell.

Debbie estimates that Words Travel gives out 360 books in a year. Marilee said overall, VOA gives out about 1,000 books a year through prisons.

For information, call 624-2378.

## Two churches collaborate on Prayer Shawl Ministry in Chewelah

*Continued from page 1*

ministry, but that required setting up a sewing machine and piecing a quilt. It didn't fit her lifestyle.

"I gave the book on prayer shawls as Christmas presents to friends," Barb said.

One was Nell, who saw the potential for a ministry to bring together different generations. She sent out an announcement to find if some people would be interested. Barb asked to join the group. It became ecumenical with members of both churches.

"At first, we knew of more people who needed shawls than we had shawls ready to give them," she said. "We choose colors specifically for a person, whose need we know."

Over time they made shawls before knowing the need, wanting to have shawls ready when needs arose.

"Shawls take more time than scarves—one week to months to knit—so the time and material make the shawls more potent symbols of the love being of-

fered," Barb said, adding that the ministry was begun in 1998 by Janet Bristow and Victoria Galo, 1997 graduates of the Women's Leadership Institute at Hartford Seminary.

The ministry has since spread worldwide.

Jean Wise, also of St. Mary of the Rosary, grew up in Spokane but has lived 31 years in Chewelah, where she is a surgery tech at St. Joseph Hospital.

"I taught myself to knit years ago and it is a source of consol-

ation and comfort for me," she said. "Knitting prayer shawls provides a sense of peace and a time of reflection in the midst of my high-stress work. It's a blessing to me to do this ministry."

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## Giving books to children opens their minds and gives them opportunities

Because she believes that reading books opens doors and minds, Marilee Roloff delights in helping distribute more than 50,000 books Scholastic Inc. donates through the national Volunteers of America (VOA) to the Spokane affiliate.

For her, reading is a mini-retreat, a time to imagine, hope and explore. She grew up in Creston, the daughter of an English teacher and librarian, instilled with a passion for books and for people.

"If a child can't read, learning is tough," said Marilee, executive director of VOA-Spokane for 10 years and founder of Crosswalk for street kids in downtown Spokane in 1985.

"Children's books today are better and smarter than the Dick and Jane reading books of the 1950s. They challenge children to think about their beliefs and values, to think beyond themselves," she said.

The first 20,000 books are given out through the Christmas Bureau, which the VOA helps sponsor.

"I love to see children receive a book for Christmas," Marilee affirmed.

Other books go to low-income children through more than 40 agencies, and VOA programs such as Crosswalk, Alexandria's House and Words Travel.

The books arrive at the VOA Thrift Store warehouse once or twice a year in gaylords, boxes of 2,000 books requiring a forklift to move. Volunteers go there and help sort the books by age group, paper/hardback, and focus—for example, Harry Potter, Clifford, and other popular titles.

The boxes include educational toys, face paint and other gift items VOA uses for special occasions, such as parties for foster children, Clifford parties, Harry Potter parties and Kids' Day at Riverfront Park.

Some also go to Virginia Beebe, a public health nurse in St. Maries, Idaho, who gives out books through a literacy program.

In addition to explaining the distribution of books, Marilee offered an overview of VOA-Spokane's programs: Crosswalk, Project Safe Place, Alexandria's House, Aston/Bleck Apartments and Flaherty House for youth; subsidized housing for people with HIV and AIDS; three apartment facilities for people with mental health struggles; Hope House for women, plus community outreach through Passages' parent support project, the "I Remember Mama" Luncheon and the Christmas Bureau.

She said Crosswalk serves about 1,000 homeless youth in



Marilee Roloff takes a moment to read to Emma Archer.

downtown Spokane each year. Hope House serves nearly 500 women, the Transitional Programs take in five to six people at a time. The Passages program has a waiting list. Emergency Assistance helps 500 a year.

VOA has taken on Project Safe Place in Coeur d'Alene, because homeless youth go back and forth between that and Crosswalk.

"Funding for everything in the nonprofit world is chaotic now. Sometimes we don't know where funds will come from, but something pops up," she said, noting that the result of federal and state cuts for mental health and social services means nonprofits serving people have less capacity. "Imagine what the cost of one day of the War in Iraq would cover if spent on human services."

For example, other nonprofits once provided staff to evaluate and treat youth, but their funds have been cut, so they can no longer come to Crosswalk.

Even when funds are steady, it's like a cut, because more funds are needed to keep up with inflation.

With the juggling of funds and services, Marilee appreciates that the books are a steady service.

As a volunteer agency, VOA recently established an award to honor Sister of Providence Loretta Marie Marceau of the founding board of the Downtown Women's Shelter in 1998. Sister Loretta Marie has raised thousands of dollars, never giving up hope in difficult times, Marilee said.

At the Hope House Fashion Show on Oct. 20, VOA gave three bronze medallions made in her likeness, by artist Steve Gevurtz, as an award for compassion

"We have become the family for many teens," she said.

Some come at 15 and are still there at 19. They attend school, eat and stay overnight—the overnight program is just until they are 18. Then some go to Flaherty House or Hope House.

Crosswalk programs help some go back home, others find foster care or enter residential treatment. The rest keep coming and attach with adults who volunteer or provide meals.

"Human services are about relationships. We can talk about social service models and theories, but it's always about relationships," Marilee said she has learned in 30 years of social service work.

An example of that are volunteers from a teachers' sorority who come to the Christmas Bureau to help parents select books for their children. Some parents know what their children would like

because they read to them, but others don't know what reading level to choose.

Volunteer teachers watch to see who may need a suggestion. Then they begin a conversation and ask what grade the child is in and what the child's interests are.

Marilee added that the Christmas Bureau is open Mondays to Saturdays, Dec. 7 to 20.

Now that it is at the Fairgrounds, she is glad that people no longer have to stand in line outside in the cold. The process is computerized, moves quickly, and the wait is all inside.

The Giving Tree for Crosswalk, Alexandria's House and the Downtown Senior Center at Nordstrom's for 15 years will be in VOA's lobby at 525 W. Second.

People interested in giving a gift can call, email [showard@voa-spokane.org](mailto:showard@voa-spokane.org) or stop by for a tag to purchase a gift before Dec. 18.

For information, call 624-2378.

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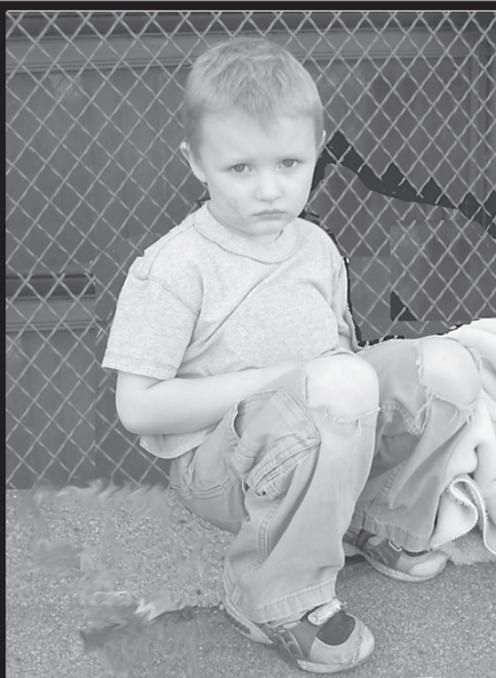
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# 'How willing are we to take seriously Jesus' prayer that we be one?'

*Continued from page 1*  
ing churches, churches running a refugee camp for mostly Muslims, and seminarians required to help in emergency services.

A 40-year-old woman told her she had decided to be baptized, because she realized from family names, traditions and celebrations—although not identified ostensibly as Christian during the years it was unsafe—that her family had been Orthodox.

Marion asked in opening her presentation here: "How willing are we to take seriously Jesus' prayer 'that all may be one so the world may believe' or the 1952 Lund Principle of common mission that 'churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately'?"

**She shared how worship** and stories transform local, regional and global ecumenical efforts.

For 30 years in her Naramata, B.C. congregation—one of 65 Canadian United-Anglican churches—liturgies, music, beliefs and systems different from her own stirred discomfort, patience and new understandings.

That helped pave the way for her involvement with the World Council of Churches, which integrates church unity and renewal with healing human community, she said.

Serving on WCC governing bodies and as vice-moderator the past seven years required "patience, humility, imagination and courage." It also called her outside her comfort zone of faith and culture, listening to the angry and the dispossessed, and learning to "live with the contradiction of seeing people with nothing compared to us in material terms, and yet often be richer and wiser about life, and clearer about God."

Starting with 147 churches from 44 countries in 1948 and now having 346 member churches in 126 countries, the WCC's life requires continual renewal.

**Marion's encounter** with the boy during a 1985 WCC Christian Lay Leadership Training in Tanzania made questions of aid, development, debt and structural adjustment real for her. So did seeing vestiges of European culture—choir robes, hymns and a picture of a white Jesus—continuing from colonial times.

She connected those questions to colonization of First Nations in Canada, where the government is now paying reparations for having boarding schools, and churches are making settlements about abuse at boarding schools they ran.

**Meeting another time** with leaders of the Pentecostal Church of Chile, founded in the early 1900s and one of the few Pentecostal members of the WCC, she realized the importance of dialogue to build understanding



Marion and Jack Best in the Whitworth Chapel, listen to opening music.

and respect for and among the 400 million Pentecostals worldwide.

Her group met 200 laymen—many illiterate field workers—who come every two months for training in Bible, worship and evangelism. Evenings, they preach, witness, meet and lead little, rural, open-air churches. Many had been alcoholics, but became dependable workers and good family people because the church connected moral, clean living with economic prosperity.

Marion joined a several-block procession, picking up people along the way until 800 gathered for a vibrant three-hour evening worship featuring choirs, guitars, tambourines, loud prayers, and much praising and shouting.

When someone asked, "How have you been able to be so successful working with the poor?" the pastor replied, "We don't work with the poor, we are the poor."

**Marion's week of immersion** in the Orthodox Church in Albania opened her to ways the church has moved from systematic extermination to resurrection. Mission and evangelism are critical, because the existence of Christian faith in Albania depends on them.

"Two generations had no contact with faith in a time of suffering and fear. Public worship, religious symbols, crossing oneself, saying grace and religious literature were banned," she summarized.

When political reforms started in 1991, the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church asked Archbishop Anastasios to visit Albania.

The Archbishop had three goals for reestablishing the church: local leadership, local language and local finances. The WCC has given program and personnel support, but each project must have some Albanian financial support.

"The church is not here only for itself. It is for everyone," a priest said, adding, "At the last judgment I will not be congratulated for my theological writings. I will be asked why I didn't help a certain old woman."

In 10 years, the church has established a diagnostic medical clinic, preschools, public schools, a technical school, a radio station and summer camps for children and teens, welcoming people of any or no stated faith.

Anastasios said: "You come to understand your own suffering as sharing in God's suffering. People sometimes think the cross is a death symbol or a stop along the way to the resurrection, but the resurrection is in the cross."

Marion observed there a transformation of individuals, communities, society and churches.

**Her immersion in the WCC** was heightened at assemblies in Canberra, Harare and Porto Alegre.

Seeds sown at Vancouver heightened global awareness of indigenous peoples' agendas. The 1991 Canberra Assembly opened with Australian Aborigines welcoming participants to worship, inviting them to walk through smoke of a sacred fire at the entrance of the worship tent. Didgeridoo sounds filled the air. For some, it was a cultural curiosity. Some called it pagan worship and others familiar with native spirituality welcomed the authenticity of a people sharing their worship with visitors to their land.

The other issues there included Professor Chung Hyng Kyung of Korea using feminine images of God, blending Korean remembrances of ancestors in worship and speaking of *han* as unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, particularly by women.

"Her presentation was greeted with resounding applause by some and resounding silence by others," Marion said. "With issues raised by the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, her presentation became a flash point and led to tensions in and among member churches."

**Canberra was Marion's** first taste of being one body, singing one another's hymns with gusto, saying the Lord's prayer simulta-

neously in hundreds of languages, recognizing common concerns and making commitments to work together, but Orthodox worshippers could not partake in the common Eucharist service offered at that assembly.

"At the heart of their beliefs, the Eucharist is the expression of unity, not a means toward it," she said. "It reminded us that we are a broken body of Christ, not yet at the unity Christ calls us to."

**By the 8th Assembly** in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, the 22 Orthodox Churches—200 million of the WCC's 450 million members in member churches—requested that particular attention be paid to their relationship with the WCC.

The Harare Assembly established a Special Commission with equal numbers of Orthodox and Protestant/Anglican members. It met for three years and made recommendation on ecclesiology, membership, worship and decision-making in the Council. Their recommendations were adopted and affect the Council's life.

**In Porto Alegre**, the Council moved to consensus decision-making, except for finance, elections and constitutional changes.

The words "common prayer" were used instead of "worship," because worship for Orthodox includes Eucharist. The morning common prayers in Porto Alegre,

however, were much like previous morning worship services.

Marion is proud of how the WCC has addressed HIV and AIDS, helping people in churches talk about it, educate and advocate, moving from the shame and denial attached to this crisis.

For her Friday presentation, she shared parts of the 9th assembly's opening and closing worship services, gathering people divided by nations, wars, greed and lust for power, so that their groans might be transformed into joy by the God of life, love and peace.

**For the opening service** in Brazil, people brought symbols:

- A bell from Asia represented the need to hear the cries of people suffering from abuse, wars, earthquakes, poverty and the struggle for justice in Asia.

- Sugar cane from the Caribbean represented cries to deal with pollution, drug trafficking, domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS.

- A reindeer calf skin reminded people of cries from Europeans who carry a tradition of death, wars, conquests, exploitation, racism and genocide, with a rising gap between rich and poor.

- Fruits and a Salvadoran cross were brought forward on behalf of Latin Americans who lack shelter, food, health, respect and rights, and who seek respect for indigenous peoples and an end to violence.

- A Coptic Orthodox icon from the Middle East brought a call to respect gifts of cultures and traditions in the midst of tyranny, injustice, inequity and hearts heavy with the politics of frustration, starvation, humiliation and dehumanization.

- North Americans brought wheat, corn and sweet grass from a place inhabited by people from many lands who have trampled heavily on the earth, not loved First Nations or other ethnicities, and failed to speak truth to power.

- People of the Pacific brought a woven mat and a ceremonial bowl, aware of rising oceans, sinking islands and lost heritages, people harmed by nuclear testing, people calling for accountability and seeking their island of hope.

*Continued on the next page*

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## Each day of workshops and plenaries opened and closed with worship

Continued from previous page

• People from Africa brought a Shona stone from Turkana, the cradle of civilization, where people are torn by nationalities, wars, greed and lust for power, and people have resilience and spiritual strength.

Marion shared actions and words from the opening worship with a prayer with a sung response: "Come Now, O God of Peace."

She then reflected on the assembly's prayer theme, "God in Your Grace, Transform the World."

For her, it expresses the tension between "leaving it to God" and believing it is up to us to "transform the world."

"We focused on transformation of our lives, our witness, our churches, our societies and our world. Psalm 36 speaks of an abiding belief in God's steadfast love. Over and over, I experienced people from difficult situations in their countries, churches and lives testifying to the hope within them. It was humbling," she said.

Each day began with 4,000 people at the common prayer in a big tent on campus. Services included singing, a call to worship, and a procession with the Bible, a candle and the symbol for the day. There were no sermons, just Scripture, music, prayers for the world and the Lord's Prayer.

Then participants went to Bible Study groups with people whose lives contrasted politically, economically and socially.

"Reflecting on Scripture in the light of our different contexts, our understanding, care and concern for each other grew," she said.

Next, delegates went to ecumenical conversation groups on 22 topics. Marion met with a group of 80 to discuss "Religious Plurality: Embraced or Feared?"

"We realized no religion is an island. Many people are looking for spirituality, but not in places, institutions and forms it has been found before. It seems to be a search for meaning without belonging—a challenge for all religions," she said.

"There is concern that dialogue between different religions has been undertaken by professionals, while a dialogue of life happens as people of different religions live their lives together. We noted the frequent absence of voices of women and youth, outcasts and indigenous peoples in dialogue circles," Marion continued.

During a two-and-a-half-hour lunch break, people attended worship services in the university chapel, workshops, concerts or committee meetings, or rested on grass and benches on campus.

One noon, two Korean pastors, one from North Korea and one

from South Korea, led a service. Their churches, both members of WCC, maintain relationships across their border but cannot meet in Korea.

Afternoons were filled with business sessions or presentations in the plenary hall with 1,700 persons. Speakers included Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Brazilian President Lula de Silva.

Lula, a former union organizer, spoke of his government's emphasis on education and health care. A Portuguese colony until the mid-1800's, Brazil was then ruled by military juntas and dictators.

Even though it is a new democracy with one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it is still burdened by billions of dollars of debt to the World Bank. Poverty, unemployment and lack of education and health care are major issues.

Evenings, participants returned to the worship tent for common prayer conducted by different confessions and churches—Anglicans, Pentecostals, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, and different Protestants, including services led by women clergy.

One evening there was a candlelight peace rally and march from the center of Porto Alegre to its cathedral. Young people carried banners. A Bolivian indigenous Christian spoke and the Catholic Archbishop of Porto Alegre helped light a large candle. Representatives of other faiths took part in prayers of blessing.

Archbishop Tutu closed the evening with an impassioned address, saying: "God is a mighty God, but this God needs you. When God wants to feed the hungry, you and I must do it. Now God wants peace in the world, so go out and represent our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

This assembly lacked the controversy Marion had experienced at Canberra and Harare.

The liveliest debate was over a paper on alternatives to economic globalization, with divisions between some churches of the North wanting the WCC to work with the World Trade Organization and churches of the South asking for biblical and theological reflection on people's relationship with power and empire, and on the need to collaborate with social movements.

There was little difficulty reaching consensus on a document on ecclesiology, "Called to Be the One Church," and sending it for churches to discuss ten questions in moving toward full visible unity, including:

- Does your church recognize



Faith in Action Dialogue participants exchanged stories.

a common pattern of Christian initiation, grounded in baptism in the life of other churches?

- Why does your church believe that it is necessary, or permissible, or not possible to share the Lord's Supper with those of other churches?

- In what ways is your church able to recognize the ordered ministries of others?

- How will your church stand with other churches to contend with social and political hegemonies, persecution, oppression, poverty and violence?

- To what extent does your church share with other churches in faith formation and theological education?

- How fully can your church share in prayer with other churches?

Marion expressed gratitude for churches' cooperation on the Decade to Overcome Violence, which inspires churches to advocate for human rights, end abuse of women and children, ban arms, move to healing and reconciliation of old rivalries and hurts, protest media violence and child soldiers, and studies and efforts to discern the root causes of violence.

"HIV/AIDS education, primary health care, literacy work, theological education in underprivileged parts of the world, accompaniment of refugees and vulnerable people in danger zones of the world, disability advocacy and much more is the legacy of the WCC since the Harare assembly.

"While church unity is elusive, church co-operation is not," Marion affirmed.

The most difficult of seven public issues was a "Statement on the Responsibility to Protect"

vulnerable populations.

While WCC churches confess together the primacy of non-violence, they asked what their responsibility is when governments fail to protect their citizens—whether by neglect, lack of capacity or direct assaults.

The document asks: Does the international community have a duty to assist peoples and states, and in extreme situations to intervene in internal affairs of a state to protect people?

The assembly reaffirmed prevention through addressing causes of violence, using violence-reducing intervention and supporting police strategies that address human rights violations.

"Despite some contentious issues in business sessions, we resolved matters before us by consensus during the assembly with a model used and developed by the Uniting Church in Australia.

"I was surprised how well it worked and amazed that 700 people from 346 churches and 128 countries could reach agreement by consensus," she said.

"Through the process, we stopped often for silence, prayer and a reminder that we sought to discern God's voice," Marion said. "It isn't a technical process but a spiritual one. I kept my Bible and prayers from the day's worship at hand when I was moderating, and used both."

As moderator, she was careful not to express her opinions. As a self-discipline she found she needed to let go of preconceived notions or hoped-for outcomes.

In the closing worship on "God in your grace transform our witness," six people told about their faith and witness.

Marion shared three stories:

Gracia Violeta Ross Quiroga, of the National Network of Bolivian People Living with HIV and AIDS, who was infected by a sexual assault, came to know God's love and rely on God when no one else would help. She called for more involvement: "Whatever problems we have, we work better if we work together."

Sarah Newland-Martin of the Bethel Baptist Church, Jamaica, was born without legs and abandoned by her family. She has artificial limbs, became a Christian and represented Jamaica in the Pan-American wheelchair games from 1972 to 1982 and in the 1980 para-Olympics. Her life was transformed by her baptism. Through God's grace, she met her parents when she was 24 and forgave them for abandoning her.

Korean Professor Namsun Kang, vice president of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions, said her encounter with feminist discourse and the ecumenical movement led to her transformation: "Cheap ecumenism is empty proclamation that we are one in Christ, while nothing is done about exclusion based on age, gender, sexual orientation, color, race or disability. Costly ecumenism accompanies transformation, requiring personal and institutional repentance and acknowledgement that all of us belong to the family of God."

Preaching for the closing service, Robina Winbush, ecumenical officer of the Presbyterian Church USA, spoke of leaves of the healing tree, referred to in Ezekiel and Revelation. She named groups and movements, churches and individuals who help heal and transform places where they live and work, Marion said.

Robina closed, asking, "Are you willing to be a leaf on the tree of life, which God uses for the healing of the nations?" Marion said Robina reminded that the power and strength to be a leaf is the result of being attached to "the tree of life whose roots are watered by the river of life that flows from God. When you grow weary and tired, rest assured that the river of life will nourish you."

Participants in the Faith in Action Dialogue in Spokane closed by singing a song and saying a prayer that covers many sentiments touched at the assembly, "God in Your Grace."

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# Fall flu epidemic among nomadic Nukak people rekindles memories

A September flu epidemic affecting one-fourth of the nomadic Amazonian Nukak people and the martyrdom of five missionaries in Colombia in recent years may seem remote for someone who drives a van to transport Rockwood Retirement Community residents for shopping, entertainment, activities, medical care and other errands.

Colleen (Connie) Kessler keeps current with her concern about that part of the world through correspondence with former co-workers and websites such as [www.ntm.org](http://www.ntm.org) and [www.survival-international.org](http://www.survival-international.org).

The recent epidemic hit one of six groups of Maku/Nukak nomadic hunters and gatherers. The 500 surviving Nukak had fled their jungle homes to the frontier town of San Josea because of civil war between the Colombian army, paramilitaries and guerillas. They were then moved to a makeshift reservation on a farm by the Colombian government.

Survival International, which lobbies the government to honor the Nukak's right to their territory, reports that flu and malaria have killed perhaps half of this group of about 1,500 since they first contacted them in 1988.

Wild food is in short supply at their new location, which is about two percent the size of their original territory. The forest there does not contain the trees needed to make blowpipes or the poison they use on darts to hunt for meat. Their own territory has every resource they need for their natural lifestyle, but it has become dangerous to stay there, Colleen explained.

Her heart rests in both parts of her reality—caring about, listening to and meeting needs of those she has encountered in four years working with Rockwood residents, and keeping alive her prayer concerns, conversations, support, and awareness of the Maku/Nukak people.

She and her husband, Tom, worked with New Tribes Mission (NTM) in Colombia near Villavicencio from 1989 to 1992, part of their time there at a remote outpost in Nukak territory.

Growing up in South Hill Bible Church, which supports many NTM missionaries, she decided to enter the mission field after she graduated from Ferris High School in 1972.

Colleen met her husband 33 years ago while in training at the New Tribes Mission Bible School. Married in 1974, they lived in the Seattle area for several years.

In 1987, they became members of NTM and in 1989 went to Colombia, where they lived in the foothills of the Andes, about a three-hour drive from Bogota.

"New Tribes Mission serves primitive people who have never heard God's Word," she said.

"The process of reaching these



Colleen (Connie) Kessler

people with the Word of God begins with learning their culture and oral language," she described. "The emphasis then turns to translating the Scriptures, teaching literacy and establishing a local church among the people."

"Throughout this process there is a certain amount of social, economic, and health-care benefit to the people," she continued.

This work was being done out in the remote outpost with the Maku/Nukak until it became too dangerous for the missionaries to stay there because of the increasing threat from guerilla warfare.

The Kesslers worked in support services at a mission base with a school for missionaries' children, an airstrip and hangars for the mission planes, and housing for many of the support personnel.

Their jobs included cooking three meals a day for more than 60 people, doing building and maintenance work, working with the school children, producing field publications and assisting with various other jobs.

For a year, they also cared for a newborn Nukak baby with a birth defect that required several corrective surgeries.

"Through working with baby Marco and a few trips out to the jungle where he lives, our hearts have been forever touched with the plight of the Nukak people," Colleen said.

Marco was born in June 1991 when the missionary team was out in Nukak territory. His mother brought him to the outpost clinic saying something was wrong. She trusted that the missionaries would take him to the

hospital in Villavicencio.

While Marco lived with the Kesslers they learned more about his people. In 1973, missionaries first contacted the tribe and eventually gained their confidence to live in their territory, set up a clinic, learn their language and gain cultural insight, she said.

"Since cocaine producers began to encroach on their hunting grounds and guerillas drove them from the jungle at gunpoint, their numbers have dwindled to about 500," she said. "Because of their primitive state, they are being corrupted by nationals, who cheat them, rape their women, and expose them to new diseases. It's the same story for many primitive peoples when they come into contact with civilization."

Colleen said the Maku have learned some Spanish, but not enough to communicate their needs. The government requires them to stay on a temporary reservation, except for medical care. New Tribes Mission advocates for them.

The Kesslers spent 20 years away from Spokane, seven as missionaries—three in South America

and four with New Tribes Mission in Missouri and Florida.

Kidnappings and assassinations of several NTM missionaries in Colombia since they left made it clear they could not return. So they left NTM and came back to Washington in 1998. In Spokane, Colleen helps Tom with their small business, Kessler Painting.

Before driving the van part time, she worked two years full-time in housekeeping at Rockwood.

"I have a serving heart. I'm interested in people and their well-being, so I seek to accommodate their needs. I consider driving the van a ministry. I want to be there for people when they need something," she said.

Colleen serves on the mission commission of South Hill Bible Church, an independent, evangelical church with more than 600 members. The church provides about \$129,240 a year to support missionaries through New Tribes Mission, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Campus Crusades in China, Alaskan Village Missions or programs in rural areas of North

Idaho, Oregon and Montana.

The Kesslers' children carry on their commitment to serve: One son and his wife are adopting a Guatemalan baby. Their daughter and son-in-law worked two years with Wycliffe in Kenya, translating the Bible into the Tharakan language. Their other son is a special education teacher in western Washington.

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# Watering hole image inspires ministry in everyday life

Using liturgy, music, art, preaching and teaching within the life of churches, the Rev. Rob Gohl's ministry exemplifies the image of the church as a watering hole, where people are fed for their mission in their lives, communities and the world.

Aware that church members often want their church to be the mission field, he believes that sets up a maintenance ministry.

"Ministry is who we are, where we are and what we do to express Christian nurture, to do ministries in our everyday lives and reach out to nonmembers," he said.

That's the approach he took in his first call, serving Good Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Townsend, Mont., for 15 years, and it's his approach serving Grace Lutheran Church in Cashmere since 2002 and also St. James Episcopal Church there since 2003.

When the priest at St. James was ready to retire, he asked Rob if he would serve as quarter-time interim. Three months later, St. James dropped their search. Now he serves Grace full time and as vicar at St. James half time.

The two churches have worked together in the community and have held a joint midweek Lenten soup supper, worship and education program since the 1970s.

Both churches had struggled financially, but Grace has grown from 50 to 80 at worship and St. James from about 15 to 30.

Similarly, in Townsend, a community of 3,000 like Cashmere, the watering-hole approach led Good Shepherd to increase from 35 to 120 worshippers.

**Growing up on a farm** in American Falls, Idaho, and participating in St. John's Lutheran Church, Rob attended Lutheran Bible Institute a year and a half after high school in 1975. Then he went to Pacific Lutheran University for a bachelor's degree in religion in 1981. He also traveled a while on the West Coast with the LBI Lutheran Youth Encounter Music Team, working with youth groups.

His interest in worship and liturgy led him to attend Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., where he earned a master of divinity degree in 1986. His third year, he did an internship at Emmanuel Lutheran in Ritzville, and gained contacts in the Northwest.

**In Townsend, he developed** a youth program, Sunday school and outreach to the community through funerals and weddings, offering comfort and hope.

"Small town pastors need to do things outside the church," he said.

With a farm background, he



The Rev. Rob Gohl serves Lutheran and Episcopal churches.

helped a non-church rancher plant and harvest for no pay, and just became acquainted.

Rob also coached and did substitute teaching at the high school and junior high, gaining visibility and some income. He also did ministry with the Episcopal pastor.

"Ecumenism reminds me different denominations and churches are doing about the same ministries, just with different styles," he clarified. "We share concern to reach the poor, oppressed and marginalized. Rather than seeking to create new programs, I prefer to join existing programs."

When his marriage broke up in 1999, he began looking for churches in Washington, to cut the 540-mile distance for him in joint custody of three sons with his former wife, Susan, who returned to her hometown of Wenatchee.

**Cashmere has 12 churches**, which, like Grace, draw people from Plain and Leavenworth to East Wenatchee. Cashmere Valley is the community identity.

Rob said half the valley people are Hispanic, settling with their families, rather than migrating.

Grace supports a Headstart outreach for 18 children, all but two of whom are Hispanic.

Rob has conducted several Hispanic weddings with the assistance of interpreters.

He continues outreach, pastoral care and community services, but a bit less than in Townsend, because of serving two churches.

St. James worships at 9 a.m. and Grace at 10:30 a.m. Sundays.

Rob rushes from St. James robed in his alb and jumps into his car to arrive at Grace. Seeing him

do that one day, a woman called him "the flying minister."

St. James has no Sunday school. Grace's Sunday school meets before worship. Midweek, he leads a joint class for the churches. He also does five text studies on Thursdays for the churches—three held at assisted living centers. About 60 attend, coming to the one most convenient for them.

The economy of Cashmere, which celebrated its centennial in 2004, is based on fruit orchards, agriculture, tourism and Aplets and Cotlets.

Rob helps on farms there, too. Working in an orchard on a tractor is "a time of spiritual renewal."

**Rob described the churches** and their shared ministry.

St. James' centennial was in 2005. Its small, stone English-style building was built in 1914. Grace, started in 1940, built its present building in 1956 and built an addition in 1964. Both churches reached their peaks in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1984, the Episcopal and Lutheran churches officially permitted celebrating communion together. Their national Call to Common Mission, adopted in 1998, opened the way for Episcopal and Lutheran congregations to share clergy.

Rob is an ordained Lutheran, but has permission to serve the Episcopal church. At the Episcopal Convention, he has voice but no vote. He attends both Lutheran synod and Episcopal diocese events, plus a monthly Lutheran cluster gathering and Episcopal deanery meetings for North Central Washington.

The worship services and litur-

gies are similar, both using new music, said Rob, who plays guitar, sings and writes music.

**His passion for studying**, teaching and reforming liturgy to keep it current and connected to tradition influences worship in both churches and involves him in promoting the new Lutheran Worship Book or hymnal.

Rob uses music, prayers and Scriptures with language that is inclusive in terms of gender and culture to "break down us/them, right/wrong mentalities and explore contemporary expressions that connect people to life."

To help stem the flow of people out of churches, he uses understandable words, rather than "traditional church code language"—such as acolyte for candle lighter.

He incorporates a sense of the ordinary, an everyday message, affirming people's everyday lives, seeking to bring hope in the midst of brokenness.

If songs in hymn books and song books do not meet a need, he writes a song, using country-style music: "I call what I write the lament psalms of America."

Rob writes Christmas programs by helping youth plan musical presentations and putting Christian words to the music they know. It's one way to deal with the challenge in small towns to keep youth involved and build their awareness that they are in "a mission field" at their schools and in sports.

**Rob is one of five** members of an Eastern Washington-Idaho ELCA synod task force promoting the new Evangelical Lutheran Worship Book.

"It has something for everyone, offering 10 liturgical settings for celebrating communion, complete with music from traditional to contemporary—organ, piano, guitar, drums and strings—reflecting cultural diversity.

"Putting contemporary music in a hymnal allows people to hold and touch something that gives them a sense of permanence, in contrast to projecting words on a screen," he said.

In 1978 during seminary, Rob helped introduce the Lutheran green hymnal to Minnesota churches. Years later congregations were just adopting it.

"Lutherans are often hesitant to change. Some may grieve the loss of some familiar hymns, but there are many familiar hymns as well as new. The trade-off is bringing in new people," he said.

**Rob is visiting churches** and has helped organize four regional events with church musicians to teach some of the new music in Boise, Spokane, Tri Cities and Pocatello from October to January. Many have already ordered it to take advantage of a discount.

"Lutheran worship and liturgy is in a constant renewal," he said. "Music and liturgy are ways to approach God. We believe Jesus comes to us in Word and sacrament every Sunday.

"We seek to focus on doing the Word and sacrament so well that when people step into the churches they feel connected with God," he said. "So we need to keep the watering hole fresh, clean and inviting."

For funerals and liturgical seasons, Rob made a resurrection cross by tying brass platelets positioned on fish line to two bars. He said he turns on a fan and they move, symbolically "reflecting the light of God and giving movement from death to life."

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## World Methodists sign historic reconciliation, ecumenical documents

By George Abrams

Meeting in Seoul, Korea, in July, the five-day World Methodist Conference pressed for reconciliation on two fronts.

First, a peace march by 300 of the 2,500 delegates in the Imjingak Memorial Park near the 38th parallel sought reconciliation for "the last divided country on earth," also expressed in a conference resolution.

Second, the delegates the next day watched as leaders of the Lutheran World Federation, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Conference signed a declaration of reconciliation, reversing a 500-year-old rift among these churches.

The peace march followed an outdoor worship service at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Bishop Shin Kyoung Ha, president of the Council of Bishops of the Korean Methodist Church and others placed a placard at the site to commemorate the service.

The test launch of North Korean missiles early in July had led some delegates to cancel coming. Stress from that and from sitting in humid, 90-degree heat, wearing eyeshades, added to the delegates' stress of knowing they were protesting under North Koreans' watchful eyes.

Three young women refugees from North Korea offered sacred dance. At a signal, worshipers released helium balloons to fly into North Korea. Then they lined up behind several bishops carrying a banner proclaiming "God in Christ Reconciling." They walked to a Korean War monument overlooking North Korea.

As they marched, they shouted, "Peace now!" South Korean sol-



Lutheran, Methodist and Roman Catholic leaders sign Joint Declaration on Justification.

Photo by George Abrams

diers stared, unconcerned. Marchers paused where a passenger train from South to North Korea stopped during the Korean War on the bank above the Imjingang River, just inside the 38th parallel.

Bishop Sunday Mbang of Nigeria commented, "Through the special providence of God, Methodists from around the world are coming together in Seoul to pray for peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula in such a time of heightened tension."

The 19th World Methodist Conference in 100 years opened on July 20 in the air-conditioned 110,000-member Kumnan Methodist Church in Seoul to consider the theme, "God in Christ Reconciling."

Representatives from Methodist churches in 132 countries walked into the sanctuary of the nine-story church behind the banners for their countries.

They posted the banners around

the sanctuary below the two balconies as a 25-piece orchestra accompanied the 160-voice choir.

"When people of all nations celebrate Holy Communion together, the future is present," said German Bishop Walter Kaiber.

In business, delegates approved a resolution for reconciliation and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

The resolution encourages Methodists around the world to participate in ecumenical efforts through national council of churches and other bodies to reunite separated Korean families.

It also asks South Korean and North Korean governments to support "wide levels" of cooperation and collaboration, continue exchange programs, increase humanitarian programs and "consider mutual understandings and cooperation which would lead us toward peaceful unity."

The decision calls on 70 million Methodists around the world "to

be mediators for peace and reconciliation, as well as advocates for the peaceful reunification of Korea."

The second effort toward reconciliation was the Methodists' signing a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

During the Reformation in the 16th century, the doctrine of justification became a major cause of the split in the western churches. Part of the issue was whether sinners are justified through "good works," as the Roman Catholics maintained, or "justified by faith," as Martin Luther preached.

In 1999, after official approval by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, these bodies signed an Official Common Statement, confirming a

"Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." This document outlined the basic truth of the doctrine of justification by God's grace through faith in Christ and helped bridge the 500-year old rift.

At that time, the World Methodist Council observed that justification by faith and assurance of salvation belonged at the core of Methodist preaching.

United Methodist discipline says that "both faith and good works belong within an all-encompassing theology of grace."

On July 24, Methodists, through the World Methodist Council, joined delegates from the Lutheran Federation and cardinals from the Roman Catholic Church, in committing themselves to "strive together to deepen their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching."

The signers also agreed that the document was part of their pursuit of "full communion and common witness to the world that is the will of Christ for all Christians."

As a result of this conference, Methodists are now a part of a dialogue with the North Koreans, and with the Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

For information, call 235-4940.

*The Rev. Dr. L. George Abrams, retired pastor of the Cheney United Methodist Church, attended the World Methodist Conference—the fourth he has attended—with his wife, Jan.*

## Methodists challenge nuclear weapons

The 2006 World Methodist Conference's statement on Korea urged North Korea to honor United Nations guidelines to find resolution on nuclear issues through peaceful cooperation and to end development of nuclear weapons and threats.

On Oct. 9, the chief mission executive of the United Methodist Church (UMC) protested North Korea's testing of a nuclear weapon on Oct. 8. The Rev. Randy Day called it "a deplorable act of aggression against the prospects of a more peaceful world" in a statement issued the opening day of the annual meeting of directors of the church's General Board of Global Ministries.

He called all nations with nuclear weapons to eliminate them.

North Korea, he said, is not the

only country that holds the threat of nuclear holocaust over the heads of the world's people.

Randy said the UMC has a history of opposing nuclear weapons. Its 2000 General Conference called use or threat of such weapons "evil and morally wrong."

He expressed concern for the people of North and South Korea, and called on nuclear powers and the United Nations to use the occasion of the test "to hasten the work of nuclear disarmament."

"Nuclear weapons are menaces to all forms of life on the planet and to the earth itself," he said. "Such weapons must be controlled and rapidly eliminated by international covenant."

"The church has repeatedly called for ending all testing, use or stockpiling of nuclear weap-

ons and for enforceable means to bring the age of nuclear weapons to a close," Randy continued.

He expressed concern that North Korea, a poor nation, uses limited resources for nuclear military purposes. The General Board of Global Ministries has sent food to North Korea and expressed concern for the people.

"We value our links with the Christian Federation in North Korea," he said. "We are prayerfully concerned for the people of both South and North Korea."

"We join our friends in the Korean Methodist Church in prayer for peace, stability and eventual unification," he said. "We hold our brothers and sisters in our hearts in this crisis and extend love that defines the God of peace and hope."

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## Contemplation and dialogue are alternatives to impasse of polarities

Believing faith can empower people to move beyond the impasses they experience in work for justice in the world and their churches, Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Nancy Sylvester urges contemplation and dialogue.

"We need to be hospice workers to the old paradigm and midwives for the emerging one," she said during the November Catholicism and the New Millennium lecture at Gonzaga University.

Sister Nancy believes the world is at a critical moment that demands a new consciousness.

"The issues we face and polarities we experience witness to the powerlessness of trying to change ourselves or society in the usual ways," she said.

After 15 years as a researcher and lobbyist with NETWORK, the national Catholic social justice lobby in Washington, D.C., Sister Nancy felt lobbying puts a finger in the dike of societal, economic, political and ethical issues by developing laws that can be changed and changed again.

"While it is important to change laws, laws do not transform people at the depths of who they are, what they believe, what they see as true and what they do," she said, having worked with Democratic and Republican-led Congresses.

"I thought there was an opportunity to make a difference when the Soviet Union fell," she said. "I thought we would shift from a high military budget to support human needs. Instead, we continued to pour money into military programs and even moved to a pre-emptive strike policy."

Sister Nancy, who grew up in South Chicago, entered the convent after high school and earned a bachelor's degree from St. Louis University in philosophy and political science in 1971. She taught secondary religion and social studies in Michigan for six years before going to NETWORK.

In 1982, she was elected vice president of her congregation and moved to Monroe, Mich. She also served three years on the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

In 2002, she established the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue and developed its program, Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue. This work combines her background in the political arena and her work in the ecclesiastical arena.

Through Engaging Impasse, she has facilitated 13 circles that involved 170 people who met three times over several months. In December, six circles with 100



Nancy Sylvester, Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

people will begin in Cleveland.

In the circles, participants tell their stories of impasse, engage the impasse, dialogue on insights from it through a process of communal contemplation to help them imagine new ways of being and acting.

Participants shared feelings of impasse about such events as frustration at the failure to prevent the War in Iraq, ruptured relationships that don't seem to heal, win-lose conflicts, abuse of women and children, religions becoming sources of conflict and industrial progress destroying the earth.

"When people who have been trying to integrate what they have been learning through recent decades of psychology, theology, science and the new universe story, a few face impasse. They encounter individuals and systems protecting old ways of thinking and doing," she said, "ways that have roots in our consciousness shaped by patriarchy and the Enlightenment."

"Worldviews or paradigms offer us stories that have shaped us. Although much good has come from these worldviews, today they are failing us. They tell us we are separate, mechanistic, selfish and violent. They promote ideas of either/or over both/and, might makes right, human domination over other species and earth, males over females, and identity based on possessions," she said. "We need new paradigms, new stories to move into the future."

"Political debate of 'this way or else' limits our world view. We can't think of how to resolve the violence that comes from might makes right. We can't solve the problems from the same consciousness that created them," she said, citing words of Albert Einstein.

So Sister Nancy promotes "engaging the impasse through contemplation," a way to pray that loosens the hold of traditional stories that shape who we say we are as individuals, nations or Christian communities.

"These stories lock us into ways of thinking. Contemplation opens us to take a long, loving look at the real," she said. "Then we can see how our fears and insecurities make us complicit in the impasse. We need to be vulnerable to create a shift that transforms our consciousness in a profound way."

Sister Nancy believes people are evolving to a more global earth-centered perspective from former ethnocentric ways of viewing and responding to problems.

"In this climate of division and polarities, some have become so dogmatic that those seeking to explore new stories of who we are and why we are here feel they have lost their voice," she said.

Basing social and political structures on old paradigms inhibits people resolving issues they face, she added.

"Contemplation in a small group allows us to discern different responses," she said, inviting

dialogue. "Absolute positions foster divisions that are killing us as a country, as Catholics, as families and as individuals. We need to take time to converse, be curious and explore options."

"We can make bridges through conversation and contemplation," she said, contrasting that to her efforts in the Catholic social justice movement to appeal primarily to the intellect by providing enough data on poverty, racism and other issues that people would come to new understandings and change their views.

Now she sees a deeper shift is needed, one relying on the wisdom and spiritual insights of many sources which have often been less valued in the dominant worldview, including women and indigenous people.

Using the image of two islands sticking above the water, she said dialogue finds the unseen common ground, the land connecting them underwater.

She believes this kind of conversation is needed "if we are to reimagine new ways of addressing the economic and political problems facing us. For example, the environment cannot be addressed if corporations rely only on quarterly profits as the measure of their success. Sister Nancy calls for long-term investments that may not show profit the first quarter."

The government divides issues into a variety of committees, rather than looking at overall implications and the relationship of issues.

"We need to connect issues so we find creative resolutions with new ways of thinking," Sister Nancy said.

"We can change laws, but if we do not transform how people understand reality, the laws will not

address the underlying issues," she said. "For example, we need laws against discrimination and for equality, but unless people believe black people and white people are one and are more alike than different, we will not shift from the racism embedded in our structures and worldview."

Sister Nancy seeks to integrate psychology, theology, philosophy, politics and science in a collage of perspectives, so people can see how the pieces are related.

"We may not change the impasse, but we can change ourselves and how we engage the situations of impasse and, in doing so, change the world as well," she said. "By changing how we deal with impasse, we can live with integrity in this transitional time."

"Hope is not naive if people know what we are up against and imagine new ways of doing and being," she said. "Contemplation is never a privatization of religion. It always moves us to act. It can awaken our consciousness to new understandings as planetary citizens. God is bigger than we imagine."

For information, see [www.engagingimpasse.org](http://www.engagingimpasse.org).

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## Prayer for transformation may bring surprises in our lives, our media

Since the election it seems that print, broadcast and online media have permission to include some voices not heard for a while. There seems to be more responsible coverage. By responsible, I mean they stir the thoughtfulness and hope we need for a democratic society, for cooperative community, healthy families and dialogue reflections.

Perhaps it's because the reports are a contrast with the blistering frenzy of emotional, spiritual, verbal and mental abuse we endured with messages of hate and distrust shot against opposing candidates, parties, religions and government itself in the expensive mid-term campaign.

Perhaps these articles help us pick up from there, be reasonable, research issues, become bipartisan and love those we made enemies for show in the campaign.

Reports with food for thought include:

- A Combined Arms Center leader advocates for the army to put more emphasis on training beyond for major combat operations to be more effective in countering insurgency. It includes training in peace-keeping, reconstruction, and understanding languages, cultures and human nature to deal with the realities of security, infrastructures and services to restore community.

- A Florida State University study finds that "self-sufficiency usually results in selfish, anti-social behavior," and having money makes people less concerned about other people and their needs.

- One-fourth of Iraq and Afghan U.S. war veterans suffer mental health problems. In 1998, more than 56,000 Vietnam vets and more than 18,000 Persian Gulf War vets were in state and federal prisons, many for violent offenses. Skills for a war zone are inappropriate at home, leading to

hypervigilance, insomnia, irritability, withdrawal, depression and anger that impede relationships.

- Women increased to a record 16 percent of Congress and less than 25 percent of state legislatures, but how will their presence will affect policies on war, children and poverty?

- O.J. Simpson's book and TV special were turned down by the major media corporation that planned to publish and promote them.

- Stories on riots destroying 80 percent of Nuku'alofa, the capitol of Tonga, began reporting on more causes than the pro-democracy movement—rival businesses and unemployed young men in gangs.

- Jewish women are raising funds to buy and send solar cookers to women in Darfur refugee camps, so they won't have to leave the camps for firewood and be raped.

In this Fig Tree, Sister Nancy Sylvester suggests we use faith resources—contemplation and dialogue—when discourse divides and systems exclude. Other articles point out how worship and faith can motivate involvement in our ministry through our everyday lives.

Lately, I've been praying, "God, in your grace, transform the world," particularly as I felt ruffled by inhumanity and dishonesty in the campaigns. We need to transform ourselves, be open to hear new insights from unexpected places and ready ourselves for new responses to age-old dilemmas.

"God, in your grace, transform our lives, our congregations, media, community and government leaders, societal and religious structures—our whole wide world."

Mary Stamp - editor

## Christmas is about the deep 'ahaba' love for God's suffering people

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not love, I become sounding brass and tinkling cymbals," we read in I Cor. 13.

The chapter reminds us that the spirit of the unfathomable, enduring love of God prevails. "Love suffers long and is kind. It bears all things, hopes all things." The chapter tells us we only know in part—the perfect will come and the imperfect will fade. Our spirit soars with "Faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love."

What does the famous love Scripture tell us in Christmas 2006? Is it relevant in this century of war and dissent?

The international status of our country is

dubious with the cloud of 9/11 hovering, the endless war in Iraq, the nascent nuclear adventuring of Iran, the nuclear-bomb testing in North Korea, and hatred in the Middle East of the U.S. "democratization" efforts and kinship with Israel.

Thoughts on our nation's and world's past and present peril and challenges collide with I. Cor. 13 in a strange juxtaposition of events, failed actions and prophesy.

For example, when a flag-draped coffin is one of ours, we care and seem united, but we easily become wound up in divisive chat about the fine points of the latest hot-button issue and overlook the big picture.

A Hebrew word for love, "ahaba," re-

lates with the history of God's love for the "chosen people." Despite God's love, we see Jewish people suffering from hatred, diaspora, pogroms and the Holocaust. Ironically in the Middle East, only Israel does not have oil, the black gold that gushes in Arab nations and fuels the economies of the United States and the western world.

St. Augustine based his concept of Christian inclusiveness on broadening the scope of the faith community in the example of Jesus' inclusion of both Peter and Judas at the Last Supper.

My thoughts center today on the cost of war: The human cost for U.S. service personnel with about 3,000 and rising deaths,

plus 20,000 wounded. The count of Iraqi civilians is in the hundreds of thousands with innumerable refugees and unbelievable destruction. For some Americans, however, the central thought is that after Vietnam, we have to win one.

In my juxtaposition, these random thoughts, events, disasters and realities come together in spirit with the greatest source of peace, mercy, redemption and love exemplified in I Cor. 13, which encompasses the love Jesus brought into the world in the ironic arrival of a baby: "Now we see darkly, but then we will see face to face."

Jo Hendricks - Contributing editor

## For gifts, the simplicity of a book, a bear and something to wear works

Wish lists of a teddybear-loving daughter used to begin with 1) a book, 2) a bear and 3) something to wear. It could continue with anything not advertised on TV.

Three stories in this issue touch on the necessity of and joy in children's learning to read. That you are reading this demonstrates that people took the time to induct you into the circle of the literate.

Books aren't always regarded as exciting gifts. In a poem called "A Merry

Literary Christmas," Alice Low recalls how she wrote thank-you notes that were "too polite" to an aunt who always sent her books as gifts. When she grew up to be an aunt who gives books, she began receiving the too polite notes and decided that she needed to give her aunt sincere thanks for Mary Poppins, Rat and Toad, King Arthur, Dorothy, Ferdinand, Babar and all the other friends who were still with her.

During this season, many congregations

and service organizations are gathering gifts to distribute through the Christmas Bureau and other agencies. Consider adding a book. Bookstores such as Auntie's and Children's Corner Books have Christmas trees with tags for books that you may purchase and the store will forward to the agency with which they cooperate.

A book may not seem an exciting present, but new toys are not new for long. A book waits quietly until the fuss has died

down.

In our house, two daughters went through three copies of "Goodnight, Moon." Now it comes packaged with a toy bunny in blue and white "feetsie" pajamas. Reading it to a young grandson is one of those warm fuzzies I can give myself periodically.

Every child deserves to read and be read to, and every parent needs the warm fuzzies that result.

Nancy Minard - editorial team

A pastor's reflection

## Sounding Board

Newsletter Excerpts

## Cultural 'holiday' pressures may distract from gratitude and giving

We are in a season we call "the holidays"—the days between the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade and dropping the ball on New Year's Eve. It's a fast-paced time of year, as if our lives aren't fast paced enough. It's a time of spending and buying, and planning and preparing, a time when we focus on what we want, what we don't have and what we might possibly need.

I ask my children who have everything they could want what they want for Christmas. As a child, I loved the holidays, as an adult, I sometimes dread their arrival.

Christmas magic comes at a price, and often adults pay the price. Too many credit card charges, trips to the mall, presents, loops around the grocery store.

Perhaps the key to surviving the holidays is remembering the simple truth that the best gift we will ever receive is the gift of life. Life is a gift, and you don't need a diagnosis of cancer, or the loss of a beloved to remember that your life is a gift.

Our cups may run over with the blessings of life, yet I know that, among us, we face struggles and challenges aplenty in these days.

Life is a complex business. We are watching our children grow up and away from us, and we are holding on to our parents who are growing older and will

one day die. We are worried about a new diagnosis. We are praying that the new treatment will work. We just wish the pain would go away. We are worried about our jobs. We are working too hard. We are wishing we could find meaningful work. We are trying to find our way through the changes that come with long-term relationships. We are ending relationships. We are wishing we had a relationship. We miss someone who is living far away. We miss someone who is no longer living. We miss someone who sits at our table, but seems so far away.

So over the hills and through the woods, we come to the holidays, and all the stuff of our everyday lives, all the burdens we carry and struggles we engage come with us to the holiday table.

It can be difficult to find our way to a place of gratitude, especially when you've been on your feet all day, cooking, cleaning, setting the table and washing dishes. It's hard to feel grateful when your heart is breaking or your life exhausts you, but that is the mission for the day, to find our way to a place where we can be grateful, where we can see our cups as overflowing, not half full or half empty.

One reason it's hard to be in a place of gratitude is that we are inundated 24 hours

a day 7 days a week with our culture's messages that pull us away from gratitude.

We live in a consumer culture that fuels its economy by persuading us that we need more. To take it a step further, we live in a culture that promotes in us and in our children a sense of entitlement.

Our society profits by teaching us to believe that we somehow deserve it all, and only the best—the right brands, the designer labels, the newest models, the best seats, the fastest technology.

When only the best will do, our cups can seem mighty empty. We can find it hard to imagine it could be our own cup that, indeed, runneth over.

From where I sit, it is an exhausting way to live. I remember my mother telling me not to compare myself to others, for there will always be someone more talented and someone less talented. If we want to look around, there will always be someone who has more than we do, and someone who has less. The problem with looking around is that we don't look down, look in the mirror, look at our own lives and truly see the blessings before us.

The basic truth before us is that we are born entitled to nothing. All of life is a gift. If we look hard, we realize the blessings we treasure come to us most often through

no efforts of our own, but from someplace beyond ourselves.

We can step off the treadmill of consumption and walk away from the biggest, the newest, the fastest, the coolest. We can change our perspective from what I need and what can I buy to what do I already have. Maybe, for this season of hope and faith, we can take a moment to rest, to breathe, to celebrate the good things that we already possess.

The way of the culture of consumption, the push of "never enough" and "not good enough" is exhausting and limiting. It teaches us to keep everything for ourselves, and to be careful what we share. It can drain the joy, and the life right out of us.

There is another way.

Even in the most troubled of times, we are blessed, but we can find it hard to notice or to say thanks either to our neighbor or to our God. So in this holiday season, say thank you now, while you have the time. Look around. Breathe in and breathe out. Take time for rest and for Sabbath, know that the world will not stop turning if you stop running. Find joy and feel thanksgiving. Take time to be grateful for all you already have.

The Rev. Debi Hasdorff  
Cheney United Church of Christ

## Specialist discusses HIV/AIDS in Spokane area

Christopher Zilar, a health-program specialist with the Spokane Regional Health District, will present a lecture, "The Faces of HIV/AIDS in Spokane," at 8 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 5, in Weyerhaeuser Hall's Robinson Teaching Theatre at Whitworth College.

He will address questions about people affected by AIDS, what AIDS looks like in the Spokane community, whether the numbers

and demographics of those infected are changing and how people can help AIDS victims locally, nationally and internationally.

His presentation is being sponsored by the Whitworth Medic Team and the Acting on AIDS Club.

Since 1997, Zilar has worked closely with people in Spokane who are affected by AIDS. In addition to working for the Spo-

kane Regional Health District, he has served as a director and chaplain for Strength for the Journey, a retreat for people living with HIV and AIDS. He has also made numerous presentations at area hospitals and colleges and universities on the topics of sexuality, risk assessment, counseling issues, and HIV and Hepatitis C issues.

For information, call 777-4449.

## Students mark World AIDS Day

Gonzaga University is observing World AIDS Day with AIDS Awareness Week, Nov. 27 through Dec. 1 to offer education on the worldwide AIDS epidemic, with special focus on the social and political impact AIDS has on individuals and the region.

Every day there is a fund-raiser from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Crosby Student Center to raise funds for the Spokane AIDS Network.

On Friday, Dec. 1, World AIDS Day, students are expected to wear T-shirts as a sign of solidarity with the many Americans living with AIDS.

There will be a prayer vigil at 6 p.m. in the Jesuit House.

For information, call 328-4220.

## Spokesman-Review reprints articles

The Spokesman-Review is reprinting about one article a month from The Fig Tree,

"It gives The Spokesman Review access to us as a news source and gives us wider visibility," said editor Mary Stamp of the agreement. "They are purchasing second-publishing rights.

"We are already experiencing positive feedback about the articles and the greater circulation," she said.

The articles are condensed versions and run on the Saturday religion page.

For information, call 535-1813.

## Creston church has live nativity

Creston Christian Church will present a Living Nativity Scene from 6 to 8 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 20, in front of the church. Church members will fill the various roles and the choir will sing carols.

For information, call 636-2761.



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## Calendar of Events

- Dec 1** • World AIDS Day
- Dec 1, 2** • Christmas Candlelight Concert, Gonzaga University Choir and Women's Ensemble, St. Aloysius Church, Boone & Astor, 8 p.m. - 325-SEAT
- Dec 2** • Program on 2007 Farm Bill, Lutheran Public Policy Office, St. Paul Lutheran, Quincy, 8:30 a.m. to noon - 787-2824  
• All-City Messiah Sing-Along, Kennewick First Presbyterian, 2000 W. Kennewick Ave., 7 p.m.  
• "Gospel Jazz Christmas," The Service Station, 9315 N. Nevada, 2:45 p.m., 7 p.m. - call 534-3007
- Dec 3** • Community Sing-Along Messiah, First Presbyterian, 318 S. Cedar, 6 p.m. - rehearse 4 p.m.
- Dec 3, 4** • "Messiah," Central United Protestant, Stevens & Williams, Richland, 7 p.m.
- Dec 5** • "The Faces of HIV/AIDS in Spokane," Christopher Zilar of the Spokane Regional Health District, Weyerhaeuser Hall, Whitworth College, 7:30 p.m., 777-4449  
• "Program Evaluation," Nonprofit Board Development Series, Jerrie Allard, United Way of Spokane County, Gonzaga University Schoenberg Conference Center, 7:30 to 9 a.m.
- Dec 7** • Fig Tree Board, Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 1 p.m.  
• PeaceWorks, Planning for Nonviolent Change in 2007, 35 W. Main, 5:30 p.m.
- Dec 8** • Sisters of Providence, closing 150th observances - 484-2306  
• Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane potluck and film, "A Force More Powerful," 35 W. Main - 838-7870  
• Whitworth Christmas Festival Concert, From Out of Darkness, We Have Light," First Presbyterian, 318 S. Cedar, 8 p.m.
- Dec 9** • Whitworth Christmas Festival Concert, First Presbyterian, 3 and 7 p.m. - 467-9397  
• Spokane Area Children's Choir Holiday Concert, Westminster Congregational UCC, 411 S. Washington, 3 p.m.
- Dec 11** • Spokane Citizens for a Living Wage, 35 W. Main, 5 p.m.
- Dec 13** • "United Nations Human Rights Day, David Boose, Unitarian Universalist Church, 4340 Ft. Wright Dr., 7 p.m.
- Dec 13, 14** • "An Irish Christmas," The Singing Nuns, The Met, 2 and 7:30 p.m. - 325-SEAT
- Dec 16** • Hanukkah begins  
• Inland Northwest Minister's Wives and Ministers' Widows Fellowship, Calvary Baptist, 203 E. Third, 4-6:30 p.m.
- Dec 19** • "Bringing It Back and Making It Happen," Nonprofit Board Series, Dan Distelhorst, Organizational Effective Consulting, GU Schoenberg Center, 7:30 to 9 a.m.
- Dec 25** • Christmas
- Dec 31** • First Night Spokane, opening ceremony, 6:15 p.m.
- Jan 3** • Fig Tree distribution, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th Ave., 9 a.m.
- Jan 4** • Fig Tree Board, Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 1 p.m.
- Jan 7** • Spokane CROP Hunger Walk Planning Committee, Interfaith Hospitality Network, 2515 E. Sprague, 1:30 p.m.
- Mons** • Taize Worship, Koinonia House, Washington State University, Pullman, 7 p.m.
- Tues** • Need to Know, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 314 S. Spruce.
- Tues-Sat** • Habitat-Spokane work days - call 534-2552
- Fridays** • Colville Peace Vigil - call 675-4554
- 1st Sat** • Ministers' Fellowship Union - call 624-0522
- 2nd, 4th Weds** • Pax Christi, St. Joseph's Catholic, 1503 W. Dean, noon
- 3rd Mons** • NAACP - call 467-9793

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# NAACP education director perseveres despite taunts and bias

Michael Wotorson did not let being spit on at age 18 when he was walking across campus at the University of Missouri stall his quest for higher education.

Coming from Liberia with his self-concept based on his tribal community, not his race, he was undeterred when the spitter told him to go back to Africa and called him a name he had only read about. That insult, however, changed his identity to being a black man in America.

"In American society, the road for black men is too often from cradle through prison to death," he said. "It's taught by schools and police making assumptions."

Now national director for education with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Michael spoke at the recent Spokane Freedom Fund Banquet on the Scholarship, Partners in Education, Back to School/Stay in School programs that are part of the NAACP's Call to Action in Education.

"Our education campaign is a 12-step program calling for parental involvement, resource equity, teacher quality and smaller class sizes," he said. "The goal is to reduce the alarming high school dropout rate and connect students with post-secondary options for personal growth, development and economic security."

Michael earned bachelor's and master's degrees in political science from the University of Missouri-Columbia and is working on a doctorate in education administration at the American University in Washington, D.C.

Now active in Read Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Glendale, Md., he has worked in civil rights and education for 15 years with the Fair Employment Council of Greater Washington, the Anti-Defamation League, the Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund and other organizations. He worked with a hate crime prevention and awareness project for the Anti-Defamation League.

"I came to the United States believing every aspiration could be realized. I still believe it," he affirmed. "The NAACP is here to make that so. Through it, members are in Washington, D.C., making noise about policies, preferences and perspectives."

Fifty years ago, the NAACP advocated desegregated public education. This year it filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a plan to re-segregate Omaha public schools. The case is now before the Supreme Court.

"We value integrated public education, but not everyone does.



Michael Wotorson of the national NAACP

In the Supreme Court, we are challenged by well funded, if misguided, adversaries who would turn back gains we made.

"We need to be steadfast. We need to organize and mobilize, so young people will continue to benefit from the promises and gains we fought for," he said.

Michael calls for three levels of engagement: 1) tell the truth, 2) engage in a personal existential struggle and 3) take action.

As a sign of its commitment to assure opportunities for young people in higher education, the 2006 NAACP convention gave \$276,000 in scholarships, up from \$198,000 in 2005.

"When I started, African Americans bought into the dream. While it appears the dream is deferred and some have walked away from promises, many people continue to work doggedly day and night to usher in the dream," he asserted.

Michael calls for pushing ahead "for the sake of our children," not assuming those who would move backward are better organized.

After graduate school in 1992, he chose to work in civil rights to make a difference for children.

In the Liberian tradition of family and friends being honest for

the sake of the wellbeing of those they love, Michael offered a list of concerns from recent studies:

- With 46 percent of black adults below average in literacy, it is hard for them to process information for civil engagement.
- Too many black high school graduates have eighth-grade math skills.

- About 60 percent of black fourth graders cannot read.

- Every day, 7,000 high school students drop out, and the majority are black and brown.

"Where is the moral outrage about that data?" he challenged.

"Schools have clever means to push children out of school under No Child Left Behind," Michael observed. "It's a form of terrorism for black and brown children to sit in under-resourced schools with inadequate textbooks."

"Seventy percent of black students attend schools that are predominantly black and lack resources, allocating \$400 less

per student than schools with predominantly white students. We need to close these educational gaps," Michael said.

In 2001, the NAACP asked governors to reduce the racial gap by 50 percent in five years. It has not happened.

"We need policy makers to understand that every day our children are underserved is a day they are denied opportunities to meet their aspirations, and a day they are marched in the direction of prison," he said.

He expects more than a whimper from those who survived slave ships, slavery, Jim Crow, rape and segregation. He expects blacks to be the nation's conscience because of that oppression.

"We need a radical change in how we educate minority children," he said, noting the importance of education as minorities become the majority. "If we are undereducated when we are the majority, how can the United States compete in the world? How can we know what democracy means and keep our democratic rights and responsibilities?"

Michael urges shifting from an education system geared to children taking tests to one that develops critical thinking skills.

"Diversity matters. Just because someone is devising ways to trip us up does not mean integration is a mistake. We must not confuse people with slogans about 'no child left behind,' if the policy is not funded or implemented."

Michael hopes people will struggle and think.

He also urges parents to discern if they help or hurt their children by letting them wear baggy pants, smoke, cuss, watch TV or put off homework. He urges them to set an example by caring.

Michael said the need for change is reason to join groups like the NAACP, a matter of status for his grandmother's generation when neighbors contacted the NAACP about problems.

"Our children need the NAACP," he said. "We need to be involved, not look the other way. The eyes of the future are looking back on us. Acting can simply mean to speak up, not to accept things as they are, to vote, and to become involved."

With 60 the average age of NAACP members, he said, people cannot simply assume it will be there to challenge police brutality, sexual assault or education inequities.

"We need to be part of the action to challenge that felons—who are disproportionately black—lose the right to vote and their ability to find work," he said.

Even if a dream is deferred or dies because people become comfortable with mediocrity, he believes it can be revived collectively.

"We are interdependent, whether we are black, brown or white," Michael said. "We need each other. We need to love each other so much we tell the truth and encourage a personal struggle that motivates people to act."

For information, visit [www.naacp.org](http://www.naacp.org) or call 323-6368.

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