

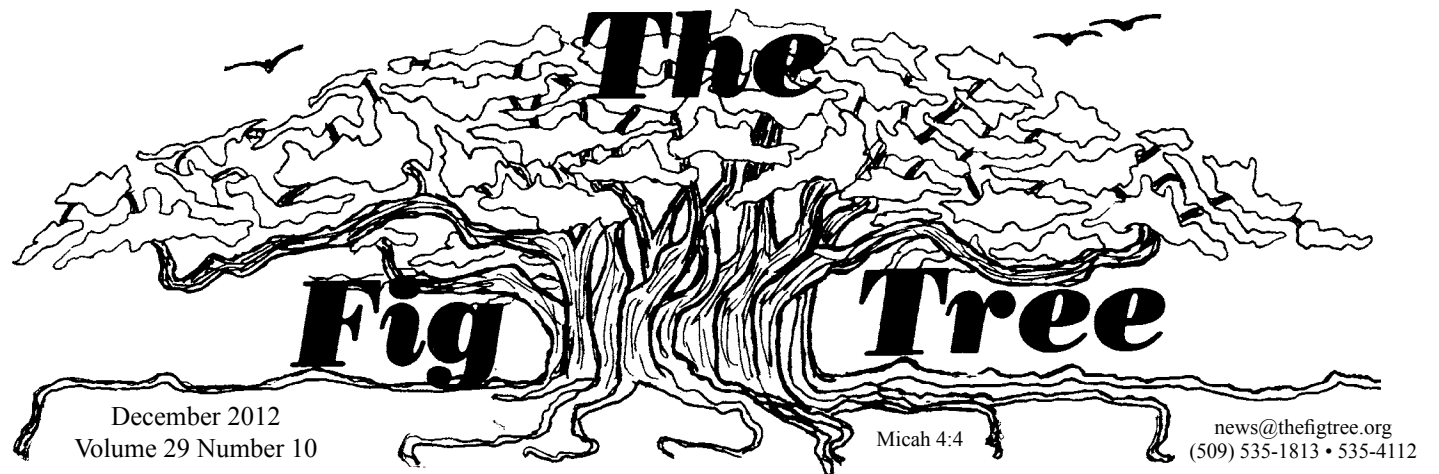
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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Neighborhood nonprofits partner

By Mary Stamp

A thrift store and a children's center a few blocks apart started a partnership in October to help them serve families in the South Perry neighborhood.

Liberty Park Child Development Center at 1417 E. Hartson had piles of donated clothing in plastic bags that took up space in the office and foyer.

Families would come in and go through the unsorted clothes looking for things to fit their children, but there was no place to try on the clothes.

When Spencer Grainger began as program and development director in the summer, he started reorganizing space and looked for another way to redistribute the clothing.

He talked with Lena Lopez Schindler, president of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John's Service League, which runs The Windfall Thrift Store at 1024 S. Perry.

Lena experienced that connection as "a God moment," she said.

The Windfall has a dressing room and volunteers to sort it by size and type, and hang it on racks. The child development center had "customers" and donated clothing. The center sends families there with vouchers they can use to shop.



Lena Lopez Schindler said partnering helps thrift store serve more neighbors.

The Service League overwhelmingly approved of partnering to meet this neighborhood need.

Spencer took the clothing donations that were at the center, and regularly takes new clothing donations. If someone calls to donate, he suggests they take the items directly to The Windfall. So far, he has taken nearly 20 bags.

"The voucher program is a respectful relationship to let families shop in the store for whatever they need," Lena said.

Windfall volunteers ask families what they need and help them find items.

Ronalisa Notton, the center's family service coordinator, set up the voucher program. Because she is responsible for family intake to the center's ECEAP program, she knows families' backgrounds and children's financial and health needs. For refugee children, she has information in English on their sizes for shoes and clothing.

"Our goal is to create neighborhood partnerships," said Spencer. "There are many nonprofits in the neighborhood, and our need to connect is obvious."

For information, call 534-3888 or 534-0957.

Related stories on pages 4 and 6

25 percent more people are accessing Second Harvest food banks in 2012

Reporting on the hunger crisis in Spokane County communities and the response by Second Harvest to it, Melissa Cloninger, director of community and corporate relationships, said 25 percent more people were accessing food in their network of food bank agencies in 2012 compared to last year.

Speaking at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on Thanksgiving Day at the Unitarian Church, she told of the beginnings of Second Harvest.

In 1971, an economic time similar to today, social worker

Kay Porta realized that with so many people out of work and neighborhood food banks lacking the capacity to meet their needs, she should do something.

She gathered groups like the Greater Spokane Council of Churches to establish a reliable resource, helping found the Spokane Food Bank to provide food to 13 Spokane County food banks.

Last year, Second Harvest provided 20 million pounds of food to 250 food banks and meal programs in its network within its 51,000-square-mile service area.

Melissa invited participants

at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service to imagine the 55,000 runners lined up for Bloomsday and transpose the image of that massive crowd into an image of 55,000 standing in line outside a food bank.

"Collectively, that's how many people our network of food bank agencies are serving each week," she said, "and the numbers continue to climb."

In the last two years, there have been record-breaking numbers of people in need coming.

"Today, 100,000 children in Eastern Washington are uncertain where their next meal will come from," Melissa said.

One woman's husband lost his construction job a year ago. She lost her job as a preschool teacher. With four girls, they were struggling to keep their home. They were finding creative ways to serve rice and beans.

Out of resources, they came to a mobile food bank, where they received fruit and vegetables, pasta, bread and more.

"We can't provide a job, but by
Continued on page 3

Day of Tolerance gives chance to uplift diversity

Seeking to build bridges on the Gonzaga University campus and with the community, Tracy Ellis-Ward, director of Gonzaga's Unity Multicultural Center, said the third annual celebration of International Day of Tolerance was held to honor and advance tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation between different cultures: "It's a powerful presence to stand together."

Leaders from the business, faith, education and government communities spoke on Nov. 16 as more than 200 participants formed a human chain by linking arms and standing together.

Councilman Mike Fagan read Spokane Mayor David Condon's proclamation of the 2012 Day of Tolerance, held in recognition that "this is a multicultural society" and that diversity and inclusion "mean a quality of life."

Spokane Councilwoman Amber Waldref said she supports honoring diverse individuals "in our midst and in our neighborhoods," because they often "experience oppression, bias and injustice."

She said the gathering was not only a symbolic way to express solidarity but also a way for people to take action against hate.

Amber shared some statistics, including that 1.7 million young people are homeless, that 97 percent of rapists never go to jail, that 20 percent of hate crimes are based on religion, that half of Americans live in poverty, that Native American women are the most often raped and abused, that Hispanic people face discrimination in housing and that one in 10 drops out of school.

Continued on page 3

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WCC welcomes appointment of Archbishop

Bishop Justin Welby, bishop of Durham in the Church of England, has received congratulations and the promise of prayers and cooperation from the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) following an announcement on Nov. 9 that he is to become the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is primate of the Church of England and a founding member church of the WCC. He also plays a leading role in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Welby will take up these responsibilities following the departure of Archbishop Rowan Williams next month. Williams has accepted an academic appointment at Cambridge University.

The Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary, described Welby as "someone profoundly committed to being a leader of the church for both the present and the future."

16 Days of Activism to end violence against women

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is participating in "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" through reflections, prayers and action towards overcoming violence against women.

To put an end to violence against women at the core of defending women's human rights, the 16 Days of Activism from Nov. 25 through Dec. 10 cover the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day on Nov. 29, World AIDS Day on Dec. 1 and International Human Rights Day on Dec. 10.

As part of the 16 Days of Activism, the WCC's Women in Church and Society program has launched a resource kit on the WCC website to engage churches and civil society groups from around the world. The resources were developed in collaboration with the World YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) and the World Student Christian Federation. Online materials include Bible studies, theological reflections, videos, links, prayers and ideas for activities for churches and individuals.

"It is a time for raising awareness in preparation for a paradigm shift away from the denial of women's human rights," said Fulata Lusungu Moyo, WCC program executive for Women in Church and Society.

The 16 Days of Activism focus on sexual and domestic violence against women, sexism in contexts of caste, class and race, human trafficking, as well as initiatives towards transformative masculinities aimed at addressing violence against women.

Faith groups fight small arms in Africa

"The fight against proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) is critical for peace and security in Africa," said Peter Omurangi Otim, head of the Peace and Security department of the African Union (AU) at a World Council of Churches (WCC) consultation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, held in November.

He stressed that partnership with faith-based organizations is essential to address illicit proliferation of weapons and the devastating impact on peace, security and stability in African countries related to drug trafficking, terrorism, transnational organized crime, mercenary activities, looting, as well as domestic violence."

Faith leaders warn Congress, Administration

Faith leaders from 16 states joined heads of national religious organizations to stop deep cuts to programs that help the most vulnerable, telling Congress, "Don't push the poor off the fiscal cliff."

On Nov. 29 at the Bread for the World office building in Washington, D.C., leaders of Christian, Jewish and Muslim organizations spoke on behalf of people living in poverty in the United States and abroad, those who did the least to create the country's deficit problems, but may suffer the most because of them.

Several national campaigns raise the moral principle of protecting the poor and vulnerable in federal budget debates, and to "speak the truth" to lawmakers that the deficit is the result of inadequate revenue, unnecessary military spending and a recession that has pushed even more people into poverty.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Legislative Conference presents overview

The 2013 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference program from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 2, at the Cathedral of St. John, 27 E. 12th, will address "Money: Grace and Justice."

The program begins at 9 a.m., with six issue information sessions related to priorities of the Faith Action Network. They

are wage theft, criminal justice reform, revenue, immigration, environment and human services. Those gatherings will be followed by reflection sessions with area faith leaders.

There will then be three workshops on tools to help congregations engage in advocacy—social justice action tools, missional

church tools and action networking tools.

After lunch, there will be a speaker, legislative briefing and opportunity for networking.

Organizers for the event include The Fig Tree and the Faith Action Network of Washington.

For information, call 535-4112 or 206-625-9790.

Faith Action Network honors advocates

Pacific Northwest United Methodist Bishop Grant Hagiya will present the Faith Action Network's Lifetime Justice Award to Alice Woldt at the 2012 awards dinner, benefit and celebration at 6 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 8, at Temple De Hirsch Sinai, 1511 E. Pike St., in Seattle.

Faith leaders and advocates will celebrate the state network's work to build a just, compassionate and sustainable world.

Father Michael Ryan, pastor of St. James Cathedral, and the Honorable Ron Sims, former deputy

secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and former King County executive, will be on the program.

Alice served as co-director of the Faith Action Network with Paul Benz after the Washington Association of Churches, which she served as transitional director for several years, merged with the Lutheran Public Policy Office. Alice also gave leadership to advocacy work with the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

The Faith Action Network will also present its Interfaith Award

to the Gurudwara Singh Sabha in Renton for the Sikh candlelight vigil held in August after the mass shooting of Sikhs in Wisconsin.

The FAN will also recognize the Vancouver United Church of Christ with an Advocating Congregation Award for organizing a Marriage Equality March last February from Vancouver, Wash., to Olympia during the 2012 session.

Rabbi Daniel Weiner will offer a welcome and opening prayer.

For information, call 206-625-9790 or visit www.fanwa.org.

Consortium schedules its annual meeting

The Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium's 2012 Annual Meeting is from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 12, in the SNAP Administration Building at 3102 W. Fort Wright Dr.

Jonathan Mallahan, community and neighborhood services direc-

tor, and Jerrie Allard, director of community housing and human services, both of the City of Spokane, will speak on "Together Is Better: Merging Housing and Social Services Departments."

Rachael Meyers, executive director of the Washington Low

Income Housing Alliance, will speak about her agency's 2013 state legislative agenda.

Along with business, the SLIHC will celebrate its 2012 accomplishments.

For information, call 325-3235 or email cindy@slihc.org.

Ministers Fellowship Union plans services

The Ministers Fellowship Union is hosting a Candlelight Christmas Eve Service from 7 to 9 p.m., Monday, Dec. 24, at New Hope Baptist Church, 409 S. Greene. The Rev. A.S. Rhodes of Mt. Olive Baptist will give the message.

It will also hold a Watch Night Service at 7 p.m., Monday, Dec.

31, at 7 p.m., at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, 645 S. Richard Allen Ct.

The Ministers Fellowship Union is an interdenominational forum for pastors in area communities to engage in fellowship, mutual support, teaching, training and Christian service. Its members seek to build racial, gender

and multid denominational unity.

Its president is the Rev. Jimmie Pierce of Unspeakable Joy Christian Fellowship and its vice president is the Rev. Lonnie Mitchell of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

For information, call 535-1336 or email spokaneministersfellowship@gmail.com.

Cheney Outreach gathers gifts for children

Cheney Outreach Center is collecting gifts and funds for Christmas gifts for children. The deadline is Dec. 19.

Gifts or checks may go to the center at 616 Third St.

There are also collection boxes at EWU, local businesses, Cheney Medical Center, Cheney Dental Center, the United Methodist

Church, United Church of Christ, St. Paul's Episcopal and Emanuel Lutheran.

For information, call 235-8900.

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Freda Gandy - director Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center

Monday, January 21

Annual Unity March

10 a.m. Old Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

Community Resource Fair, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

1st & 2nd Floors, Riverpark Square, 808 W. Main Ave.

Children's Activity Fair, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

2nd Floor, STA Bus Plaza, 701 W. Riverside Ave.

Questions? Call 509-455-8722
www.mlksokane.org

Students and speakers share statistics that reveal inequities from intolerance

Continued from page 1

Spokane Police Chief Frank Straub said it was appropriate to mark the Day of Tolerance the day after the sentencing of a member of the police department, whose actions took the life of someone who represented many communities of disadvantaged people.

"We are to serve people in the community, regardless of skin color, religion, language or opinion," he said.

Gonzaga students then read more statistics about unemployment, drop outs, domestic violence, homelessness, hunger, disability, lack of clean water, human trafficking, slavery, forced labor, disease, unequal income, environmental hazards on reservations, access to health care, literacy, childhood deaths and the lack of prenatal care.

These facts, said Tracy, indicate that people, based on racial, cultural, religious, gender, sexual orientation and other differences,



More than 200 lined the sidewalk on the Gonzaga University campus.

experience injustices and inequities in communities, states and internationally.

Mike Herzog, Gonzaga's chief of staff, thanked those gathered to support the civic virtue of tolerance as part of Gonzaga's 125th anniversary and 100th anniversary of the Law School.

"Intolerance seems to be the oldest tradition and there seems

to be little progress in respecting and caring for all," he said. "The U.S. Constitution guaranteed rights for all, but excluded slaves and women. We have a racist heritage, unequal compensation for women and bias based on sexual orientation. The first class at Gonzaga had no Native Americans or women."

He quoted Alexander Solzenit-

zen, who said intolerance is the first sign of inadequate education.

"We must have tolerance at a Catholic Jesuit University. Ignatius asks us to see God in all things, and that includes in all human beings. Our institution, community, nation and world have made progress, but we have more to do to be a tolerant world," Mike said.

"There's a difference between tolerance and acceptance and trust," he continued. "We need to pledge to move beyond tolerance to acceptance so we can make choices and act out of our true and best selves. Let us do the hard work to transform the system from intolerance to acceptance."

For information, call 313-5836.

Hungry people educated, underemployed

Continued from page 1

putting food on the table for their families, we can help them free up their meager cash resources to cover their bills," Melissa said.

The people facing hunger today, she said, are more likely to be educated, older, have a home, and have one or two jobs but be underemployed.

"They look like you, or you or you," she said, pointing to people in the congregation.

"Hunger deprives children of more than food. It's hard for children to learn when they are hungry," Melissa said.

She added that teens who are hungry may make choices that will undermine them in the future. Parents lose dignity and feel hopeless that they are unable to provide for their children. Children feel a profound insecurity that may lead to mental health issues in the future.

In the face of those difficulties, Second Harvest has been able to provide more food and is on track to provide 22 million pounds of food in 2012.

It is partnering with Washington State University to educate thousands of clients about healthy food choices on a shoestring and the benefits of eating healthful food, and to connect with other resources to meet their needs so they have a future.

"For every \$1 you donate, we can provide five meals for hungry



Melissa Cloninger said \$1 can provide five meals.

people," Melissa said. "The gift of food is a gift of hope, letting people know they are not alone in their struggle and that tomorrow will be better. It is an investment in the future of our community and in the indomitability of the human spirit."

In a telephone interview, Rod Wieber, chief resource officer, said he is finding that some people seeking help now say that they used to be donors and volunteers.

"It's tough all over," he said. "The news says the economy is rebounding, but it's hard to see those signs."

Stories of clients and informa-

tion about ways to give are available at www.2-harvest.org.

For information, call 534-6678.

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Windfall conveys caring for neighborhood

Related stories are on pages 1 and 6

Lena Lopez Schindler celebrates that social networks for The Windfall Thrift Store in the South Perry Neighborhood are close and personal.

"In our society, people are often unaware of who lives next door, but Spokane still remembers people being good neighbors and helping each other. People of faith still care," Lena affirmed.

Despite ups and downs over the years, The Windfall, like its name, "makes something sweet out of the things the wind blows our way," she finds.

The word "windfall," which means unexpected good fortune, originally described fruit that the wind knocked off a tree. The bruised windfall fruit was given away or sold at a discount. Penny-wise homemakers bought boxes of it to make jams and jellies.

One employee and 20 volunteers run the store, which draws 15 to 20 people a day to shop for bargains. Students, neighbors, immigrants, faithful customers who moved from the neighborhood and other thrift shops come.

The store took over the role of doing rummage sales, which for years were a way the Cathedral of St. John's Service League raised funds for the cathedral, community and mission.

As president of the Service League this year, Lena, who has three part-time jobs, is responsible for administrative tasks and emergencies. She uses her community connections to promote it.

Like some of the volunteers, she helps a few hours one day a month. Other volunteers give many hours each week to keep the store going.

In the recent economic downturn, The Windfall has struggled with more demand for clothing just as people are unable to give as much in clothing donations.

"The volunteer-employee ratio has waxed and waned over the years," she said. "A few years ago, we thought we might go out of business, but increasing volunteer time and weatherizing the building—including installing new double-paned windows at the front in October—has kept the store going.

"Volunteers offer their skills—as cashiers, sorting and preparing clothes in the back room, hanging them on racks or folding them on tables," Lena said. "Some do plumbing. Others clean and dust."

The volunteers are from the cathedral, St. Steven's and St. David's Episcopal in Spokane, and St. Mark's Episcopal in Ritzville.

The Windfall can always use more volunteers, including some-

one to handle EBay sales.

The store uses volunteer staff only from Tuesday to Thursday. Volunteer and paid staff run it Friday and Saturday. It is open from 1 to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Friday, and 1 to 5 p.m., Saturday.

The Windfall continually needs gently used clothing, especially men's clothing. Sometimes there is plenty of children's clothing, and sometimes they need more.

"We had nine bags last month, but now the glut of children's clothing is gone," she said.

The Windfall also accepts donations of kitchenware, household items, bedding, used books, furniture, knick knacks, DVDs and more. Some donations are items left after yard and estate sales. Donations come from the neighborhood and around the diocese.

Volunteers sort donations, clean them and set them out to sell, organizing clothing by sizes and hanging them on racks. Prices are on the racks.

The Windfall draws people by its low prices: \$1 for children's clothing, \$2.50 for women's blouses—in contrast to \$4 or \$6 at other thrift stores.

The average net profit after expenses each month is \$1,200. Of that, 10 percent is tithed to the cathedral and the rest goes to neighborhood charities.

Items that do not sell are given to other charities, such as Our Sisters Closet, the Community Warehouse, Union Gospel Mission, Our Place and Christ Kitchen.

Because the cathedral is the seat of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane with 42 congregations in Eastern Washington and North Idaho, it is concerned about problems of the region, Lena said.

The Service League, which has representatives from six guilds, also organizes an annual bazaar, coffee hours, funeral receptions and kitchen activities.

Lena told The Windfall's story. After more than 40 years of doing rummage sales to raise funds, Mrs. Richard Coombs, then wife of the dean of the cathedral, and Mrs. Finch Parsons, wife of a deacon, had the idea of a thrift store. Originally, it began to provide low-cost clothing, shoes, household items, books and other items to people in the South Perry and Grant neighborhood.

In April 1961, they opened the "Windmill" in the windmill store at 11th and South Perry. By 1966, they needed more space, and secured their location at 1024

S. Perry, renaming the store, The Windfall. By 1967, the Service League decided to stop doing rummage sales and put all their effort into The Windfall as its primary income source.

Lena said Bishop Edward Cross, who came in 1924, and his wife, Angela, started the Service League at All Saints Church at First and Jefferson. In 1925, he envisioned building a gothic cathedral overlooking Spokane.

The Service League was to raise money for the building and its appointments—furniture, pews, stained glass and vestments.

In 1931, the league and its 16 guilds raised \$14,300 despite the Depression—\$195,582 in today's dollars—in addition to funds it gave for food, clothing and relief.

It continued to raise funds for the cathedral, which many groups use as a community center.

In 2011, the guilds and Service League raised \$20,000, most of which went to local outreach.

Lena started to attend the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John before she went to college at the University of Puget Sound. She earned a bachelor's degree in art and art history in 1990. She earned a master's in fine arts in sculpture at the University of Montana in Missoula in 1995.

Being spiritual and inquisitive, she had a love-hate relationship with Christianity, investigating Buddhism and women's spirituality in the 1990s. Teaching art 12 years at Spokane Falls Community College, Whitworth University, Eastern Washington University and Fairchild Air Force Base, Lena re-entered the church.

As she read about Byzantine and Renaissance art to prepare for classes and as she took students to see art and architecture at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Temple Beth Shalom, the Cathedral of St. John and St. Marks Lutheran Church, she gained understanding of Christian faith.

After her mother died in 2003, Lena became more involved in the cathedral and active in a guild.

Anticipating funding cuts in higher education, she began looking for other employment opportunities.

She now works in estate and asset planning, and owns the Hungry Robin Garden, which sells heirloom fruits and vegetables and fine crafts at the South Perry and Spokane Farmers' Markets.

For information, call 534-3888 or email lopezandschindler@me.com.

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Human rights education entails changing people's hearts and minds

By Kaye Hult

After recent conversations Tom Carter had with some people who thought their minds were made up on issues, three people came away expressing that he had challenged them to think further. They emerged from the conversations with broadened perspectives.

"I never thought of it that way."

"I never thought you could give me a reason to think differently than I did a few minutes ago."

"I now see something I never thought existed."

As the new executive director of the Human Rights Education Institute (HREI), Tom believes the way to solve problems is through communication, and that requires education.

He came to the HREI with a mandate from the institute's board of directors to bring viability and sustainability to the organization.

So his job entails working with the board to raise funds, build community involvement and encourage visitors to stand up for human rights, tolerance and respect for everyone.

The Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations created the institute in 1998 as its educational arm. Since 2005, the HREI has operated out of a historic downtown building at 414 W. Mullan Rd.

Tom resonates with HREI's values: human rights, education, dignity, diversity, inclusivity and partnerships. He and the board envision programs to help educators, support students and broaden businesses by teaching tolerance, diversity and cultural awareness in this community and beyond.

The institute began with an endowment that has funded the work since its inception. Now, however, the board recognized the need for an executive director with business acumen, as well as a passion for human rights.

Tom brings more than 20 years of experience in education, business development and training. He earned a bachelor's in psychology from Gonzaga University in 1995 and a master's in teaching from Whitworth University in 2001. He was headmaster at a private boys school for more than 16 years. He also previously owned a small business.

He has put his business skills to work by cutting spending 72 percent, turning down heat in the winter and opening windows in the summer. He also finds grants to cover costs of the programs.



Tom Carter heads the Human Rights Education Institute

"Our goal is to raise money to keep the institute going," he said. "The HREI can no longer rely on the endowment. We're being efficient. We receive no state or federal funding. Our funds are from private donors or grants."

He has put together a successful golf tournament and other benefits that have raised about \$70,000, half of the annual budget.

Tom seeks to gain more community support through an annual fund drive, a monthly sustainability program and volunteer opportunities. To increase involvement, he set regular hours of operation. The HREI is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday.

"Cultural diversity, awareness, support and understanding start with community involvement and branch out from there," Tom said.

The HREI invites the community to four socials a year. The next one is at 6 p.m., Monday, Dec. 10, at the institute, featuring David Eubanks as speaker and presenting him with the Human Rights Education Award for his work as teacher at Lakes Middle School and organizer of the Mearly Multicultural Fair. The events include socializing and speakers.

The community also participates in exhibits the HREI hosts or creates, programs for children and events that celebrate diversity.

November events included African song and dance, tango lessons, an art show, the first Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil in North Idaho, and a Human Rights Book Club.

The HREI's two-year calendar has four six-month quarters.

The past two years, its programs focused on Mahatma Gandhi's Seven Social Sins under the theme "Peace Lives Here."

In January, the theme shifts to Native Americans and Africans.

Programs include human rights education for children in K-12 school programs, using a curriculum the HREI offers. It also hosts a Martin Luther King Jr. Children's Week Program.

For middle school and high school students, its Young Advocates for Human Rights program offers speakers, field trips and community service.

The HREI provides global diversity training to businesses, teachers, schools, colleges and the wider community.

Tom's passion for human rights began in his childhood.

"I've seen it as an issue ever since I was a child," he reflected. "I grew up in a multicultural family. My mother is Hispanic. We lived in the Oakland, Calif., area, which was culturally diverse. I saw people's issues with diversity, but I never understood them."

"In my family, my father was bigoted. He regularly offered racial slurs," said Tom, who chose emulate his grandfather, Salvador Lopez Leiva. "He worked for Chrysler, starting out working as a groundskeeper and working up to be vice president, despite being a Spanish immigrant."

From him, Tom learned the work ethic, doing things right and treating people well.

When he was eight, he moved to Spokane. Since then, the Northwest has been his home. While serving in the Marines, he

lived in South Korea. He also spent time in Central America, Japan, Jamaica, Canada and Hawaii after he left the service. Tom and a friend worked with aborigines in the Australian Outback in 2005.

Through these experiences, he learned to see each person as an individual. He invites those with whom he interacts to do the same.

Tom also lives his convictions through involvement with St. Mary's Catholic Church in Spokane Valley, serving on the Catholic Diocese of Spokane executive board, participating on advisory boards of the Disability Action Center in Coeur d'Alene and *Family Magazine*, and mentoring youth to set goals.

He wants to help "people see people as people," not as labels—Mormon, Latino, black, Joe the plumber, Sikh, Hindu or CEO—but simply as individuals.

"Interaction with people educates us. Experience educates. I've learned much from people who don't have formal education, but have other kinds of wisdom," Tom said.

"To close off and not communicate with others allows minds to stagnate about what is reality and what is not reality," he said.

"I want people to change themselves through awareness, information and choices," he said.

For information, call 208-292-2359 or visit www.hrei.org.

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Commitment to neighborhood leads to interaction with many cultures

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Because of Spencer Grainger's commitment to serve his neighborhood, the Liberty Park/Grant School area of Spokane, he interacts daily with children whose families come from Burma, Vietnam, Sudan, Eritrea, Kenya and Iraq.

The Liberty Park Child Development Center, where he is program and development director, is situated in the Liberty Park Apartments, which provide subsidized, temporary housing at 1417 E. Hartson. Many people who live there and elsewhere in the neighborhood are refugees.

Along the edge of the reception desk in the center's office are greetings in the 13 languages children there speak, an example of the cross-cultural communication that occurs there.

The four-year-olds whose families come from around the world pick up English readily. They are at about the same language development level as native English speaking neighborhood four-year-olds, Spencer said.

The center's 35 pre-kindergarteners, its up to 30 before- and after-school children, and the children in its summer program include African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and children of other races. Their demographics match Grant Elementary School's ratio of 50 percent white and 50 percent from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

While most of the children are from the neighborhood, some come from other areas of the city.

Despite starting 30 years ago to provide day care for poor families, the Liberty Park Child Development Center now focuses "on investing in the community to prepare the next generation of leaders for our community, our city and our world," said Spencer.

Believing that any of the children from economically challenged households could become a mayor or the President, he said the center's role is more than just to watch children until their parents pick them up.

Teachers expect the children will be "leaders in a changing world," so they guide the children to have a voice in what their classrooms will be like.

To express that vision, the center changed its logo from three children of diverse races to three flowers, each with five multi-colored petals shaped like hands to represent growing children and community, Spencer said.

The pre-kindergarten classroom is like the natural world with a tree and wildlife, a solar system hung from the 20-foot tall ceiling and a



Spencer Grainger pursues partnerships to improve its services to children.

view overlooking the city.

Spencer began in July as one of three administrative staff supporting the work of two teachers in the state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and two teachers in the before- and after-school Champions Program.

The ECEAP program, which is for four-year-olds, also provides families with education, health, social services, nutrition education and parent events.

Spencer, who grew up in Spokane and has lived in the neighborhood for 10 years, said the before- and after-school programs mentor children in life skills, tutor them and help them with homework, so they have time with their families when they go home.

The life skills include learning to resolve conflicts in productive ways and to resist peer pressure to abuse drugs. They also include Christian education.

In the summer program, teachers take the children out of the building every day to museums, parks, theaters, farms, science centers, swimming pools, splash pads and vacation Bible schools. They go on walks and learn to use public transportation. They play games and create arts-and-crafts projects.

"We give children skills and connect them to the city so they will want to stay here and make it better," said Spencer, who also works as adjunct faculty at Whitworth University, teaching and mentoring students in administrative leadership.

After earning a master's degree in public administration from Eastern Washington University in 2008, he began working as the director of Pathways to Progress and later as interim executive director at Emmanuel Family Life Center when it opened in 2009.

Spencer made a commitment to attend a church within walking distance from his home, so he and his family attended Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. He has also attended other churches in the South Perry neighborhood to help connect those churches to the surrounding neighborhood.

When he and his wife Stacie first married, they lived near the Cathedral of St. John and attended there.

Having grown up in non-denominational churches, it was a shift when he became part of the Episcopal cathedral, which overlooks and is an integral part of Spokane.

He found the sound of the cathedral's carillon a reminder to the community of its presence. In contrast to the concept of a church focusing on building community inside its walls, he found the cathedral has a positive impact on the community around it.

"I'm committed to make a connection between the church and the surrounding community," Spencer said, "as part of my understanding of the great commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

"It's not always easy to love our neighbors, to connect with people along the way as the Good Samaritan did. My neighbors may be broken and frayed.

"My neighbors are more than the people I go to church with," he said. "I love the people who live in the spot where I live. We are to be Christians in our community as a practical response to Christ's calling. We are to love folks who are not in church and may be different."

"We try to be our neighborhood's response to Christ in a time when churches often do not

connect with their neighbors," he continued. "My interest in Liberty Park is in response to my call to serve neighbors. I have two children, and I am called to relate with neighbors so they will grow up in a healthy neighborhood. I want neighborhood children to grow up loving their neighborhood."

At Eastern Washington University, while managing a service-learning project and through the urban planning department at EWU, he began to consider the relationship of churches and their surrounding neighborhoods.

On a study abroad program in England in 2003, he learned of the evolution of British cities, such as Liverpool, which was almost bombed to nothing, losing half of the people, infrastructure and historic buildings.

"In England, I also looked at the importance of churches in the evolution of cities, including their road systems and land use. I considered the impact of the physical presence of churches and government as having a vital role in the development of community," he said.

Liberty Park Child Develop-

ment Center is an outreach of the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest with funding primarily from area Presbyterian churches, grants, individual donations and scholarships. It receives food reimbursements from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food program for child-care centers, and meals are cooked on site.

The ECEAP program is funded through the state of Washington. Christian education occurs only in the before- and after-school program.

The center seeks to be a neighborhood hub, partnering with nearby organizations to provide services.

It partners with First, Bethany, Hamblen Park, Manito and Whitworth Presbyterian churches in Spokane; Community Presbyterian in St. Maries, Idaho; Marcus Whitman Presbyterian in Des Moines, Wash.; and the Bethel B.A.S.I.C. Gospel Choir, the Tree of Sharing, Project Warm-Up and the nearby Windfall Thrift Store.

It also partners with the South Perry Business and Neighborhood Association, Liberty Park United Methodist Church, Emmaus Church, Bethel AME, and the Buddhist Temple for the South Perry Street Fair on the third Saturday of July.

Spencer said the center accepts volunteers to assist in the classrooms, on field trips, with reading, in the office and with maintenance.

For information, call 534-0957 or visit libertyparkkids.org.



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Developing relationships and being positive role model clicks with students

Mike Robinson never knows when, where or if what he conveys will click with someone he relates with as vice principal at Centennial Middle School, as an ordained elder-teacher at Holy Temple Church of God in Christ or as prison minister at Airway Heights Correction Center or Walla Walla Prison.

As he teaches people, he brings his life experiences, his caring and his desire to build relationships. Often he shares just by being present in people's lives and by modeling a positive way of living everyday life.

Now in his second year as vice principal at Centennial Middle School in the West Valley School District, Mike incorporates understanding of people gained from his experiences in ministry and in military service, turning discipline into teachable moments.

He's able to do that because he has relationships with the students. He greets them at the door each day as they come in, sees them in the halls, and attends football and baseball games. He's a presence in students' lives. He also connects with the community and meets parents at games and school conferences.

As a chief petty officer in the Navy, he served as a Search and Rescue Swimmer, jumping into water from helicopters to rescue people. His deployments were in Italy, Spain, Australia, Singapore and Asia, as well as the United States. He joined the Church of God in Christ in 1986 while based in San Diego.

Before retiring from the Navy in 1995, he earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts in 1992 from St. Mary's College in Maryland. He also studied business and economics for two years.

After leaving the service, he worked briefly in banking, with Blockbuster and as night security officer for Microsoft.

At City University in Tacoma, he earned a master's in K-8 education in 1998. During that time, he qualified and was ordained as an elder in the Church of God in Christ in 1997.

He taught math for three years to seventh to ninth graders in the Bethel School District, coached varsity girls' basketball for four years at Wilson High School in Tacoma, was vice principal at Lakota Middle School in Federal Way and was principal for three years at Gladrone Middle School in Tacoma.

The school reorganized because of funding cuts, letting go all administrative staff and rehiring only some. His year unemployed was "a shocker" for him, "but God



Mike Robinson establishes relationships and models the kind of attitude adjustments he seeks to instill in students.

met all of our needs."

He did substitute teaching for a year before moving to Spokane Valley.

At Centennial Middle School, Mike said his role is to connect with the 580 students, faculty, staff and surrounding community. He is part of the team providing for the academic and social needs of students as they progress through sixth, seventh and eighth grades, preparing to transition into high school.

"The vice principal at a middle school handles discipline," he said. "I can use it as an opportunity to teach the students, because I have a relationship with them."

"They know that when they come to see Mr. Robinson there are consequences, but they also know I care about them," he said. "I want to help them learn and grow from their mistakes. I challenge them to be truthful.

"Students want to have rules and expectations, so we create a positive culture for students to be accountable," he said.

As a lifelong learner, Mike hopes to instill that passion in others.

"I want to continue to learn to be better. If people call things to my attention, I try to improve myself so I can be the best at what I do," he said.

He wants other people to share that attitude so they can make ad-

justments that improve their lives.

Mike thinks middle-school age is a time to make a positive impact to mold children and youth for a lifetime. Many carry baggage, coming from broken homes, having a parent incarcerated or worrying where the next meal will come from. Many of the students are on free or reduced-price lunches.

"The stories of some pull on the heartstrings, because much of their situation is no fault of their own," Mike said.

"This school is a place where their life barriers do not matter. We give students a sense of home, family and support for learning," he said.

"In my years in education, I have found young people resilient. Giving them the right nurturing and environment, they will flourish," Mike said. "I see students mature even in one year. I want to help the students grow academically, socially and emotionally."

While he doesn't talk about spiritual issues at school, he can model his faith by being someone the students want to emulate.

"I try to display consistent behavior every day," he said. "It's one thing to talk a good game about one's faith, but another thing just to live it by caring for people."

Many students know he's also a minister. Some saw him in that role when he spoke at Millwood Presbyterian Church.

An insight from his experience in the Navy was the way people on the flight deck of a ship worked together, using their different talents and responsibilities.

He believes teamwork like that is also key in education and in ministry.

During their years in the Tacoma area, Mike and his wife Joan began doing prison ministry at the state prison in Walla Walla. In addition, he leads a twice-a-month interactive Bible study for 50 inmates at Airway Heights Correction Facility.

When he was an angry third grader growing up in Seattle with his mother, brother and sister, some may have thought he was headed to jail. His father had left when he was six months old. In the fourth grade, however, some-

one cared and he began going to church with his mother's friend.

"I gave my life to the Lord and spent my teen years in the youth group," Mike said. "So now I go to jail to minister, I serve the church by teaching children and adults, leading workshops and seminars, and I relate with middle-school students to give them guidance."

With students and prisoners, he knows the importance of people having both opportunities and discipline.

Mending relationships is also key in each setting.

In prisons, he meets with people who made mistakes and need someone to reach out to share the Gospel without judging them for what they have done.

"Recognizing that we are all sinners and have fallen short," Mike said. "I minister to them, and they minister to me."

At Airway Heights, prisoners discuss Scriptures during multi-racial services Mike leads.

"They want to learn and improve their lives," he said, aware that some may come just to be out of their cells. "When they come, however, they hear the Word of God, which does not leave people in a void. My role is to teach the Word and to pray for people. I have no expectation of instantly healing people.

"It's awesome to realize that God made each of us to fulfill God's purposes. We are each one of a kind," he said.

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The Oak Tree gathers people interested in justice and open to faith ties

Named for the Celtic understanding of an oak tree as a door between physical and spiritual realms, and with its logo image of deep rootedness and branches reaching out into the world, The Oak Tree is a new approach to faith life that several West Central Spokane clergy and lay leaders have started.

However it's defined—movement, faith community, activists' gathering—it's designed to draw people concerned about social justice and reconnect them to an awareness that people of faith are engaged in transforming the world.

Participants emphasize that "how we live, what we do, how we treat people and what choices we make in this world are at the heart of 21st-century faith life," said the Rev. Deb Conklin, pastor of St. Paul's and Liberty Park United Methodist Churches.

She helps lead The Oak Tree along with the Rev. Liv Larson Andrews, pastor of Salem Lutheran Church; Lynda Maraby, lay missionary with Salem and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church; Matt Phillips, an attorney offering access to legal services at Salem, and Joel Williamson, whose "church" is The Oak Tree.

"The Oak Tree invites people to explore spirituality even though they may not go to traditional churches," said Deb. "It engages people in a faith-based community to live the social justice teachings of Jesus."

People come to study and work for social justice, to understand issues and processes so they can change what is broken. Sometimes it leads people to faith and sometimes it doesn't, Deb said.

In gathering, study, story-sharing and reflection, people become aware that systems create conditions that make people hungry and deprive them of basic necessities, creating widows and orphans.

Joel's story exemplifies what draws participants.

"I now realize Jesus was a systems thinker, attentive to people's needs and aware of where the power was and what leverage was needed to bring change to improve people's lives," he said.

Joel now believes a powerful faith community can transform the world, as well as individuals.

In the fourth generation of his family at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, which his great grandparents helped found, he went to Sunday school at St. Stephen's until he was about 10. Attending churches with friends in his junior high through college years, led him to think religion was about a checklist of what to believe.

"If you could check the boxes,



Joel Williamson finds niche with The Oak Tree.

good things would happen to you in this life and after. I couldn't believe 'the facts' listed, so I was 'left behind' with questions."

Joel, who graduated in 2005 from Eastern Washington University with a bachelor's in theater, went to Los Angeles. He spent four years doing lighting design with a touring theatre group. Its members wrote and performed a play about their experiences of racism as an African American, a Hispanic and a Filipino American.

He began to see how systems cause injustices that stir people to re-present the injustice to others through art to challenge them to see causes. He began to read about politics and economics.

"I had an 'aha' moment when I became aware that my family's story was linked to political and economic systems," Joel said.

He had thought his parents' rose-growing business and marriage had failed because they had not worked hard enough.

"I realized the business closed because conglomerates owned grocery stores that previously bought roses and other goods locally. Free-trade agreements with Central America and cheap transportation meant the stores could buy cheaper roses from thousands of miles away than from local growers," he said.

That injustice meant he would not be a rose grower.

"At that moment, I wanted to come home and reconnect with my family," he said. "I had blamed them rather than realizing how hard they had worked."

Back in Spokane, Joel began searching for ways to make the city a better place. Learning about the Spokane Alliance, he walked into the office in 2009 and said what they did sounded like what he wanted to do: to build power to change Spokane.

He wanted to be involved even though he was not a member of an organization that was a member.

Soon Joel was walking the South Perry neighborhood with Deb, going house to house to tell about SustainableWorks doing retrofits to reduce energy waste.

"I didn't think I had anything in common with pastors, but found that this pastor deeply cared about what I cared about," Joel said. "We shared the same values. She said they came from Christ and the Gospel. I thought the Gospel had nothing to do with 'this world.'"

"Pastors and people of faith of different denominations showed up at alliance meetings and shared how the story of faith connects to the things I'm concerned about here and now," he said.

Joel began to see that Jesus started a movement to develop leaders, change systems, bring jubilee, redistribute wealth and free slaves.

"Many reject faith because they don't know commitment to Jesus is about social justice, as well as salvation," said Deb.

Now Joel finds a spiritual connection that empowers him through the Oak Tree. Large-group monthly meetings are a chance for him to connect with

people, the stories that have shaped them and how their stories connect to the world.

Joel began volunteering with the Spokane Alliance and then worked for it. Now he works as legislative assistant with Spokane City Councilman Jon Snyder.

In today's culture, people like Joel might not respond to an invitation to be part of a traditional church, but would go to a seminar.

So since February, The Oak Tree has offered Thursday seminars, inviting people through Facebook and drawing some from Occupy Spokane, the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane and the participating churches.

Seminars meet from 5:30 to 7 p.m., Thursdays, followed by conversation at a pub or coffee house.

In February, about 20 began a six-week study of *Agenda for a New Economy* by David Korten. They meet in Salem Lutheran Church's fireside room.

After the study, a task force formed to research why the economy is broken and what can be done. Some are exploring developing an anaerobic digester to create alternative energy from methane to heat a greenhouse in the winter and produce compost for growing local food. Joel is coordinating that effort.

In the spring, Kris Christiansen, who is on the ministry team at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and is one of the founders, led a class that focused on GMOs (genetically modified organisms), as well as destructive agricultural and food production practices.

Out of that session, a group

began looking at community gardens, growing and selling local and organic food. They are negotiating to maintain some Department of Transportation land by growing community gardens.

Liv led the third seminar in May on "Spirituality: Bodies of Worth," on how media images about bodies affect self-images and relationships.

Its summer series showed social justice films at Liberty Park United Methodist Church.


A fall seminar studied worker owned co-ops and started research on creating an alternate economy with a worker-owned co-op in Spokane.

In December, Advent Sunday evening services at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church will use the service of evening prayers from Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center in the North Cascades.

In January, there will be a film series on environmental justice.

To nurture spiritual community by adopting weekly covenant discipleship groups, The Oak Tree also has groups of six to eight people who meet for self-reflection and mutual accountability in balancing 1) prayer and meditation, 2) public worship, 3) acts of charity and 4) social justice.

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Downtown church opens doors to homeless people for meals, ministry

By Deidre Jacobson

The City of Spokane has contracted with First Covenant Church at 212 S. Division to serve as a warming center, allowing homeless people to spend the night in its gym when the temperature drops to 17 degrees or lower.

Two other locations do that: Hope House for single women and Salvation Army for families. For three years, House of Charity was the warming center for single men, but turned down the contract this year, said Rob Bryceson, pastor of First Covenant.

City funds will pay people to work when the warming center is open. Union Gospel Mission will provide staff.

First Covenant has space to accommodate up to 95 men and will be available every night except Monday, when SNAP at 2nd and Wall will be open. The warming center is not required to have a place for the men to sleep. They may stretch out on the floor or sit through the night.

The church already serves homeless people, hosting about 150 people for meals, mostly men, on Sundays, except first Sundays. On cold, rainy Sundays there may be 200 guests. In addition, Union Gospel Mission also serves Friday evening meals at the church.

First Covenant calls its ministry to the homeless, "Street Wise!" It raises funds from donors to support meals, which cost \$2 each—about \$300 an evening. Outside groups help serve.

The church, which was established in 1888 when Washington was a territory, built on its present site in 1905. Swedish Lutheran immigrants started the national Evangelical Covenant Church in the late 1800s. In the early 1900s, First Covenant was a large, well-attended church. It built a new sanctuary in 1950.

For many years, the dwindling, aging downtown congregation has discussed closing.

When Rob arrived four years ago, returning to Spokane from California, only eight families were consistently involved.

"We need to minister to this neighborhood, or sell and move," he told the church. They wanted to sell and move.

The church, appraised at \$2 million in 2007, lost value and by 2009 was valued at \$1.3 million. When the property was on the market it received only one offer—for \$750,000.



Rob Bryceson shows the gym which will house the downtown warming shelter for men when temperatures drop to 17 degrees.

The congregation wanted to draw young families. Most of the neighbors, however, are homeless, prostitutes, drug addicts and downtown mentally ill.

In September 2009, his wife, Tonia, baked a pan of cornbread and made a pot of chili. Rob went through the alleys and streets, inviting people to a free dinner and to watch football. The first night, 35 came. Soon, 150 came.

The rules were to be polite, not ask for money, and not come high or drunk. The last rule didn't work, but the first two remain.

Of the original congregation, just 10 remain but, on average, 70 attend worship. Of them, 40 are homeless or downtown dwellers. Some new members, drawn by the mission and worship, have joined the congregation. Not everyone attending is sober.

They say:

- "Rob hears stories of the homeless."
- "This is the first time in 30 years I've been in a church."
- "I can't come to church, because I cry too much."

"People have been over-preached to," Rob said. "Some are jaded against the Gospel."

So he asks them to share their stories, and they keep coming.

In February 2011, the church ran out of money as payments from selling the parsonage ended.

Rob met with national denomination leaders and reported that by April the church would close. Then a homeless person left the church a \$10,000 gift that would keep it open a few more months. By then, the denomination de-

ecided to support the church's work for three years with a \$200,000 building equity loan that has helped fix the building and support the ministry.

When that's gone, he said, "faith kicks in." In a poor church, the offering may be to clean up cigarette butts outside or mop the floor, but that doesn't pay the bills.

"The mission is sometimes frustrating and lonely," Rob said. "We are serving a third-world church in Spokane."

His approach is to love people until they ask him why. Then he shares his experience of Christ.

A friend's drowning during his freshman year of high school propelled Rob to search for God. He attended several churches.

After he graduated from

Cheney High School, he earned a bachelor's degree in history and education at Eastern Washington University.

At Calvary Chapel in Spokane in the mid-1980s, he began leading contemporary worship, which led him into youth ministry, playing base guitar, singing and writing Christian music. Rob also worked at Hume Lake Christian Camp, where he performed for 10,000 youth each summer.

Unable to answer some questions young people asked, Rob went to Multnomah Biblical Seminary in Portland, Ore., and then earned a master of divinity from Western Seminary in San Jose. He was ordained in the Baptist General Conference.

He was teaching pastor at a San Francisco Bay area mega church. In 2000, he switched to the Evangelical Covenant Church, which he found more in harmony with his beliefs, especially on social justice. He served a church in

Pleasanton, Calif., then led contemporary worship at a Presbyterian church for four years.

In 2008, Rob moved his family to Spokane, looking for a new beginning. They stayed rent-free in a friend's rental home. His wife looked for work and suggested he take his resume to churches.

He took it to First Covenant, which hired him as associate pastor to bring in young people. He worked nine months with the senior pastor, Lawrence Hudson, and became senior pastor when Lawrence left.

For information, call 747-2818 or email rob@fccspokane.org.

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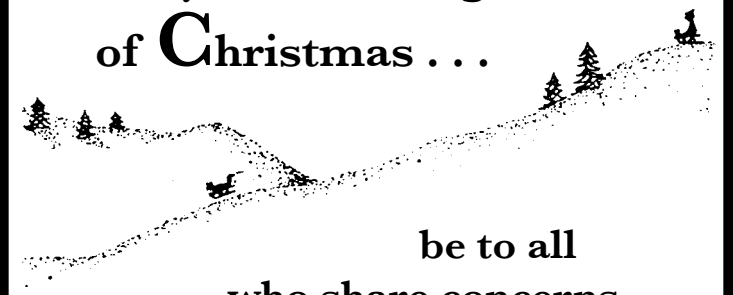
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We need media that enhance and enrich our culture and society

Thanks to The Spokesman-Review for its role in the Christmas Fund. Thanks to KXLY for its Coats for Kids Drive and Extreme Makeover of homes and remodeling Mid-City Concerns. Thanks to KREM for its Tom's Turkey Drive, Rachel's Challenge and the Tree of Sharing. Thanks to KHQ for its Success by Six reading program. Thanks to KSPS and KPBX for ongoing thoughtful programming to stimulate our minds and spirits.

A recent online photo and story of a New York police officer buying shoes for a barefoot homeless man in November also exemplifies how everyone can be part of newsgathering to change mindsets.

Media can do much to uplift people, calling our attention to the struggles, injustices and disasters people face, providing us the information we need to respond, and sharing stories of people who do respond. Media attention can help raise funds, recruit

volunteers and spread ideas of ways people are engaged in building caring community.

We do have our better sides. While they often seem overshadowed by pressures of self interest so often reported, that does not undo the many efforts on behalf of the community's and world's wellbeing.

What if every day—to present a realistic balance the horrible things that do happen—media shared stories that feed hope, generosity, possibility, opportunities and caring? I don't mean just feel-good stuff, but solid stories that show how people and groups are role models creating a gentler, cooperative, caring culture.

A new Aryan group forms in North Idaho. Yes, we need to know about it, but do we dwell on it, re-creating the bad reputation of the Inland Northwest. Yes, the unusual is news, but so is information on the many efforts for human rights. Coverage of a white supremacist can be balanced

with coverage of the region's many expressions celebrating diversity and advocating for human rights.

In our age of social networks, digital communication and technological innovations, we need tools to understand that reality is more than our bad sides. We need to know how we can foster reconciliation and change people's minds about conflicts.

As social media proliferate, media conglomerates still consolidate and limit what voices we hear, images we see, art we appreciate, information we access, beliefs we hold and items we consume.

By limiting access to stories of positive efforts, conglomerates confine us to a consumer culture. They feed the frenzy of people lining up outside and rushing into stores for Black Friday bargains. Then, we take the temperature of our economic revival as if it's based on sales that day.

A holy day is overshadowed. The gen-

erosity, mystery, hope and caring of the season are sidetracked by Xmas.

Without communication—in the beginning was the Word—we do not have life. In today's noisy, cluttered lives, people may seem too busy to open their lives to each other, but that's not the case.

Communication can create exclusion *and* inclusion, misunderstanding *and* understanding. People need stories that build respect across cultural, economic, political and religious stereotypes and simplistic talking points that defy common sense.

Given today's hunger, homelessness and underemployment crises, we need stories that move us beyond the worn-out messages that serve those already in power.

What can media do to help open our eyes? We hope the example we offer with The Fig Tree can be a model to inspire other media to open our eyes, minds and hearts.

Mary Stamp - Editor

Loss of identity sets up a sense of solidarity with the world's displaced

Theft of my identity in an unexpected way—putting my name and address on checks from a bank I don't use and cashing them at chain stores—has been disconcerting, because I have to follow up when notices come to my home and bill collectors want to collect.

Because stores have accepted the checks without question, I repeatedly have to fill out affidavits that the checks are not mine. Fortunately a police detective working on bad check cases saw surveillance tapes that included people writing some of these checks. He recognized some of the people, so I hope I'll soon see the end of this time-consuming and distracting experience.

In my feeling vulnerable and afraid, wondering what will happen next, losing control over some aspects of my life and even the ability to concentrate on anything else, I have stretched back into my identity and

identified with the many displaced people who lose their identities.

I think of refugees fleeing their homes and homelands because of political and economic instability and injustice, because of warfare obliterating their neighborhoods, or because they spoke out to challenge systems that oppress.

I think of displaced workers whose jobs and co-workers' lives went up in flames because of unsafe working conditions and their inability to flee a burning sweatshop where they earned a pittance making clothing sold cheaply in U.S. chains.

I think of displaced workers in our country and around the world who are educated but lost their careers and are now underemployed, balancing two or more under-paying part-time jobs to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

I think of people displaced by Hurri-

cane Sandy in the Northeast United States coastal areas and the Caribbean, and of the people displaced by the many unusual and record-breaking storms in 2012.

I think of professionals displaced because their educations are now no longer a ticket to a career of assured income and benefits, and whose long-term investments, pensions, Social Security and Medicare are being undermined.

I think of the people displaced by austerity measures around the world—tightening the belts of those already squeezed and sacrificing in the recession/depression created by those who can't imagine sharing their blessings with the country whose laws they manipulated for their personal gain.

I take time to remember and identify with those who have actually lost their identities. I know that in spite of my periodic feelings of helplessness in the mess I face, I am not

helpless. Family and police are helping me bring those who are misrepresenting my name and address to justice.

Our role in this season of giving, gratitude, hope and sharing is to be faithful, to care and to be among those who welcome strangers who have lost their homes, to feed hungry people who are working hard, to respect competent people who have lost their jobs, to reach out to provide long-term assistance through our faith group channels to those displaced by storms, to be in solidarity with those who have lost their assurance of security, and to challenge those for whom more than enough is still not enough.

Through the community of faith, we keep our eyes opened to the broader picture of the world, rather than becoming lost in our losses.

Nancy Minard - Editorial Team

Letter to the Editor

Sounding Board

Newsletter Excerpts

The Christian year begins with the season of Advent. It is a time of waiting for Jesus to arrive. In the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah, we see the anticipation and hope God's people had waiting for the Messiah, but when he actually came, many didn't recognize him.

They didn't think the Messiah would be born anywhere but in Jerusalem, the center of religious and political power, even though there were plenty of hints in their Scriptures that he would be born in Bethlehem. King Herod, who had read the hints and knew where Jesus was, tried to get others to bring Jesus to him, though not to worship him as he said, but to do away with a potential threat to his own power.

Ultimately, who did find Jesus? It wasn't the ones who stayed in their comfortable homes. It wasn't scribes or priests—the professionally religious.

It wasn't the mighty, ensconced in places of power. It was shepherds, ready for a Savior. It was those wise enough to read the signs and follow them, who traveled far and came to a place marked not by power but by poverty.

This Advent could be for us a turning point in how we wait for Jesus. I suspect that if we just stay in our comfortable churches, enjoying the benefits of membership, we may miss him. We could start by reading the Gospels, so that we know Jesus well enough to recognize him when we see him. We could see the signs and begin a journey, knowing that others won't bring Jesus to us, especially if our design is not to worship him but to control him.

We could understand that church is not a steeple, not a building, but a people on a mission, and that we find Jesus when

we serve others in his name. Advent is no absurdist play, ending in nothingness, but a flat out search for the One who brings meaning and hope to life. This year, let's be among those wise ones who commit themselves to the God quest. We can seek and find Jesus.

Dale Cockrum - United Methodist Inland District Superintendent - Inland Steeples newsletter

I travel from one congregation to another and see how each congregation is an integral part of the Eastern Washington Idaho Synod. However I have discovered that many parishioners do not feel that way. Some feel that they are on the periphery while others don't even think about being part of the synod.

What do we mean by the synod? Is it the synod staff, synod council and cluster deans, the clusters, the congregations and other ministries including three campus and four outdoor ministries? Hopefully, all of the above.

The original Greek word "synod" means to walk alongside one another. There is great diversity in our church communities, yet we do ministry alongside each other in the Northwest.

We also share a Lutheran history, tradition, liturgy, culture and many values such as education, social justice and faith. We have developed relationships over time and some people have family and friends in other congregations within the synod.

We are a part of the body of Christ together and we can turn to each other for prayer, encouragement and resources. We have a network of support.

We need each other especially as some

congregations decline and others are born. Our fledgling ministries need our support as do our elderly congregations that want to exist for years to come but struggle to stay alive.

The Rev. Helga Jansons director for evangelical mission, Eastern Washington Idaho Synod - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

This is a busy time. Winter is upon us or soon will be. Daylight grows shorter; darkness lengthens. We shift our clocks back to gain a little more light in the morning. We begin to hunker down, we stay inside, we grow quieter, we search for warmth.

In the midst of this busy time, take a moment and breathe. We are constantly surrounded by God's Peace if we would but take a moment, if we would but pause a moment: Just to say, hello God, here I am!

Greg Skinner Country Homes Christian

"Shhhh..."

The days are shortening. Nighttime sneaks up on us, with darkness settling in by four in the afternoon. Cold wind invites us to bundle and stay inside. The earth is telling us: hibernate, hush, rest. Funny. Our cultural response to these seasonal cues is to do anything but hush. Instead, we rush. We bustle about, waking up early and staying up late to accomplish all we wish to achieve. Stores accommodate our resistance to nature, keeping unnatural hours of business. Chasing the promise of gaining an edge in profits, their parking lot lamps glare on through the night, never going off.

What is our response as people of faith?

Do we resist hibernation, moving along with the bustle and business? Or, do we give in to the urge to bundle up in blankets and not leave home? Or is there a third way?

Advent is a healthy third way. It responds to the earth's rhythms by receiving them as occasions for blessing. The nights lengthen and darkness deepens. So we thank God for making light and dark, and we light candles as we pray to the true Light, Jesus Christ. Chill and cold make us yearn for warmth, so we meet together over hot soup and good stories. The culture around us makes more and more noise, calling to us to join the frenzied throng. So we keep silence.

At least our tradition invites us to keep silence. Silence is difficult. So often we urge each other to speak up, sing out and be heard. That is good, but in order to rightly speak and sing of God we must take time to listen.

Advent features the stories of bold people like John the Baptist who not only speak up but even shout about the arrival of the kingdom of God. I wonder if, instead of listening to his prophetic voice, we drown out the call with endless buzzing and chatter.

Welcome to the season and discipline of Advent. Welcome to a holy path through seasonal challenges both earthly and manufactured. Knowing that Christ, our light and our salvation, is on the way, let us welcome these darker nights as a gift and sign that we are forever kept and held by God. At the end of these darker, quieter weeks, let us rejoice in the gift of God's incarnate presence in our midst singing "Silent night, holy night..."

The Rev. Liv Larson Andrews Salem Lutheran Newsletter

Christmas Bureau lifts people's spirits

Christmas Bureau donations makes its coordinator Judy Lee more aware of the meaning of Christmas beyond the materialistic emphasis of the season.

As special events coordinator with Catholic Charities Spokane, she knows that many people struggle through the year.

"It hits home at Christmas when those who struggle know others are going shopping for their families. It's a painful time of year for some," she said. "So the Christmas Bureau lifts people's spirits and gives them a bit of cheer and hope."

Along with receiving a book for children under 14, a toy for teens and children under 17 and food vouchers of \$15 for a single person and \$30 for a family, families coming to the Christmas Bureau find a festive atmosphere with entertainment and caring assistance from more than 100 volunteers a day.

The Christmas Bureau is open from 10 a.m., to 2:30 p.m., every day from Dec. 12 to 21, except Sundays, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center, 404 N. Havana. It's open to anyone who feels need of assistance and brings photo ID, verification of address, and verification of children's names, ages and addresses.

The 2012 Christmas Bureau is the 67th one. It's coordinated by

Catholic Charities Spokane, Volunteers of America of the Inland Northwest and The Spokesman-Review, which runs articles each day to stir interest and donations.

In her third year as Christmas Bureau coordinator, Judy is impressed how individuals and businesses in Spokane come together to help bring holiday cheer to people who are struggling.

"It's a time of year people need

an extra hug," said Judy, who is at the bureau every day it's open.

"That makes me more aware that it's not the material things that count at Christmas," she said. "My family is doing less in materialistic gifts and more for each other and the community. Instead of shopping on Black Friday, I donate to the Christmas Bureau."

For information, call 358-4254 or email jlee@ccspokane.org.

Calendar of Events

- Nov 30-Dec 16** • "The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge," Ignite! Theatre, 10814 E. Broadway, www.ignite-theatre.org
- Dec 3 +** • "Lasting Heritage," long-term exhibit opens on American Indian cultural objects, art work, historic photographs, Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. First Ave, 456-3931
- Dec 5** • **Inland NW Death Penalty Abolition Group**, 35 W. Main, 5:30 p.m., 838-7870
- "Spiritual Conversations with Spokane Baha'is," at Chairs Coffee, 113 W. Indiana, 5 p.m., www.spokanebahais.org
- Dec 6** • **Peace & Justice Action Committee**, 35 W. Main, 5:30 p.m., 838-7870
- Dec 7** • **First Fridays with the Bishop**, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr Rd., 11:15 a.m., 448-1224
- Dec 7-Feb 9** • "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Warriors," photographic portraits of Native Americans, Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. First, 456-3931, northwestmuseum.org
- Dec 7-9** • **Ignatian Weekend Retreat**, Fr. Armand Nigro, SJ, IHRC, 6910 S. Ben Burr Rd., 448-1224
- Dec 8** • "Waiting in Hope," Advent Retreat, Shonna Bartlett of the Ministry Institute, 405 E Sinto, 313-5765, bartletts@gonzaga.edu
- Dec 9** • **German-American Society** German Christmas Service with the Concordia Choir and the Rev. James Stern, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th Ave., 3 p.m., 928-2595
- Dec 10** • **Human Rights Education Institution Social**, featuring Dave Eubanks, 414 W. Mullan, Coeur d'Alene, 6 to 9 p.m., 208-292-2359, hrei.org
- **Release of Racial Justice Report Card**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, imoore@pjals.org
- Dec 11** • **Salvation Army Holiday Fundraising Luncheon**, Davenport Hotel Grand Pennington Ballroom, noon, 329-2732
- Dec 12** • **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference Planning**, 1414 W. Broadway, 9:30 a.m., 535-4112
- **Veterans for Peace**, 35 W. Main, 6:45 p.m., 838-7870
- **Spokane Police Accountability & Reform Committee**, 35 W. Main, 5:30 p.m., 838-7870
- **Spokane Low-Income Housing Consortium Annual Meeting**, SNAP Administration Building, 3193 W Fort Wright Dr., 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., 325-3235
- Dec 12, 13** • **Singing Nuns' Christmas Evermore Concert**, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 2 and 7:30 p.m., 462-4335, srmvianney@cmri.org
- Dec 12-21** • **Christmas Bureau**, Spokane County Fair and Expo Center, 404 N. Havana, 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 358-4254
- Dec 13, 27** • **Palestine-Israel Human Rights Committee**, 35 W. Main, 3 p.m., 838-7870
- Dec 15** • **St. Lucy's Candlelight Breakfast Benefit** for Shalom Ministries, Cathedral of St. John, 127 E. 12th Ave., 455-9019, shalomministries10@gmail.com
- Dec 17** • **NAACP meeting**, East Central Community Center, 500 S. Stone, 7 p.m.
- Dec 24** • **Ministers Fellowship Union** Candlelight Christmas Eve Service, New Hope Baptist Church, 409 S. Greene, 7 p.m. 535-1336
- Dec 28-30** • "Speak Lord," young adult discernment retreat, Fr. Jeff Core, IHRC, 6910 S. Ben Burr Rd., 448-1224
- Dec 31** • **Watch Night Service**, Ministers Fellowship Union, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, 645 S. Richard Allen Ct., 7 p.m., 534-3007
- **First Night Spokane**, multiple locations in downtown Spokane, 4 p.m. to midnight, 456-0580, www.firstnightspokane.org
- Jan 2** • **Fig Tree distribution**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 9 a.m.
- Jan 3** • **Fig Tree Board**, Emmanuel Family Life Center, 631 S. Richard Allen Ct., 1 p.m.

Catholic Cemeteries broadens its services

In October, the Catholic Cemeteries Board announced its new name will be Catholic Funeral & Cemetery Services of Spokane.

Jim Falkner, executive director, said the rebranding is an opportunity to improve and broaden its end-of-life services to include education on end-of-life decisions to planning funeral services.

Personnel help mourning families with decisions, weighing cremation or interment in a cemetery.

Jim estimates that the cremation rate in Spokane County is 75 percent, compared to 40.6 percent nationally. Cost and environmental concerns are common factors in the decision, he observed.

For information, call 467-5496.



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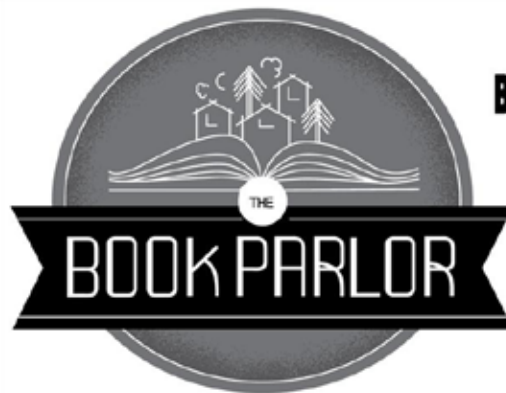
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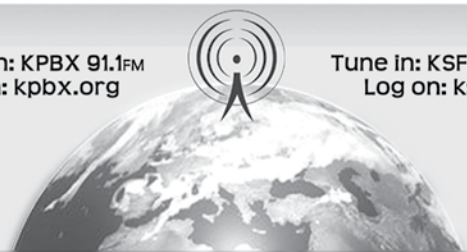


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Faith leaders shed insights on their traditions' celebration of diversity

Faith community leaders told how their faiths give thanks for diversity during the 2012 Interfaith Council Thanksgiving Service Nov. 22 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane.

The Rev. Todd Eklof, pastor there, said that "diversity makes our community work. It makes it a cornucopia. Our unique beliefs, backgrounds and lifestyles make us who we are. So our church does not just tolerate differences, but celebrates them.

"When we celebrate differences, sometimes we do not recognize our similarities, which are so great that our differences should not mean anything," he said. "Our differences should not make us dislike or mistreat anyone."

Sr. Mary Eucharista of Immaculate Heart Retreat Center said she became a religious sister "to pray, play and work in community to serve God and everyone." She said her name, "Eucharista," means "thanksgiving," and the greatest gift for which she thanks God "is the Eucharist, the bread of life offered at the Mass for the whole world." She sang a capella an ancient hymn, "Te Deum Laudamus," a Latin Gregorian chant, "We Thank Thee, O God."

Delores Forsyth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints told the story of only one of 10 lepers Jesus healed returning to thank him. She challenged people to live with awareness of their blessings and to serve people as a way to thank God, "counting your blessings even though you may be burdened."

She called people to give thanks at all times, to do "thanksgiving."

Joe Niemiec of the Interfaith Council said, "If we respect each other's different traditions, peace will be possible in the world. We can be thankful for what our faiths bring to our lives. Even though we may not agree with each other, we can break bread together.

"News is created to excite us, not to tell us what is going on in the world. Media tend to focus on the awful things," he said, noting that three recent articles call this "the most peaceful time the world has seen."

"The only way there will be more peace is if I don't tell you what you should believe, because I think I'm right and you're wrong," Joe said. "When will we reach the point we ask what others believe and know it's right for them? Peace begins when individuals let go of anger, bigotry



Joe Urlacher, Toni Niemiec, Sr. Mary Eucharista, Mona Ali and Aruna Bhuta sing during service.

and the need to be right, and welcome others as they are."

Aruna Bhuta, a Hindu, said uniqueness and differences help people understand each other and move forward. By meeting people of different beliefs and cultures, we can see our commonality, become aware of our differences and accept goodness in different faiths. This can help us live in peace and harmony.

"Hindus see God in every being and in every soul. That makes us think before we mistreat someone," said Aruna, who shared a "Shanti" or peace mantra: "May God protect us and nourish us all. May we work together for the good of humanity and may we never hate each other."

She said Hindus do not forget "an act of kindness by others toward us," but are "to forget one's own acts of kindness to others."

Baldev Singh of the Sikh Gurudwara in Spokane Valley appreciated people of different faiths gathering in August around their gurudwara in solidarity after Sikhs were shot in Wisconsin.

"Today we live in an increasingly diverse world. We are the same but different, each originating from the loving God and sharing in the tapestry of earth," he said. "We have different foods, sports, colors, eye colors, birthdays, shoe sizes and missing teeth. Some want to make the world in their own image. If that happened, every tree would be the same height and the only color would be gray. Our greatest differences are our blessings

and challenges," he said, calling for embracing a multi-cultural world, for celebrating personal, interpersonal, institutional, racial and national differences, and for realizing how new demographics affect access to power.

"Look at the rainbow and celebrate every color. There's magic in the moment of embracing diversity in the world," he said. "We need to replace 'either-or' thinking with 'both-and.'"

"Most differences are from the accident of our birth, and should not be sources of hate," he said. "Respecting differences is the basis for peace."

Toni Niemiec of the Center for Spiritual Living said that Science of Mind recognizes that "all sorts of paths lead to the same place."

"The diversity of our uniqueness creates richness in our lives," she said. "When we are young, we may look at how we can fit in. As we grow older, we stand up for our uniqueness, and find beauty and power in being who we are, bringing to the world a unique part of the wholeness of life."

Mona Ali of the Spokane Islamic Center quoted the Koran: "If you could count your blessings, you could never compute them."

She said people are to give thanks every day, to praise God in prosperity and adversity. Praying five times a day is a way to remember and be thankful.

"Humans tend to be ungrateful and think we don't have enough," Mona said. "We need to thank God for what we have, and appreciate the simple things of life."

Joe Urlacher said Bahullah, the name of the Baha'i founder, means "the glory of God." He said God, like light, is manifest and hidden: "Rainbow colors are differences manifest and hidden in light. They represent all humankind, religions, traditions, peoples, nations and colors. Every color that existed comes together in light. A prism turns white light into colors. So powerful is the light of unity that it can illumine the whole earth."

Sicco Rood, a Zen Buddhist practitioner, studies "the mystery" through the lens of Zen. He sees each person and the world as expressions of the mystery.

"Each moment, each encounter is an encounter with this mystery, or Dharma gate," he said "Each of us has a limited view, but a unique view from our time, place and culture. In Zen, we experience and appreciate uniqueness and diversity, or the world of differentiation, in the foreground at the same time we realize the nondifferentiated boundless background. Once we open up to that, we stop seeing the 'other' as a stranger," he said.

"Rains and leaves fall, each moment is a gift," he said. "We need to practice thanks for every moment. Similarly, we should not disregard a single being or encounter. All are precious gifts."

"Each religion, wisdom tradition, has a special way of practicing, seeing and understanding, which can contribute to other religions and humanity," Sicco said, expressing hope that people from all traditions see each other as brothers and sisters, and work together to realize peace and prosperity on this precious planet."



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