

40TH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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FEATURES 70 EVENTS



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

Newspaper uplifts positive stories

By Mary Stamp

To connect and communicate among Spanish-speaking people in the Spokane area and region, Maria and Troy Gaines have been publishing La Prensa Bilingue monthly for 28 years.

They want to counter negative impressions from misunderstandings about and misrepresentation of Hispanic people and culture in media.

“We uplift the good things people need to know about what Hispanic people are doing and about the positive aspects of the community,” said Maria.

“We present Latinos in a positive way, reporting about Latinos doing good things in the community, about professionals serving in the community and about Hispanic people of faith, so the community can see Latinos beyond common media portrayals,” Troy added.

Through publishing a bilingual English/Spanish newspaper, they are also able to address the cultural gap within families.

“Many older Latinos speak only Spanish, but children go to school and speak English. Communication is often a problem in families,” Maria said.



Maria and Troy Gaines publish La Prensa Bilingue to strengthen Hispanic community.

The newspaper’s motto is: “A bridge to cultural understanding,” she said.

Born and raised in Panama, Maria met Troy in 1984 at a Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Buddhist gathering when she went to Washington D.C., his home city, to study.

Maria, who had previously graduated from a business school in Panama City, found it too expensive in D.C. and left after a quarter of studying economics.

Troy and Maria continued their friendship with letters and phone calls. Troy visited Panama three times.

Three years later they were engaged. They married in 1987 in Panama just before Troy—who had studied art design at the University of DC and worked with the National Academy of Sciences in D.C.—entered the Air Force.

They were stationed four years at the Rhein Main U.S. Air Force base near Frankfurt, Germany, during the time the Berlin Wall came down and the Cold War environment ended.

There, Maria saw only German or English newspapers. At that time, she envisioned starting an

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350 Spokane’s interfaith committee offers ‘Wake Up World’ curriculum

The 350 Spokane Interfaith Committee is offering a teach-in on what is happening with creation.

They are using “Wake Up World, a Curriculum on the Climate Crisis for Faith and Community Groups” by Robert and Anita Dygert-Gearheart, a retired United Methodist minister and clinical social worker from Spokane, who became engaged on the issue during COVID.

They want to inspire people to become more active.

The United Methodist Church and Earthkeepers invited people to do a project. The curriculum was Robert’s and Anita’s project.

After they prepared a six-week faith version, highlighting creation and roles of communities of faith, they created a three-week community version highlighting the importance of the earth and humanity’s role.

They have taught the community version numerous times at colleges and universities in Florida, Oregon and Utah.

Robert and Anita invite 10 faith groups to offer the curriculum between now and May 2024 to help their community become more educated and more active in solving the problem.

They are working with the Lands Council to offer groups who study the curriculum the opportunity to plant trees in the spring with their Spocanopy project.

Six faith groups that have signed up to teach the curriculum are Temple Beth Shalom, Manito United Methodist, Hamblen Park Presbyterian, St. Mark’s Lutheran, St. Stephen’s Episcopal and Unity Spiritual Center.

350 Spokane is working to recruit five or more.

Each group can decide how to offer the material.

For a printed copy, groups are asked to cover the cost of printing the copy, which is available through Cokesbury, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble and at wakeupworld.earth.

For information, call 541-951-2897 or email adygertgearheart@hotmail.com.

The Fig Tree gears up for 2024 Benefits, Gala

The Fig Tree has lined up speakers and is inviting supporters to host tables or groups for eight guests for the Spring Benefits, gathering around the theme celebrating 40 years of “Sharing Stories: Empowering People.”

The Benefit Lunch buffet opens at 11 a.m. and the program is from noon to 1 p.m., Friday, March 8, at Cataldo Hall at Gonzaga University. It is in person and on livestream.

The Breakfast-Time Benefit begins with gathering on Zoom at 7:30 a.m. for those wishing to chat in small groups on Wednesday, March 11. The program is from 8 to 9 a.m.

For both events, Hamilton Studio is presenting a video on the theme with perspectives of Denise Attwood, Flora Bowers, Catherine Ferguson, Mitch and Kathy Finley, Emma Maple, Marilynne Mueller, Bart Preecs, Naghmana Sherazi, Bishop Emeritus Bill Skylstad, Maurice Smith and more. Some were early organizers, writers, story subjects and boosters. Some work with The Fig Tree today.

“In addition to an overview video for the Benefits, we will share fuller comments of these members of The Fig Tree community,” said editor Mary Stamp.

“In reviewing the bound volumes of our 40 years, I have been reminded of the hundreds and hundreds of people involved in the ideas behind framing our unique approach to journalism that is geared to inspire hope that empowers people to act,” she continued. “We have shared stories of thousands of people in more than 12,000 pages.”

Plans inspired by the 40th include officially adding pdf files of all the issues to our website archives and to Washington Digital Newspapers. In addition, staff and board members are

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The Fig Tree 1323 S. Perry St. Spokane, WA 99202-3571

Religion News Briefs

Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111
Fax: +41-22 788 7244 www.oikoumene.org

WCC communications is prophetic storytelling

Communication from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2023 involved prophetic storytelling and growing channels to highlight justice, reconciliation and unity across the world. Voices and visits from young people, news from member churches, and stories of challenges and hopes rang through WCC communications.

In 2023, the WCC website at oikoumene.org attracted 1.5 million visitors worldwide. With 185,000 visits, January was the month the website was visited most as readers clicked into news and resources related to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

With an average of 70 news articles published online monthly, the WCC published more than 800 articles in 2023, including news, feature stories and interviews. Some of those stories are featured in this Fig Tree column.

In 2023, their social media channels increased their audience, with the total number of fans and followers across all channels rising from 93,000 in 2022 to 97,000 in 2023. Instagram had the most growth, adding 2,000 new followers through several campaigns.

During the WCC central committee in June 2023, the WCC Instagram and YouTube channels carried observations and inspiration from young people in a customized dedicated effort to encourage input from younger generations.

Stories from that meeting and others prophetically covered peacebuilding, interreligious dialogue, youth and WCC missions in conflict regions.

The WCC's in-person audience broke records, too, with the visitors' program drawing more than 600 visitors, including a high number of young visitors.

Many visitors appreciated the artistic storytelling exhibited in the Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance with 180 panels hand-crafted by people sharing personal pain and hope to overcome sexual and gender-based violence.

Stories like these also captured the interest of many readers globally. With 15,200 mentions in world media, the WCC's prophetic voice reached across the world.

From the weekly news summary to YouTube, the blog, social media and the website, readers and listeners tuned into many WCC channels on many topics.

The WCC YouTube channel featured dozens of online productions, such as webinars, live events, prayer services, special interviews and video greetings to member churches and partners around the world. There were 27 webinars, 54 interviews, 46 YouTube shorts, 21 live-streamed events, 18 WCC video greetings and three live-streamed prayer services.

The WCC blog is a space where reflections from Christians and people of good will around the world shared how they are promoting justice and peace.

On social media, WCC published about 2,300 posts in 2023, averaging over six daily posts on its social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Instagram saw an 84 percent increase people seeing the posts compared to 2022.

The WCC continues to publish three journals: The Ecumenical Review, International Review of Mission and Current Dialogue. In 2023, articles that looked back to the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, and looked ahead to the 2025 celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, a key moment in the history of Christian faith.

A thematic issue of International Review of Mission focused on the decolonial task for ecumenical mission today, highlighted the need for repentance, reparation and restorative justice. Current Dialogue tackled interreligious engagement and gender justice.

In 2023, the WCC finalized 20 publications, including a mission centenary series, reports on the 11th Assembly, HIV resources and an Ecumenical International Youth Day Toolkit.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Fig Tree plans archive and books for 40th

Continued from page 1
working on two books, one will review the history of The Fig Tree and the other will compile articles and editorials by Mary.

"We seek sponsors for those projects," Mary said. "Those projects will begin this year, but may take time to complete."

From 5 to 8 p.m., Sunday April 28, The Fig Tree will host a Gala 40th Anniversary Celebration at the Cathedral of St. John, 127 E. 12th Ave.

Karen Georgia Thompson, the first African-American woman

to be president and general minister of the national United Church of Christ and a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, will be the featured speaker.

When invited, she did not hesitate. She's a Fig Tree reader.

In addition to her speech, there will be a dinner, a panel of local faith leaders reflecting on the impact of The Fig Tree on the life of faith in the region and an interfaith service.

For the Spring Benefits, the goal is to raise \$42,000 to sup-

port The Fig Tree, Resource Directory, website, social media, educational events and new media that include a networking email listserv, a podcast and emerging media.

Benefit guests and supporters may donate at the events, by mail and/or online at thefigtree.org/donate.html.

Tickets for the gala will be \$50 and there is opportunity for those interested in being sponsors.

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

Lands Council shares message for youth

The Lands Council reached its end-of-year fundraising goal of \$35,000 to "empower us to continue our vital work in preserving and protecting our precious lands for future generations," said Jasmine Vilar, development director.

"While we celebrate this achievement, we also want to acknowledge the global climate challenges that can leave people feeling debilitated," she said. "It's important to recognize that even in the face of adversity, there is still hope."

Recently, Scottish data scientist Hannah Ritchie gave a Ted

Talk in which she affirms hope for the future because renewable energy sources like wind and solar are getting cheaper and more accessible.

Jasmine said Hannah points out that "many steps the world has already taken to reduce carbon emissions are working, so carbon emissions from fossil fuels will probably peak in 2025."

The Lands Council is sharing her message to help youth have a sense of purpose and hope for the future, and to ask them to continue the work previous generations started towards building a sustainable future.

"We encourage you to watch her video and share it with the youth in your life," said Jasmine.

The TED talk, "Are We the Last Generation—or the First Sustainable One?" is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl3VVrggKz4>

The Lands Council is also expanding its SpoCanopy and Reforestation programs in the new year and working hard to give voice to its priorities in the state legislature session, said Naghmana Sherazi, climate justice program director.

For information, email jvilar@landscouncil.org.

Faith & Reason hosts Fr. Robert Spitzer

Fr Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D., president of the Magis Center on Science, Reason and Faith, and the former president of Gonzaga University, returns to Gonzaga in February for a two-evening series of talks organized by the Aram Professor of the Gonzaga School of Business and the Faith & Reason Institute.

"What's Missing in Contem-

porary Approaches to Business Ethics? The Devaluation of Principles, Conscience, and Faith," is the title for the Aram Lecture of Gonzaga School of Business Administration, 7 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 7, Coughlin Theater, Woldson Performing Arts Center.

"Increasing Openness to Transcendent Intelligence in Contem-

porary Big Bang Cosmology" is the Gonzaga Faith & Reason Institute Lecture at 7 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 8, at Coughlin Theater in the Woldson Performing Arts Center.

He will be available to sign his books in the lobby after each lecture.

For information, call 313-6743 or email calhoun@gonzaga.edu.

Flannery Lecture will be held on Feb. 12

Gonzaga Religious Studies Department is hosting the Spring 2024 Flannery Lecture in Catholic Theology with the theme, "Guadalupe, Mestizaje, and Las Castas," from 4:30 to 6 p.m., Monday, Feb. 12, in the Globe Room of Cataldo Hall at Gon-

zaga University.

The lecturer is Nancy Pineda-Madrid, the T. Marie Chilton Chair of Catholic Theology at Loyola Marymount University and president-elect of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

She will share a theological interpretation of Our Lady of Guadalupe in relation to the notion of "mestizaje," the mixing of Spanish and Indigenous blood lines and the well-known 1750 painting, "Castas," by

Luis de Mena, and other paintings delineating and ordering las castas, in which Guadalupe appears to bless various forms of intermarriage and racially based hierarchical ranking of intermarriages.

Nancy's focus is on Guadalupe as a theological symbol, stressing its interpretation in a manner that mediates and affirms that all human beings are fully *imago dei*.

For information, email lewisc4@gonzaga.edu.

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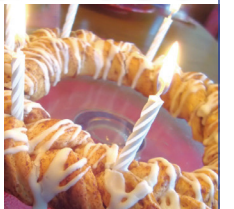
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Calvary Baptist celebrates 134th year

Calvary Baptist Church of Spokane will celebrate its 134th anniversary at 2 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 4, at the church, 203 E. 3rd Ave. The theme for the celebration, "The True Foundation," is based on I Cor. 3:11.

It is the oldest African-American church in Washington, established in 1890 when its founders left First Baptist Church of Spokane Falls and started their own church. The church met in three other locations before settling at 203 E. Third.

For information, call 294-1636 or visit calvarybaptistchurch-spokane.com.

Congregations help donate to Mardi Bras

Transitions and Volunteers of America invites congregations and groups to participate in its annual Mardi Bras, to host parties and invite friends to join virtually or in-person to help more than 600 women experiencing homelessness at Hope House and Women's Hearth.

Donations of bus passes, deodorant, socks, sports bras, tampons and underwear can be selected on the Amazon wish list or dropped off at the drive-thru event.

In 2023, 1,738 bras, 2,124 underwear, 11,900 tampons, 10,815 pads and 1,338 socks were collected and shared with homeless women. This year, the hope is to surpass that.

For information, visit help4women.org/spokane-mardi-bras.

Village Cohousing places affordable home

Village Cohousing Works (VCW), a volunteer nonprofit, recently purchased the first of 10 affordable homes they will place in Takesa Village manufactured home community in Mead.

The two-bedroom, energy-efficient, 780-square-foot manufactured home has a bath, kitchen, utility area and common space, said VCW director Sarah Olson.

Funds were raised with assistance from the Smith-Barbieri Progressive Fund. The first homeowner will buy the home with a \$86,000 mortgage. VCW will use those funds to purchase additional homes.

Lerria Schuh, executive director of the Smith-Barbieri Progressive Fund, said they partnered with Village Cohousing Works, aware that it takes years to develop affordable housing.

For information, visit villagecohousingworksspokane.org.

Public Library hosts Death Cafés

On second Sundays, Spokane Public Library hosts Death Cafés to make death a normal part of life.

The cafes are led by Samantha Potter of Rubicon's Edge, which offers end-of-life doula service, bereavement support and life transitions coaching. Death Café gives people an opportunity to discuss death and make the most of their lives. It is not grief support or counseling. Since September 2011, Death Cafés have spread across Europe, North America and Australia.

For information, visit deathcafe.com/deathcafe/17431 or at rubiconsedge.com/events.

Coalition forms for education on Palestine

The Inland Northwest Coalition for the Liberation of Palestine (INWCLP) recently formed to educate the community.

They advocate ending the U.S. unconditional support for Israel because of its occupation and illegal settlements, and its systemic ethnic cleansing and displacement of people since 1948. They promote equal rights, responsibilities, votes, justice and human rights for all in Palestine.

The coalition is hosting "Experience Palestine," a film festival, from 4 to 6 p.m., Sundays, Feb. 4, 11 and 18, at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 4340 Whistalks Way.

In addition, they are offering "Kites for Kid" at 10 a.m., Saturday, Feb. 17, at The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague Ave.

For information, email info@inwclp.com.

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Expo '74 events set for 50th anniversary

From May 4 to July 4, Spokane celebrates the 50th Anniversary of Expo '74, the first environmentally themed World's Fair.

The Expo '74 50th Celebration calendar online lists several events.

Each week, organizers will add events as they are confirmed, building a variety of events for the nine-week celebration.

The Opening Celebration is from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, May 4, at the Spokane Pavilion in Riverfront Park.

There will be speakers and performances from arts, cultural, tribal and community organizations. There will also be food, recreation and wellness activities.

The Community Stage and Vendor Village begins at 11 a.m.

on select Saturdays from May 4 to June 29, at Riverfront Park.

There will be a dance, performing arts, inspiring talks and engaging performances.

There will also be international cuisine, memorabilia, historic and interactive activities. The stage will be adjacent to the Vendor Village, which will feature local vendors, artisans and handcrafters.

From 4 to 10 p.m., Thursday, July 4, there will be the 50th Anniversary Closing Ceremonies, a 4th of July Spokane Symphony Concert and a fireworks show.

Front-of-stage seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Doors open at 4 p.m. with community performances and the vendor village.

The Spokane Symphony begins at 9 p.m. followed by a

fireworks display at 10 p.m.

The Expo 50th Celebration invites people to join Club '74 for \$74. Members help support the free, family-friendly activities and programs throughout the celebration and receive benefits, opportunities and content before and during the celebration.

The Lands Council will also host events and post them on their calendar, like planting a SpoCanopy 'Expo Forest' in May and an Expo Legislative Summit on June 21. The calendar is at landscouncil.org.

The Cathedral of St. John will host an interfaith dialogue on environmental issues for Earth Day on April 22.

For information, visit <https://my.spokanecity.org/riverfrontspokane/programs/expo-74-50th-anniversary>.

National CEO of YWCA speaks at luncheon

Margaret Mitchell, CEO of YWCA USA, will give the keynote address at the 42nd Annual YWCA Spokane Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Friday, March 15, at the Spokane Convention Center.

As one of the oldest and largest women's organizations, Margaret said the YWCA anticipates trends and creates competitive breakthrough strategies.

"I believe in a world where all women and girls, especially those of color, are free from racism and sexism, experience justice and equity, and thrive," said Margaret who is committed to YWCA's mission to eliminate racism and empower women.

In 2019, she led the call to De-

clare Racism a Public Health Crisis in Cleveland and Ohio. She launched a digital racial equity and social justice challenge to broaden understanding of racism. In 2021, she received YWCA USA's Excellence Award for Racial Justice for her "fearless leadership, innovative programming and tireless advocacy."

She fought for women's rights and acquired Cleveland's largest emergency homeless shelter for women. She transformed YWCA Greater Cleveland's Early Learning Center to include a trauma-informed preschool for homeless children.

YWCA Spokane announced the 2024 Women of Achievement Award honorees who embody YWCA Spokane's mission

of eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity.

The winners are Melody Heaton, Arts and Culture; Colene Rubertt, Business and Industry; Kristine Hoover, Carl Maxey Racial and Social Justice Award; Samantha Clark, Community Enhancement; Stephaine Courtney, Education; Vanessa Waldref, Government and Public Service; Denise Smart, Science, Technology and Environment, and Sindhu Surapaneni, Young Woman of Achievement.

In addition to honoring women, the luncheon raises funds for survivor support services at YWCA Spokane.

For information, call 789-8275 or visit ywcaspokane.org/woa.

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2024 Benefit Events



Lunch - Friday, March 8

Arrive: 11 a.m. • Program 12 to 1 p.m.
Cataldo Hall at Gonzaga University
in person and streaming

Zoom - Wednesday, March 13

Gather 7:30 a.m. - Slides 7:50 - Program 8 to 9 a.m.

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La Prensa Bilingue is bridge to cultural understanding

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English/Spanish newspaper.

From Germany, they were assigned to Fairchild Air Force Base in 1991. They bought a house in Spokane, intending to settle. His enlistment ended in 1992.

Troy worked at a nursing home as an assistant in physical and occupational therapy for eight years. In recent years, he worked as a rehabilitation counselor to help support the family.

While Maria focused on caring for their sons after settling in Spokane, she also became involved with the Inland Empire Hispanic Association—now the Hispanic Business and Professional Association.

Through the association, she met people from the local media, police department, businesses and community agencies.

"I learned that many Latinos felt isolated and needed a voice, so I started an eight-page tabloid format newspaper with local news, recipes, cultural events and more," said Maria. "I had no background in journalism.

"I was self-taught," commented Maria.

The first issue was published in December 1996.

She began to do interviews to gather news, read books on publishing a newspaper and met with Virginia de Leon, a reporter with the Spokesman-Review.

In January 1997, Virginia wrote an article about La Prensa Bilingue in the Spokesman.

That gave their newspaper a boost. Many people called, wanting to subscribe and advertise.

"It was overwhelming. People from around the nation wanted to help underwrite it," Maria said.

First, they worked with Garland Printing, which also offered advice.

Later they worked with Griffin Publishing in Spokane and now with TPC Publishing in Lewiston.

Troy and Maria also published The Northwest Tribune for Russian speakers and Diversity for the Diverse Community magazine for two years.

Maria focuses on the newspaper, gathering news. Troy focuses on sponsors and advertisers. Ads are their primary support. Each month they publish 12 to 16 pages, depending on advertising.

Usually, it takes Troy three days to deliver the paper at schools, libraries, businesses and community buildings in Spokane, Tri Cities and North Idaho. Sometimes they print more if there are community events. One son helps deliver.

"While some consider print

newspapers to be dinosaurs, there is demand. Many people like to hold something tangible," said Troy. "Where I go, many are happy and proud to have a Latino newspaper. They look forward to it and feel part of it."

While Maria gathers most stories, she also receives press releases from agencies like Mujeres In Action and other contributors.

"I am proud to be publishing a paper that connects the community and community leaders, that lets the wider community know of events, nonprofits, food drives and more," said Troy.

Over the years of shining a positive light on the Hispanic people living here, Troy has seen changes as more Hispanic people live in Spokane and they feel less isolated as people of color.

He noted the contrast for him of living in Spokane after growing up in D.C., where 85 percent of the people were black.

"People in Spokane embrace us and are generous. We no longer feel like transplants. We have put down roots and have a good life," he said.

After a stroke in December 2015 and a small stroke in 2019, Maria lost a quarter of the vision in her left eye, so she likes working at home because she can work any time.

An important element keeping them going through the struggles of publishing a newspaper is their SGI Buddhist faith. While they are involved with the SGI Buddhist community in Spokane, much of their practice is chanting and meditating at home.

SGI is a Japanese Buddhist movement based on teachings of the 13th century Japanese priest Nichiren Daishonin. It has spread to 192 countries.

Maria joined the SGI in 1976, encouraged by the SGI emphasis on peace, culture and education.

"SGI challenges us to have a heart for and a positive influence on our community," she said.

Troy said Buddhism teaches compassion and valuing others.

"We pray for our individual happiness and the happiness and wellbeing of others," he said. "If we are happy and content, it will spread happiness in the world."

Maria and Troy often recite the Lotus Sutra and chant the mantra, "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo." "Nam" means devotion. "Myoho" refers to the mystic law. "Renge" is cause and effect. "Kyo" is to be in harmony with the universe.

"Our Buddhist practice helps us counter negative forces that would pull us down. We chant to manifest our state of absolute happiness or enlightenment. We pray to keep life in rhythm," Maria said. "When we are in a state of happiness, we influence the environment in a positive way.

"When we are happy, we do not harm others. When we feel hope, we give hope to others so people will change their lives," she said.

Maria finds that sitting and chanting gives her hope. It inspires and sustains her commitment to give people information through the newspaper, so they have hope.

"Information can help and empower people," she said.

"Our faith helps fulfill our

life mission of helping people. Sometimes publishing the newspaper is a struggle, and we wonder why we are doing it. Then someone tells us how it makes a difference for them, and we know our work has meaning," Troy said.

"We cover stories of inspiration, sharing how people struggle and overcome those struggles," Maria said.

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The Black Lens relaunches in February with Black History Month

By Mary Stamp

The Black Lens newspaper relaunches for Black History Month in February.

The interim editor, attorney Natasha Hill, is slowing the caseload of her legal practice to work with board members, The Spokesman-Review, Comma and contributors to produce the first issue since editor/founder Sandy Williams' death in September 2022.

"I wondered if we would have enough copy, but with Black History Month we will have a strong emphasis on black history, including the historic election of Betsy Wilkerson as the first black woman City Council president. The NAACP Spokane is swearing in a new president, Lisa Gardner.

"Many people don't even know that Spokane had a black mayor, Jim Chase, (1982 to 1986)," she added.

"The city recently voted for justice not to build a new jail, so we will have reports on that," she said.

The February issue will also tell about Sandy's life and issues on her radar.

"Like Sandy, we will be direct and not afraid to talk about issues," she said.

The Black Lens' national and local search was unable to find a new editor to succeed Sandy.

Natasha may lack journalist experience but is committed to carry on the legacy of advocacy for the Black community and to uplift the positive elements of Black culture, art, music, events and more.

She and the board, which recently welcomed four members—Bob Lloyd, Luc Jasmin III, Alethea Dumas and Mike Betheley—to serve along with Sandy's brother Rick Williams, who lives in California, and daughter Renika Williams, who lives on the East Coast, have set up an independent nonprofit.

"The Williams family appreciates what Sandy started and wants to continue it," Natasha said.

Along with overseeing content, she will build the structure to provide longevity.

Natasha has been practicing law since graduating from Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles in 2006. After passing the bar in 2007, she practiced law for 10 years in Los Angeles. She returned to Spokane, first working with an established firm and then setting up her own practice in 2019. Her practice includes civil litigation, contract and employment disputes, family law, business formation and entertainment.

Housing costs in Los Angeles led her to return to Spokane, where she grew up in the Hill-yard neighborhood and graduated from Rogers High School in 2000. With Running Start credits, she had completed an associate degree at Spokane Falls Community College in 2001 and then completed a degree in sociology at the University of Washington in 2003, before going to Southwestern Law School.

"With COVID and the resurgence of civil rights after the murder of George Floyd, I worked from home to be with my two children," said Natasha, who became involved with commu-



Natasha Hill serves as interim editor of The Black Lens.

nity and school issues through the NAACP Spokane.

Natasha focused on policy changes in the schools to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline that often catches students of color, low-income students, and students with special needs.

"For example, we advocated for changes to isolation and restraint policies—locking kids in rooms and physically restraining them," she said. "Touching special needs students, such as those with autism, may escalate an issue.

"After COVID, kids had already been isolated, and there was funding to address the school-to-prison pipeline and the use of resource officers or police in schools," said Natasha, who worked with community organizations and parent groups like Every Student Counts Alliance to develop policies.

That drew her into the Democratic Party. She was appointed by state legislators to the Spokane County Redistricting Committee that held hearings on expanding from three to five districts.

Gaining public recognition in the process, Natasha ran against Cathy Morris Rogers to represent the fifth Congressional district in 2022, seeking to address the civil rights of the region.

"We are an area with a history of hate from the Aryan Nations and beyond. They were visible when I was growing up. We do not want hate groups," said Natasha.

"My values come from my grandmother, a hard-working, independent woman who married at 16 and divorced by her 30s. She owned her own home and raised her children and mixed grandchildren in the midst of racism.

"We have a Christian background and went to church but went to white churches in Spokane Valley, which did not welcome us as brown children.

Christians are not the only ones who do good things. Some family members were in sex trade and did drugs. I learned not to judge but to put my feet in others' shoes before judging them.

"I learned that their choices did not mean they had no worth. I also learned they can change. I learned how important redemption is, seeing that people who make bad choices can change their lives and make amends," Natasha said. "What is important was to maintain family and community relationships and a sense of belonging.

"People who screw up need opportunities to make amends. People are not defined by their faults," she continued. "In law and civil litigation, people are able to win monetary damages. Accountability is important, such as when there is wage theft or discrimination by employers.

"There needs to be a balance of power to give individuals the opportunity to hold corporations accountable and recover damages," she said. "By holding people accountable we can create changes in the system and have redemption. Monetary damages do not make someone whole, so creating accountability is important."

Natasha has taken on the interim editor role with The Black

Lens to give voice to people who do not have resources.

"If a newspaper is run by advertising and profit, its voice may be influenced," she said. "If it's supported by people, we can use the power of the pen to give opportunities for people to get their voice out and to collectively organize."

To help with finances, Innovia Foundation is providing major funding while The Black Lens secures long-term sponsors. The Black Lens is also working with Comma, which is set up with the Spokesman-Review as a nonprofit to secure funding as a strategic partner with The Black Lens and to support other local journalism efforts.

"We will do some ads but keep ads below market level so local people can afford to advertise," Natasha explained.

Subscribers and sponsors will be a base of funding.

The Black Lens will be printed and distributed through the Spokesman-Review's circulation of 60,000, half in print and half online. The Black Lens will also have independent distribution and a website.

Spokesman staff will assist with layout and developing article ideas that will be written by reporters and contributors.

The Spokesman-Review will hire a full-time race and equity reporter.

The Black Lens is also reaching out to the NAACP Spokane, Carl Maxey Center, the black queer community, former African-American Voice editor Bob Lloyd and others to contribute stories. There is much content to report with the legislative session, business and economic issues, black churches, African-American arts and culture, food, restaurants and music.

"There is much bringing joy to our community," Natasha said. "There is much to feel good about in ways that bring the community together."

The first issue will be 12 full-size pages and include a black business directory and directory of African-American churches and services.

Rather than distributing it in person as Sandy did, Natasha plans to pay community members or students to help distribute it.

The website will include the monthly content, a news feed, regular updates, community events and urgent news. The Spokesman is offering high school internships for black students who are interested in reporting and publishing, and are good at social media.

The Black Lens Launch Party is from 6 to 8 p.m., Friday, Feb. 2, at the Steam Plant, with an after party in their Game Room from 8 to 10 p.m.

For the long term, Comma and Gonzaga University will partner to build a newsroom on campus with shared space and resources—creative commons for collaboration with students at Gonzaga, Whitworth and Eastern Washington Universities.

For information, email editor@blacklensnews.com or go to blacklensnews.com.




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Individuals, congregations, organizations march despite the cold

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Freda Gandy, executive director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, greeted the crowd that gathered in the Spokane Convention Center, braving subzero temperatures for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Rally and March for Racial Unity.

Mayor Lisa Brown offered the City of Spokane Proclamation, saying, “King believed that true peace requires the absence of war with the powerful presence of justice. He believed violence brings only temporary victories, and by creating many more social problems than it solves, never brings permanent peace.

“He awakened the hearts of Americans by calling for true equality and integrity among citizens, by promoting a sense of justice that moves beyond racism and by encouraging a national realization that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” she said, calling for citizens to continue to live by Dr. King’s principles, ethics and philosophy that all work together to improve humankind as a united body serving the community in positive ways.

“We are to participate in a Day on, not a Day off, to celebrate the civil rights leader’s life and legacy,” she said.

After JeNese Howard sang the national anthem, Lisa Gardner, newly elected president of the NAACP Spokane, lifted up concerns in hearing that a Spokane school was going to eliminate their MLK Assembly.

“Why would they do that? It’s part of history, part of America, part of who we are,” she said.

Lisa said the NAACP education chair contacted them and was told, “There’s no interest in MLK by the students.”

“This country is facing an alarming task as some try to eliminate black history from books and education. In Spokane, we watch it on the news, and think, it’s not going to happen to us. Oh, yes, it is,” she said.

Lisa added that the education chair then said, “I don’t understand. Children are not just black, not just white, but of all races. Why would schools eliminate the one man who tried to bring this country together? Why would they eliminate something so profound because of student disinterest?”

“Students don’t like algebra or biology, but we teach those subjects,” she said. “We have to stay vigilant and ensure our students learn about MLK every day. Let’s make sure our schools, educators, principals and school board members understand the importance of a man who impacted not just black history, but American history. They assassinated him. We cannot let them assassinate his legacy.”



Photographer Gen Heywood shares images of marchers, a woman at the rally sharing a message of love, and Freda Gandy with scholarship recipient Vernon Glass and Heather Rosentrater, president and COO of Avista.

Freda believes when the community hears about something like this, it will come together to make sure students learn history, because African American history is American history.

Then she reflected on the 2023 loss of Ivan Bush, a former executive director of the MLK Center, and co-chair and founder of Spokane’s MLK Day, with Pastor Happy Watkins.

“Ivan poured his heart and soul into this community. We lost a great icon. His legacy will live on. He passed the torch, teaching me everything I know about organizing MLK Day,” she said. “I hung on the coattails of Ivan and Happy and learned all I could.”

Reading from his obituary, she said “Ivan will be remembered for his passion, activism, mentorship, kindness and the heart that he shared with his family, friends and the Spokane community. Being around Ivan, one left feeling like he cared, and they mattered and could achieve anything.”

Ivan encouraged Freda to stay

in Spokane despite her apprehension, especially after the 2011 MLK march, when a bomb was put on the route.

Freda said that because Ivan uplifted, empowered and encouraged people here, his legacy will continue in Spokane.”

Ivan’s widow, Fanny and daughters, Ivy and Oceania, flew from the East Coast to celebrate his life and legacy, which included mentoring children and adults with Spokane Public Schools.

Oscar Harris of Spokane Public Schools shared a quote from Ivan to students, “If it is to be, it’s up to me.” Oscar said he stands on Ivan’s shoulders as “one of a few African Americans in district leadership.

Announcing that the MLK Center established an Ivan Bush Community Service Award, Freda presented it to Jenay Langford, who volunteered several summers at the center.

Latrice Williams, a local singer, paid tribute to Ivan, who had helped her and others stay in school. She sang, “I want

Continued on next page



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Stephy Nobles Beans inspires rally goers to build the beloved community

Continued from previous page to leave my footprints on the sands of time,” by Beyoncé, while a video showed past MLK marches in Spokane.

Freda also announced that the Happy Watkins Scholarship was started last year. The 2023 rally raised \$16,000 for three students. They again raised funds at the 2024 rally.

Heather Rosentrater, Avista’s first woman president and chief operating officer, co-presented the first award. She remembered her parents taking her and her sister to hear Happy recite MLK’s “I Have a Dream Speech.”

Vernon Glass, the recipient, a senior from Roger’s High School, is president of the Black Student Union and Associated Student Body and vice president of DECA. He has a 3.5 GPA, is active in sports and works part time. Thanking his mother and Happy, and recalling past rallies, he said, “It’s a dream come true.”

Freda said Happy, who was at home, was proud of the recipient. She then showed a video of a previous time Happy recited Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech and invited attendees to donate to the scholarship fund.

James Watkins, Happy’s son and pastor at New Hope Baptist Church, shared appreciation to the donors, “as we want to continue the dream of MLK and continue Happy’s dream to bring everyone together in this city.”

Stephy Nobles-Beans, motivational speaker and associate chaplain for diversity, equity and inclusion ministries at Whitworth, rallied the crowd before the seven-tenths of a mile march in the frigid air.

She sang, “Keep your eyes on the prize,” sharing that the song calls people to persevere despite struggles and injustices, and despite discrimination and obstacles to focus on the big picture, the dream that is unfolding to this day.”

Through her talk, she repeated, “If not you, who? If not now, when?”

Concerned about violence in the world, she called for continuing the dream. She said it has been 55 years since the assassination of the Reverend—not just Doctor—Martin Luther King Jr., who had hopes and preached dreams, not only for his people, but also for all Americans.

He said, “You can kill the dreamer, but you cannot kill the dream.”

Dr. King also said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

“We are standing in times of challenge and controversy,” said Stephy, “so I challenge myself this year to create the beloved



Stephy Nobles Beans encourages action: “If not us, who? If not now, when?” Photo by Gen Heywood

community, where injustice ceases and love prevails. If not me, who? If not now, when?”

“We are part of the beloved community. As we strive to cultivate something better, it starts with us. It starts with me spreading love, hope and courage to stand up to injustices in our community. It starts with us showing unity,” she said. “We don’t have to wait for someone else to step up. Step up. Don’t be a bystander.”

Dr. King said, “The time is always right to do what is right.”

“It is right to spread hope,

stand up and have courage in the face of adversity. It starts with me showing unity, and it

starts with you. I challenge you today to take a step now in this community,” Stephy said.

Dr. King said, “It’s got to be me. I’ve got to show love. I’ve got to show unity. I’ve got to stand in courage, because if it’s not me, then who? If it’s not now, when?”

Stephy said he stepped out even though he and his family faced threats. He was imprisoned for his work. He believed in non-violence. He emphasized virtues of understanding, love, peace and learning. He risked his life, and it cost him his life.

Those who stood with him acted against injustice and systemic racism for the world to take notice that a change was going to come.

“I pray we continue in Spokane to take moral responsibility,” Stephy challenged, to follow King’s moral path toward achieving justice.

“Each of us must do our part to build the beloved community. May we be champions of justice,” she said, closing by asking, “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

For information, call 868-0856, email fgandy@mlkspokane.org or visit mlkspokane.org.

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Betsy Wilkerson honors local civil rights leaders at MLK service

At the Martin Luther King Jr. service organized by the Spokane Ministers Fellowship, Spokane City Council President Betsy Wilkerson read the scripture on the landowner who gave five talents to one worker, two to another and one to the third. She said the first two doubled their talents. The third, who buried it in the ground, was chastised for not using the talent.

“What are you going to do with your talent?” she challenged. “While the Scripture speaks of money, the parable symbolizes more. God has given us gifts, lived experiences and education.”

During the service Happy Watkins, pastor emeritus at New Hope Baptist Church, thanked those gathered for the worship service for the legacy he hopes will go on and on.

Freda Gandy, executive director of the Martin Luther King Jr Community Center, told of her 24 years with the center, starting as a single mother needing help with her son so she could finish her degree in social work at Eastern Washington University. Her son was a preschooler when she began as a volunteer. She wanted to be a good mother and get higher education.

The MLK Family Center was first a drop-in recreation center in the basement of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. It has grown to a comprehensive social service agency offering education and social services for children, youth, families and seniors.

“We could not do it without community partners,” Freda said. “We exist to improve the lives of children, youth and adults based on equal respect for all people.”

There are pre-school, after-school, teen recreation and seniors programs, and partners share the space.

In honor of the late Ivan Bush, who died in June 2023, slides prepared by his family shared his legacy in Spokane.

“He was a great civil rights leader in Spokane, an early director of the MLK Center,” said Freda. “I walked alongside Happy and Ivan and hung on their coattails.”

James Watkins, who led the service, said Ivan was a central figure in his life from early days at the center.

“Ivan and my dad were best friends. He was there for every important event of my life and taught me the work for civil rights must continue,” James said.

As Betsy began her speech, she looked at the people gathered at Holy Temple Church of God in Christ with tears of joy: “I see old folk and young, people who have impacted my life. We all have a role to play, not knowing how we will impact people,” Betsy said.



Betsy Wilkerson, Spokane City Council President, is surrounded by her grandchildren who inspired her to run.



Pastors in the Spokane Ministers Fellowship planned the Martin Luther King Jr Service.

She thanked her grandchildren who encouraged her to run. She thanked her Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) family and her family at Mt. Zion and Full Gospel Mission churches where she grew up and her parents were ministers. She gave special thanks to her parents' colleagues, pastors Happy Watkins, Ezra Kinlow and CW Andrews.

Speaking of talents, she noted that “Dr. King had many talents as a parent, civil rights leader, speaker and preacher. In 1963, he challenged an ordinance that prohibited a public gathering without a permit. He was arrested for the 13th time and stayed in the Birmingham jail to highlight the plight of black folks,” she said. “The Auto Workers Union bailed him out.”

“Before that, Christian pastors and the Jewish community wrote a letter to the editor criticizing outsiders and agitators. A friend smuggled a copy of the paper to King in jail. Notes he wrote in the margins became his 7,000-word Letter from the Birmingham Jail, saying that what the Christian faith tells us

to do includes going to jail and praying.” Betsy said.

“He let the naysayers and moderates have it, writing: ‘My fellow clergy, I write in defense of nonviolent protest and call colleagues, fence-sitters to push for civil rights,’” said Betsy, pointing out that going on the record like that could mean loss of a job or house.

She added that King used his talents but knew he would not achieve his dream without the talents of others.

Wyatt Tee Walker, a civil rights leader from Virginia, helped King spread the word and plan the March on Washington.

Another helpmate was King's wife, Coretta Scott King, who carried on his legacy, marching at Selma and speaking 15 days before her death from ovarian cancer. She sang at churches, developed the King Center and the King holiday. Coretta told the story of the civil rights movement from Montana to D.C., raising money and fighting for MLK Day to honor her husband.

Betsy made the point that Coretta was more than a faithful wife and mother. She and

many others made the dream come true.

She named some local civil rights leaders who used their gifts.

• **C.E. Hamp** started Hamp's Camp, taking inner city children to the lake for a week with the

help of volunteer cooks, drivers and counselors.

• **Former mayor Jim Chase** had talents but needed folks who believed in him.

• **“A body of ministers** got black people on the police force. It took many folks to make that happen,” Betsy said.

• **“Carl Maxey was the Lion** of Spokane, our legal eagle and civil rights activist,” she continued.

• **“Sandy Williams**, another civil rights activist, started the Black Lens despite naysayers. Look at what God did with her talents. She could not do what

Continued on next page



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Happy Watkins and Ivan Bush leave a legacy as civil rights leaders

Continued from previous page she did without others helping her publish The Black Lens and start the Carl Maxey Center," Betsy continued.

• **Lonnie Mitchell**, pastor of Bethel AME, wanted to start a new community center. It took him 10 years of perseverance for his vision to become Emmanuel Family Life Center.

• **"Others with vision** include Freda moving the MLK center to the East Central Community Center where she could expand daycare, the preschool, after-school, recreation and a tech team. The center is a place to celebrate homecomings and parties. I admire her tenacity in an uphill battle through challenges to make King's dream available to others," Betsy said.

"There are legacy builders we may not see. Look at cornerstones of buildings and see names of black leaders like Nate Greene. His wife Roberta Greene was the first black woman to serve on the Spokane City Council," Betsy added.

"My mother brought me and my siblings here on a train from Mississippi in 1963. We had a basket of chicken and a pound cake," she said. "My mother had a vision of a better life for her children. She set up as a hairdresser until she was called to ministry. My mother had the first mobile food bank, picking up food at the Grocery Outlet and taking it to people."

Betsy thanked the Spokane Ministers Fellowship for a letter of support when she was consid-



Pastor Happy Watkins, center, is surrounded by the late Ivan Bush's daughters, Ivy and Oceana, and his widow, Fanny, to his left. Behind them are Ephriam Watkins and his mother, Shawn Watkins. At the right is Happy's son, James Watkins.

ered for a City Council opening in 2019.

"I have never forgotten my roots in the house of the Lord," she said.

Betsy said Happy and Ivan worked together many years to fulfill another dream, naming

a Spokane street Martin Luther King Jr. Way.

"Because of Dr. King, we do all these things," she said.

"Lord, are you talking to me? Use my talents," she said. "To whom much is given, much is required. What is the church doing?"

We in the black churches often do not notice our own privilege.

"**Busy with feeding** and caring for our families and with doing our work may occupy our attention, but we should not let the rest of the world and others' problems become background noise," she said. "Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have to look around and notice how others experience the world.

"Then we need to use our talents and do one thing unto God. Let us do good for all," Betsy said. "Look at all the talents in the room. God sends up people to identify talents in our lives.

"**Dr. King needed** courage, intelligence and dedicated leadership of integrity, not in love of power for money but for justice," she said, inviting people to turn in their egos for a good cause "because everyone has opportunity for greatness."

The offering from the service began a campaign to renovate the gym at the MLK Community Center.

For information, call 858-0856 or visit mlkspokane.org.

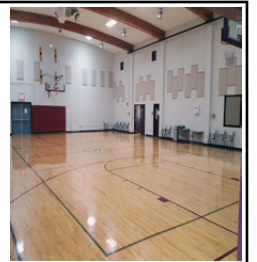
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Video appeals for volunteers in church warming centers

Winter weather has also caught up with Spokane and its homeless friends, commented Maurice Smith of Rising River Media, who has created a short video, "Volunteering at Church Warming Centers," to inform members of the faith community.

"I appreciate that our new city administration has made noteworthy efforts to mitigate the impact of this weather by opening up more than 180 additional shelter/warming beds," he said. "Recent efforts have included not only re-opening the Cannon Street Shelter, but also opening four church-based warming centers."

The church centers have opened because of a team coor-

inated by Johnny Edmundson of Growing Neighbors at Shadle Park Presbyterian, Christian McKinney of the Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium (SLIHC) and Julie Garcia of Jewels Helping Hands.

Over the years, many have hoped—prayed—that area churches would catch a vision for making a difference on homelessness and serve unsheltered friends by opening their buildings as temporary winter warming centers, Maurice commented.

Now four church-based warming centers keep 80 people—20 per location—safe and warm.

While staff from Jewels Helping Hands are providing 24/7

onsite managers at each location, they need more volunteers.

Maurice created the video to let potential volunteers see how they might help. One image is of four people sitting around a propane fire pit that one volunteer donated.

Maurice invites viewers to imagine the man in a wheelchair trying to negotiate around in the snow to find the nearest bus stop to go to DSHS.

A Vietnam veteran who saw two tours of duty in Vietnam and was shot four times is staying at the Warming Center. Maurice wants to learn more of his story, "because, ultimately, homelessness is about real people and their stories," he said.

"We need more volunteers to step up. Homelessness is a community issue that requires community involvement to solve. That involvement and that solution can start with something as simple as volunteering for an hour or two or more at a Church Warming Center and discovering the true faces and stories of those experiencing homelessness," Maurice said, inviting people to make the video go viral by posting it on their social media and emailing it to their mailing lists.

For information, call 475-8797. Link to the video "Volunteering at Church Warming Centers" at <https://youtu.be/mf7df6dDcQI>.

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Mexican boy who wanted to be a priest now serves Spokane parish

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

Who would have known that when Miguel Angel Mejía Díaz, a boy growing up in Metepec, in the State of Mexico, was asked where he wanted to go to high school, and responded, “I want to be a priest,” what that choice would lead to?

Today he is involved in Spokane as the pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish and All Saints Catholic elementary school on Spokane’s South Hill.

He is also the director of prison ministry for the Diocese of Spokane and a volunteer for Catholic Charities programs.

Father Miguel had a unique journey to be serving where he is today.

He was the oldest of six, two sisters and three brothers, from a culturally Catholic, but not particularly devout, family. His aunt lived next door with her family of five. Together they made a large extended family in the urban area where the homes were close to each other.

Because his mother worked hard in the market, he and four or five of the other children spent a lot of time with his “Abuelita Mami,” his grandmother.

“**She loved to knit** and was a great storyteller. She had a big bed. We would all sit on it, and she would tell us great stories,” Fr. Miguel said.

Later, when he was studying the Bible at the seminary, he realized that most of the stories she told were Bible stories.

At the age of 11, he told his mother that he wanted to be a priest, but neither of them really knew what he would have to do to make that happen.

She took him to the parish priest—an imposing man—and asked what he would need to do. They learned that one thing would be the priest’s recommendation for him to go to seminary.

He told them: “Right now, you are too young. In two years, when you are old enough to enter high school, you can enter the seminary, but I don’t know you and I will need to know you to write a recommendation.”

After that, Father Miguel remembers that he and his mother began to go to the 6 a.m. Sunday



Father Miguel Mejía serves Our Lady of Fatima.

Mass in the Church and sit in the front row where Father would be sure to see them. They went to the early Mass so his mother would be able to go to her work at 7 a.m. in a local street market.

Two years later, when he and his mother came back to the pastor to ask for the recommendation, the pastor replied, “But I don’t know you.”

This time they asked, “How can you say you don’t know us? Every Sunday for two years we have been sitting in front of you at the 6 a.m. Mass?”

With that, he relented and wrote the recommendation. So young Miguel began his journey to become a priest.

Miguel entered the seminary in Mexico as a first-year high school student, one of the youngest to enter—along with about 50 other young men.

“Twelve years later, only six of us stayed and were ordained. Of these, three are in the States. One of them is a Franciscan here in Spokane. Another passed away just before COVID. One left the priesthood and is a teacher in a university. Father José Millán, also a priest in Spokane, was from our same seminary although in a different class.”

How did Father Miguel become a priest serving Catholics in Spokane?

It happened through the generosity of Father Kevin Codd when he was a pastor in the Spokane

Diocese serving in Brewster. English at a local community college before moving to Spokane, attending Bishop White Seminary, and completing his college education at Gonzaga University.

In 1996, Bishop William Skylstad sent him to Louvain, Belgium, to study theology, following in footsteps of other priests from the Spokane Diocese. He was then ordained for the Spokane Diocese in August 2000.

Among the blessings of his journey in becoming a priest and since, Fr. Miguel counts the opportunities he has had to meet a Pope three different times.

Before his ordination, while at Louvain, he had an audience with Pope John Paul II in Rome. Then, in the late 1990s at Christmas, he and José Millán, both deacons and continuing their studies at Louvain, traveled to Rome together for the holidays.

They were invited into Pope John Paul’s private apartment and chapel with about 25 others. The Pope was already there praying when they arrived. Because of his severe Parkinson’s, the two deacons were asked to assist him at the altar as he celebrated the Mass.

After his ordination and more recently, he traveled in Rome with a bishop friend who invited him to meet Pope Francis. They went to where the Pope lived. Fr. Miguel met him and conversed in Spanish because the Pope is from Argentina.

“We had a short conversation, and he asked me why I, as a Mexican, was in the United States. I told him about my ministry in the Spokane diocese at Our Lady of Fatima parish,” Fr. Miguel said.

Fr. Miguel serves the people of Spokane in many ways.

Besides being the pastor of a parish with a school and working

as the Catholic director of prison ministries, he is also involved in the Spanish-speaking cursillo movement in the Tri-Cities area, helping lay men and women develop an active Christian faith.

In addition to serving on the Catholic Charities Board, Fr. Miguel volunteers at the House of Charities main desk and sometimes has led funerals and prayer services for homeless people.

“Most of the time, I just have coffee and talk with homeless people there. I try to be present with them,” he said.

Two aspects of his prison ministry are 1) responding to the spiritual needs of the prisoners and 2) working with families of the inmates.

“Often inmates ask me to visit their families and make sure they are fine,” he said. “Once I contact the families, I try to help them as much as possible and keep in regular contact with them.”

“What gives me most joy in my ministry is being a part of the school. I like the way our parish is laid out because as I go between the office and the church I can see the children in the school three times every day,” he said.

Serving as a crossing guard, volunteering during lunch and being present at the end of the school day, he cherishes the daily reminders of the purpose behind his ministry.

“They know if they ever need me, I am there for them,” he said.

In Metepec, as the 11-year-old boy who wanted to be a priest, Fr. Miguel certainly couldn’t have predicted how his life would have developed.

“Now,” he said, “I have been in Spokane more than 20 years, and this is my home. I can’t imagine serving God anywhere else.”

For information, email mmejia@dioceseofspokane.org.

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St. Francis sister has served in advocacy roles during 16 years in Spokane

Sr. Pat Millen, OSF, who came to Spokane in 2010 and served six years as executive director of St. Joseph Family Center, a Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia program, is relocating to Pennsylvania in March to work with the Chester Community Coalition, which provides emotional support for children suffering from homelessness and from trauma related to violence.

Since 2016, Sr. Pat has had two part-time ministries along with a full schedule of volunteer commitments addressing homelessness, environment, immigration and advocacy.

First, as a local Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) guardian ad litem, she has been working with six children. Currently she is working with two children who are near to being adopted. She attends virtual hearings with them and will continue to work with them after she relocates.

Second, with her national community, she is Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) coordinator. JPIC prepares corporate stands for the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia to adopt on issues such as the environment, immigration, racism, gun violence and human trafficking.

She has been involved with several local and regional ministries.

Advocacy is central to Sr. Pat's commitment. At St. Aloysius Parish, which she has attended since coming to Spokane, she has been on the immigration and the care for creation committees.

She has also participated in local outlets for advocacy such as the Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience (FLLC) group and as recent chair of the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference Planning Committee.

"It is a blessing to work with people of other denominations to make a difference on issues that affect everyone. We are one church with one faith and one God," she said.

Sr. Pat signed several letters to the editor written by FLLC and published in the Spokesman-Review.

"Sometimes at Mass at St. Aloysius, someone expressed gratitude that I signed a letter. One recently told me, 'It's good to see a Catholic voice among those who are speaking out,'" she said.

"I tried to be active here," she said.

The Chester Community Coalition, where Sr. Pat will serve, is funded by Peace Health



Sister Pat Millen OSF moves to Pennsylvania.

Hospital. The program addresses gun and other violence, assisting not only families of those who are killed but also neighborhoods and families of the killers who have been sent to jail and have had their lives disrupted.

The Sisters of St. Francis is involved with Catholic Health in anti-bias ministry, addressing spirituality by building relationships in Chester.

When Sr. Pat came to Spokane, there were five Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia here. Sr. Joanne Clavel continues in community ministry. Sr. Patricia Novak is staff administrator, spiritual director and retreat leader at St. Charles Parish. Sr. Elaine Thaden is now retired and living in the OSF retirement center in Aston, Pa. The late Sr. Florence Roch ran Kairos House, a spiritual retreat center, until her death in December.

Sisters in their congregation, like those in other congregations serving in Spokane, are retiring, moving and dying.

"There are fewer sisters in the region overall," she said. "In the 1890s, sisters first came to Spokane. We started St. Joseph's as an orphanage. It later was a children's home, then a foster care program and, in the 1970s, it became a counseling and spirituality center."

The orphanage was torn down, leaving the administration building and five houses, used for children's foster homes, with one foster parent for 10 to 12 children. Sr. Pat's involvement with CASA continues that

commitment.

Now Joya Child and Family Development owns the property and has built a new facility for programs with preschool children with disabilities.

Housing and homelessness have been one area of concern for Sr. Pat, who often saw homeless people camped nearby along the river and in Mission Park near St. Joseph Center.

"We have more homelessness because we do not have enough affordable housing," she said.

Sr. Pat has also been involved with other community and national agencies such as Habitat for Humanity of Spokane, the Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, The Fig Tree Board, the Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment, the OSF Facing Racism Task Force and the OSF Care for Creation Committee.

A Franciscan sister in Portland will continue representing the Sisters of St. Francis on the Transitions Board. They have been co-sponsors with Sisters of the Holy Names, Providence Sisters and Dominican Sisters.

A sister from Tacoma will become the OSF representative for the Seattle-based Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center, an advocacy and education ministry sponsored by seven communities.

"Now it's possible for sisters at a distance to take my place because many boards meet and work virtually," Sr. Pat said. "Zoom works well and allows us

to go to more meetings."

Sr. Pat grew up in New Jersey near New York City.

"In high school, I thought about being a sister, but my parents separated when I graduated, so I worked in New York City to help with my younger siblings until I was in my late 20s," she said.

Often spending weekends with the Sisters of St. Francis in Washington D.C., she knew there was more to life than earning more money to have a penthouse.

"I wanted to be of service and help make change," she said.

She went to Mabtown Monastery in Lancaster, Pa., and continued her education with the Sisters of St. Francis in education, religious studies and behavioral science, earning a bachelor's degree at Newnan University. While studying there and for a master's degree in education and guidance counseling at Loyola University of Maryland, she worked as a guidance counselor at a Catholic high school in Baltimore, Md.

After six years there, she spent five years at the Ministry of Caring women's and children's shelter in Wilmington, Del.

In 1995, she went to Catholic Social Services in Anchorage, Alaska, to advocate two years for homeless people, followed by two years at St. Marys, Alaska, with the Native Ministry Training Program for Yupik People to be eucharistic ministers, parish administrators and deacons in an area with no priests.

In 1999, Sr. Pat was an intern with women religious at Mercy House in San Francisco for five months and in Orange County for seven months doing community development to build affordable housing.

"On weekends, I visited Franciscan missions in California," she said.

From 2000 to 2010, she worked with Catholic Community Services in the Archdiocese of Seattle, building Max Hall, a SRO unit in Bremerton for 24 single homeless men and one father with children.

While there, she served on St. Joseph's Family Center's board, so when Sr. Elaine retired as director, Sr. Pat moved to Spokane to become director.

Commenting on the center's closure, she said. "My head said it was needed, but my heart was broken." She pointed out that "the Affordable Health Care Program helps clients, but it did not help providers. We had \$100 in costs but were only reimbursed \$40. When we closed, I knew there was nowhere else low-income people could go for counseling.

"Eighty percent of our clients were low income. We provided counseling for close to 300 people," she said. "Many people we served are not served now."

In Chester, she will start an intentional community in a house with two older and two younger sisters on social service ministry.

There, Sr. Pat will be near her siblings, nieces and nephews.

"Over the years, the Sisters of St. Francis have declined as fewer young women join," she said. "We have moved from being a conservative to a progressive congregation, as we have shifted our focus from health care and education to social services, working with homeless people, immigrants, racism and jail ministry."

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Jenny Slagle's narrative work runs through her many involvements

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Jenny Slagle's narrative work, Indigenous activism, restaurant entrepreneurship and community support intersect in her roles as Spokane Public Schools board vice president, Indigenous Eats family business owner, and full-time program officer at Inatai Foundation.

"We need allyship in any community, but especially the Native community, because we are often overlooked," said Jenny.

"A phrase that often arises in Indigenous philanthropy and nonprofit work is seventh-generation thinking. It's a philosophy I believe in. Growing up on the Yakama reservation, I heard my elders tell of my ancestors being forward thinking," she said.

"Now that terminology is common, so we can express what has felt natural and common to me."

Elders advise people to "know the impact of what we are doing today and be prepared for future generations," she explained. "That has influenced my life, guiding me to serve in my different capacities."

From that base, Jenny earned an associate degree in business at Bellevue College in 2014, she completed a bachelor's degree in business with a focus on IT management from the online Western Governors University in 2018.

She was administrative manager for the Kalispel Tribe Gaming Agency from 2000 to 2015 and communications manager for the NATIVE Project from 2015 to 2017. Then she started as director of tribal relations for Better Health Together in 2017.

"In all those roles, I have been involved in Native narrative work for a long time. My career is about centering tribes and tribal organizations," she said.

"The purpose of Native narrative work or narrative work in any community is to call out negative stereotypes and enable communication that replaces stereotypes with factual, historically correct information," Jenny explained.

In all she does, she emphasizes that Native Americans are not just people of the past, not just a history subject.

"We are here. We are modern Native people. The restaurants we started are part of that work to build positive narratives about Native people here in Spokane specifically," Jenny said.

Spokane County has about 24,000 self-identified Native people, according to the last census. There are more than 300 different tribes from across the U.S. represented here. Between Minneapolis and Seattle, Spo-



Jenny Slagle Photo by John Lok

kane has one of the largest urban Indian populations.

"I am proud to say, 'I'm from the Yakama Rez.' I never intended to move away from the Yakama reservation. I loved it there. It was the community that raised me, and where all my family lived but, because I've been here since 2000, I now feel I represent the urban Native experience here," she said.

Jenny's family encompasses different experiences and narratives.

She raised her children in Spokane on the South Hill, so they know only what it's like to be urban Natives.

Her mother was raised Catholic, the youngest of four children. Her three older siblings were baptized.

Jenny grew up in her father's family in the Toppenish and Rock Creek longhouses, where they had feasts and Sunday services in the Washat Seven Drums religion.

"My spirituality comes from that experience," she said.

"I can't speak the language. I wasn't taught it at home, because my mother is Northern Arapaho and my dad is Yakama, but I grew up hearing phrases and words here and there," said Jenny. "I took some Yakama language classes at the tribal school in Toppenish, but I never became fluent enough to have a conversation. I haven't been around it since moving here."

For Jenny, food can bring different cultures together.

Many conversations about who modern Native people are start with food. That led her and her husband, Andrew, to start Indigenous Eats.

Andrew is a leader in his own right with a bachelor's degree in business administration. His career for 16 years was in overseeing Indian Gaming compliance and in surveillance departments

for the Kalispel Tribe.

Before moving to Spokane, he worked with the Yakama Nation Gaming Commission and the Toppenish Police Department.

Now Andrew uses his regulatory background to ensure Indigenous Eats follows state and local agency requirements for food safety and organizational processes.

"Food is a great conversation starter. What is Native American comfort food? It's food I grew up eating at family and community gatherings, and powwows. It is special food we don't eat every day," she said.

Indigenous Eats employees encounter that often in interactions with customers, who ask, "What's fry bread?"

Maybe they know what it is but haven't had it in a while, or they experienced it in the South or lived close to other tribes, she said.

"We hear different nostalgic stories about fry bread and bison. People appreciate that we also offer bison," said Jenny, adding the fry bread is her mother's recipe.

Employees are drawn to work at Indigenous Eats because most of the 12 part-time and full-time employees are Native and want to work in a Native-owned business, specifically with Native food they can relate to. Her two children are among the employees.

"We have not had a problem finding employees. We start them full-time and are working to offer medical benefits and a livable wage," Jenny said.

Customers tip well because people are generous after they

experience the food, atmosphere, employees and service at the Boone location near Gonzaga University.

With success at the Boone location, they recently opened a second location in the food court at River Park Square.

On the Spokane Public School Board, Jenny sees strides in diversity, equity and inclusion. When she was elected in 2019, the community was seeking diverse members, and is now the most diverse it has been historically.

"That's where it starts. If we talk about diversity and equity, we have to start at the top. We have to be sure the people who are having discussions and making decisions have a lived experience, so they know the issues," Jenny said. "If we are talking about kids in poverty or dealing with housing or food insecurity, many of us on the board have lived those experiences."

Her experience as a student of color in public schools differs from what her children have experienced on the South Hill, attending Adams Elementary, Chase Middle School and Ferris High School. She brings to the school board awareness of those experiences as well as her early struggles as a mother of color navigating South Hill schools.

Since October 2022, Jenny has served as program officer with the Inatai Foundation—formerly Group Health Foundation.

Inatai shifted its mission and is developing a 50-year vision to center on equity and racial justice. It works with organizations and communities to build community power and systems change.

"That aligns with my role on the school board, my narrative work and Indigenous entrepreneurship," she said.

The narrative work carries over into the community with her efforts to connect Native professionals so "we can provide not only a consolidated voice, but also insight and a voice for urban Native people who might not be from a tribe in the immediate region," said Jenny.

A Native business leaders' network meets monthly at Indigenous Eats at 829 E. Boone. This group for Native entrepreneurs and professionals welcomes young Native persons to come for mentoring and community.

"We want to expand beyond established professionals and entrepreneurs, because people are at different phases of their careers," said Jenny.

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Is the primary being called by the media before most votes are taken?

We just started the primary season, and it seems media pundits are enamored with their ability to predict election outcomes before people vote. When they cite polls, we need to be wary. Who was asked what questions when and in what setting?

When my classes in political science made it seem to be more about gamesmanship and popularity than about the issues people face, I opted out of that minor.

It's fascinating as pundits say the election issue this year is the bad economy, when the stock markets reached two record highs, inflation is lowering, gas prices are dropping, unemployment is down, and jobs are up. Recently one pundit pronounced the economy "bad" because people "feel uneasy"—while others point to consumer spending being up. Are we being manipulated by opinions presented as facts?

Are we being enticed to vote for a person media wants? Where is objectivity? The journalism I learned was about granting equal time for candidates. Count it in newscasts as media rush to cover and quote outrageous things one candidate says and briefly sum up what the other one reports about what he's doing.

Such election coverage does not meet criteria of being unbiased. Some in media

rush to the raucous to win ratings, readers and profits. Is it working? Do we click on the bait of those stories? Are some media prematurely ending the primary and cutting out voices? Are they inviting a dictatorship that may censor them?

Are faith communities seeing these dynamics? Will we speak and act to help the blind see, deaf hear and voiceless speak?

Mary Stamp - Editor

Citizenship requires more than being spectators of charismatic leaders

Cameron Conner has moved to England with his year-long Watson Fellowship examining community organizing.

What if we told stories where citizenship wasn't relegated to a spectator sport?

What if we stop reinforcing the narrative that only charismatic, seemingly superhuman individuals change history and start seeing the world through stories that shine the spotlight back where it belongs: on communities of clever, persistent and well-organized people?

My recent encounter with a man from the National Health Services (NHS) in England makes the point.

The buzz of conversations grew as 500 people turned from the front of the auditorium at King's College London to face one another. A blond man in a blue-striped button-up shirt next to me was a NHS employee and a colleague of the well-dressed man who had just been on stage delivering a series of commitments.

In front of community leaders from Southeast London, he had pledged, as the CEO of the NHS for South London, to fulfill two commitments: 1) pay all employees of the South London NHS a living wage (£4 per hour above the city's minimum wage) and 2) create a pathway

to dismiss the high fees that undocumented residents were being charged for health care.

These milestone commitments and others made that night were the culmination of a long and hard-fought campaign led by the South London chapter of England's largest community organizing network, Citizens UK.

Most of the people in the room had waged the campaign: parents and teachers from Oliver Goldsmith's Primary School, pastors and parishioners from Corpus Christi Catholic Church, members of the Lewisham Mosque, Bromley Football Club, students from King's College London, and dozens of other community institutions.

Among the leaders was a small delegation of NHS workers who would carry out the pledges, including the man next to me.

We introduced ourselves. I asked how he felt about the evening so far. Instead of the energetic response I expected, his answer was prefaced with a lengthy exhale that filled the silence with a thoughtful pause.

"I've worked in the NHS for 20 years," he said, "and it feels good to see things get done. It makes me realize that we don't have all the answers. Sometimes the best

solution is to just help people solve their own problems."

There was a note of frustration in his answer, as if he was grappling with the tension between the clear pride in what his organization was doing, and discouragement that after 20 years he had failed to deliver it himself.

He was impressed, but at a loss for words, as if he had just seen something he hadn't thought possible. This stuck with me. When walking home from the bus stop to my flat in West London, I realized that what caught my attention was the surprise in his voice.

This was the same reaction I'd had when seeing the results of neighborhood organizing in Nou Barris, Barcelona.

It was the same surprise I had seen on faces of police chiefs when 270 community members in Dallas demanded improved safety protocols against gang violence.

The realization finally put words to a question that had been growing in my mind since I left Dallas and six months ago: "Why are we so surprised?"

As Jane McAlevey, a national leader in the U.S. labor movement puts it: "We have a narrative in our head that people can't win change. That is a shame, be-

cause people win things all the time."

As the cheers of a packed auditorium demonstrated that night in King's College, people are more than capable of fighting and winning their own battles if they are smart about it. These Londoners had just won better healthcare, better wages and public recognition from Britain's largest public sector employer.

We don't hear these stories often. Instead, we hear that change is made by highly motivated and talented individuals. We are taught to wait for superheroes or saviors—the right politician to fight for our values, a philanthropist to fund a silver-bullet social program, the new CEO to build a factory in our community.

If these are the stories we tell, is it any wonder we react with surprise when people do something themselves and demand sovereignty instead of salvation?

Imagine if we told stories about the Dallas residents who re-wrote the city's housing codes to take down the city's slum lords, about allied communities in Central California building a job-training program to make high-paying work accessible for their families and about 500 community leaders in Southeast London going toe-to-toe with the NHS.



Photo of MLK March courtesy of Gen Heywood

Human rights voices challenge Israel's war, peace requires listening

Many credible voices like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations claim Israel's War on Gaza is a war of ethnic cleansing. Maybe a stronger word like "genocide" might be closer to the truth.

In a territory of more than two million people, more than 26,000 Gazans are dead—the majority children and women—and almost all of them non-combatants.

That number is more than 20 times the number of Israelis killed on Oct. 7. Eighty-five percent of Gazans are internally displaced—homeless—while Israel makes the Gazan territory physically uninhabitable.

While the destruction of the Gaza strip continues, the Israeli government is soliciting other nations, mostly in Africa, South America and the Middle East, to take in Palestinians from their homeland.

While many Israelis may support forced removal of Palestinians, I am deeply grateful for the strong, moral Jewish voices, as well as other voices—faith-based or secular. These voices cry out for the world to stand against this moral travesty.

As U.S. citizens, we have to acknowledge that our own nation was founded on the grotesque practice of destruction and removal of whole peoples—for which we have yet to make restitution—but that does not give us a pass from speaking on what is happening now.

Do we just stand with our internal angst and say to ourselves, "How tragic! Such is the world!?" It is always true that "silence is complicity."

Let us speak and act in whatever capacity we can and to those we know. Let us write our governmental representatives, boycott Israeli products, align with other moral

voices, especially those coming from our Jewish and Palestinian brothers and sisters.

With each passing day, the genocide continues. It is time for all sides to lay aside the weapons of war and talk of lasting peace.

For that to happen, there must be 1) a ceasefire, 2) release of 100 plus Israeli hostages and 1,100 Palestinians held in Israeli jails without charge, and 3) a way to have talks—truth and reconciliation style—that lead to a contextualized understanding of the collective traumas which are at the root of Middle Eastern violence. Neither the brutal attacks from Hamas on Oct. 7, nor the terrible reaction from Israel happened in a vacuum.

There needs to be a broad national effort for deep listening and truth-telling whereby the deep and generational pain from all sides is heard and understood. The truth and reconciliation work done decades ago in South Africa is a model of what can happen.

Out of such listening, there might then be hope for a strategy to move forward, crafted under the biblical notion that everyone deserves to "live under their own vine and fig tree, in peace and unafraid."

First, the dropping of bombs and the firing of missiles must end.

As a person of faith, I know that a world beyond fear and vengeance is possible. Indeed, it is the only world worth living for.

Gary Jewell - Pastor of the Community Congregational United Church of Christ, Pullman

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recently posted its draft Social Statement on Civic Life and Faith at

<https://www.elca.org/civicsandfaith>.

The introduction begins, "Daily we are to pray as Jesus taught: 'Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.' These words teach us that God's will seeks the well-being of creation and all aspects of human life, including civil society (Micah 6:8) and the blessing of the gospel to join God's work in society..." I encourage you to read the draft and comment. The Civic Life and Faith study is also still available.

We need to stay informed about the state legislatures, our local city councils and school boards, and planning and zoning commissions. Write emails expressing why your faith compels you to speak for those whose voices are hushed or silenced.

Pray for public servants, those in your congregation, those you agree with and those you disagree with. Pray for your own neighborhood.

We are called to listen. Listening is crucial to both prayer and advocacy. It is a huge part of Christian discipleship, to listen—to the Word of God through scripture, to neighbors and strangers and friends, to the stirrings in our own souls, to other followers of Jesus, to people who society tries to mute, and to the Holy Spirit.

German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together* on listening, "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to God's Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that God not only gives us God's Word but also lends us an ear."

God be with you as you pray, advo-

cate, and listen in this time. Full article at <https://nwimsynod.org/blog/2024110/advocacy-and-prayer>.

Bishop Meggan Manlove - Northwest Intermountain Synod - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

I've left a porch light on, though, these last few nights. Through the evening hours, when the Christmas lights would have been on, the porch light still shines out into the dark cold night. One, it's a practicality, in case a late delivery comes, to light the way to our porch. I leave it on, though, to say to the world—or maybe to just myself—the light isn't out. Yes, we've moved on from the holiday events and decorating. Yes, the lights might be coming down, but the light we celebrate isn't dimmed.

What we believe is the light of God shining into this world is still as bright as ever, despite any hardships or challenges this world knows. While we might have moved on from iced cookies, eggnog glasses and extravagantly lit homes, the light that we celebrated on Christmas Eve when we all held candles aloft is still shining.

So, I leave the porch light on as a reminder, if only to me, that the light is still on. Let's encourage each other to keep carrying the light, even well after Christmas.

Jason Jones - Country Homes Christian

Letter to the Editor

We loved your editorial reflection, "We are already multicultural." Thanks for all your work with The Fig Tree, a true gift to all the communities that are served and are serving others.

Jim and Maureen Everman - Sponsors

Calendar of Events

Submit events to development@thefigtree.org
Phone area code is (509) unless otherwise listed

- Feb 1** • **The Lowdown on Masterworks 6:** A Message to the Stars, concert preview, music director James Lowe, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, 12 p.m., 456-3931
- **Spokane Black Stories Symposium,** A Celebration of the Relaunch of The Black Lens newspaper, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7 p.m., 313-4776
- Feb 2** • **The Black Lens Relaunch Party,** Steam Plant, 159 S. Lincoln, 6 to 8 p.m., rsvp: https://bit.ly/relaunch_blacklensnews
- **Praise and Worship, Pastor Joe Wittwer,** "Forgive Everyone Always," Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., ihrc.net
- Feb 3, 4** • **Spokane Jewish Film Festival,** Gonzaga Graduate School of Business, 1025 N. Astor, 7 p.m., sajfs.org/our-programs/sjcff/
- Feb 4** • **Birth Party for Rosa Parks,** Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, Veradale United Church of Christ, 611 N. Progress, 1 to 2:30 p.m., 926-7173
- **Black History Month: Creating an Environment** Where Black People Can Flourish and Thrive, Idaho Black Community Alliance, Trish Walker and Shari Baber, The Kenworth, 508 S. Main, Moscow, 7 to 9 p.m., 208-882-4127
- Feb 4, 11, 18** • **"Experience Palestine, A Film Festival,"** Inland NW Coalition for the Liberation of Palestine, 4th - "5 Broken Cameras," 11th - "AL Helm," "MLK in Palestine," 18th - "Imprisoning a Generation," Unitarian Universalist Church, 4340 Whistalks Way, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Feb 4, 11, 18, 25** • **Spokane Community Against Racism** Coffee, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, 9 a.m., scarspokane.org
- Feb 5** • **"Sharing Stories: Empowering People,"** Marijke Fakasiieiki, The Fig Tree Story, Hillyard Library, 4110 N. Cook, 5:30 p.m., 535-4112
- Feb 6** • **The Lived Experience, Poetry Workshop,** Stephen Plitters for Black History Month, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit Pkwy, 5 to 7 p.m., 279-0299
- **The Sound of [Black] Music,** Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7:30 p.m., mwpac@gonzaga.edu
- Feb 7, 8** • **Homebuyers Education Seminar,** SNAP and WA State Housing Finance Commission, Moran Prairie Library, 6004 S. Regal, 6 to 8:30 p.m., 893-8340
- Feb 7, 14, 21, 28** • **Spokane Community Against Racism** Meeting, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, 12 noon, scarspokane.org
- Feb 8** • **Fr. Robert Spitzer, S.J.,** "Increasing Openness to Transcendent Intelligence in Contemporary Big Bang Cosmology," Gonzaga Faith and Reason Institute Lecture, Woldson Performing Arts Center, Gonzaga, 7 to 8:30 p.m., faithandreason@gonzaga.edu
- Feb 8, 22** • **Showing Up for Racial Justice,** Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS), Zoom, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., slichty@pjals.org
- Feb 8, 15, 22, 29** • **Leadership Classes,** Valleyfest, Washington Trust Bank, 407 N. Sullivan, 4 p.m.
- Feb 9, 10-16** • **Spokane International Film Festival,** Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, Fri, 7 to 10 p.m., 227-7404
- Feb 10** **Freeing the Wounded Heart,** Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 944-6235, wildwalkspirit@gmail.com
- **Memoir: Writing a Story** of Personal Transformation, Kim Morgan, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 208-769-2315
- **KuroNekoCon Celestial Masquerade,** Doubletree, 322 N Spokane Falls Ct., 3 to 10 p.m., info@kuronekocon.com, kuronekocon.com
- **Mending Wings Ministry from Yakima,** "Dancing Our Prayers, Covenant United Methodist Church, 15515 N. Gleneden, 5:30 p.m., 466-1768, info@covenantmethodist.org
- **Leadership Lights the Way Gala,** Leadership Spokane, Northern Quest Resort & Casino, 100 N. Hanford, Airway Heights, 6 p.m.
- **Terry Buffington Foundation 2nd Annual Black History & Southern Dinner Fundraiser,** Gladish Cultural Community and Cultural Arts Center, 115 NW State, Pullman, 7 to 10 p.m., 432-3077, terrybuffingtonfoundation.org
- Feb 11** • **Death Café,** Spokane Public Library, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., Rubicon's Edge Consulting with Samantha Potter, 425-3904
- **Challenging Stereotype:** Reworking Aunt Jemima, African American Artists who created new narratives for Aunt Jemima, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, 2 to 3 p.m., 456-3931
- Feb 12** • **Spring Flannery Lecture** in Catholic Theology, Guadalupe, Mestizaje and Las Castas with Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Religious Studies, Cataldo Hall, Gonzaga, 4:30 to 6 p.m., lewis4@gonzaga.edu
- Feb 13** • **Immaculate Heart Retreat Center Women's Auxiliary** Meeting, IHRC, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., ihrc.net
- **Artificial Intelligence and the Common Good,** Core of the College Panel, Cataldo, Gonzaga, 4:30 p.m.
- **Peace and Justice Action Committee,** Zoom, 5:30 p.m., ucarter@pjals.org
- **People of the Movement:** Oral Storytelling through Voice, Song & Gesture, learn about the civil rights movement with Sara Lee Williams, Moran Prairie Library, 6004 S. Regal, 6:30 p.m., 893-8340
- **Fat Tuesday Jazz Mass,** Dan Keberle with The Jazz Prophets and Chancel Choir, Speaker Daniel White of Whitworth Presbyterian, at St. Mark's lutheran, 24th and Grand, 7 p.m., 747-6677
- Feb 13, 20, 27** • **Winter Garden Fun,** Coeur d'Alene Public Library, for ages 6 to 12, 4 to 5 p.m.,
- Feb 14** • **Silent Day of Prayer:** The Holy Shroud of Turin – Sole Witness to the Paschal Mystery with Deacon Borda, IHRC, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net
- **Montana V. Held:** Montana Youth Use the Courts to Fight for a Livable Climate, Barbara Chillott and Melissa Hornbein, Hemmingson Center, Gonzaga, 702 E. Desmet, 5 p.m., 313-6942
- **General Meeting, American Italian Club,** Sons and Daughters of Italy, 330 E. Boone, 6 p.m.
- **Tango & Tapas:** Valentine's Day with the Spokane Symphony, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7 p.m., 624-1200
- Feb 16** • **Weekend Retreat:** "Moving Towards God with St. Ignatius of Loyola," Fr. Michael Maher, S.J., IHRC, 6 p.m. to 1 p.m., ihrc.net
- Feb 16, 17** • **Pacific Northwest Ballet,** Gonzaga Dance Program, Myrtle Woodson Performing Arts Center, Gonzaga, 7:30 p.m.
- Feb 17** • **Kites for Kids,** The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, INW Coalition for the Liberation of Palestine, 10 a.m. to noon
- **Saturday with the Symphony:** A Children's Program, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, Children 3+ 11 a.m.
- **Viva Vino Gala,** Nuestras Raices Centro Comunitario, Riverside Place, 1110 W. Riverside, 6 to 11 p.m., hbpaofspokane.org
- Feb 17, 18** • **Spokane Public Radio Record Sale,** Centerplace Regional Event Center, 17th-9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 18th-11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 720-5200, spokanepublicradio.org
- Feb 18** • **Lunar New Year Celebration,** Spokane Chinese Association, The Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox, 4 to 5:30 p.m., 720-8825, SpokaneCA@gmail.com, spokanechinese.org
- Feb 20** • **Covenant of the Salmon People,** Nez Plerce Tribe documentary about protecting the Chinook salmon, Hemmingson Center, Gonzaga, 702 E. Desmet, 6 p.m., 414-6942
- **World Cooking: Puerto Rican Food,** Chef Wilma Cartagena of Feast World Kitchen, Spokane County Library District, online, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., scl.d.org
- Feb 21** • **Free Legal Clinic Latinos En Spokane,** 1502 N. Monroe, 5 to 7 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- **"Discourses of Complicit Denial** and their Relationship to Gender-based Violence in Puerto Rico," Noralis Rodriguez-Coss, Humanities Building, 1002 N. Astor, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., gonzaga.edu/events
- **Civic Theatre Fundraiser,** "Amadeus," Mission Community Outreach, Spokane Civic Theatre, 1020 N. Howard, 6 p.m.
- **NAACP General Membership Meeting,** in person and virtual, 7 p.m., spokanenaacp@gmail.com
- Feb 22** • **Here in a Homemade Forest,** Michael Holoman and Jacy SoHappy on Indigenous weaving and beading in exhibition at Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, WSU, 1535 NE Wilson, Pullman, 12 to 1 p.m., 335-1910
- **People of the Movement:** "Oral Storytelling through Voice, Song & Gesture, History of the Civil Rights Movement," Sara Lee Williams, Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., 893-8400
- Feb 23** • **Taste of Life,** Hospice of Spokane Fundraising Event, Historic Davenport, 807 W. Sprague, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.
- **Healing Harmonies,** concert for Cancer Care NW Foundation, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m.
- Feb 23, 24, Mar 1, 2** • **Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,** Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, Fri - 7 to 9 p.m., Sat - 3 to 5 p.m., 7 to 9 p.m., 487-6540
- Feb 24** • **Spokane Regional ESL Conference,** Hemmingson, Gonzaga, all day, gonzaga.edu/events
- **"Homebuyer Education Seminar,"** SNAP and WA State Housing Finance Commission, Argonne Library, 4322 N. Argonne, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 893-8200
- **El Mercado, A.M. Cannon Park,** 1920 W. Maxwell, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- **African American Quilt History:** Folk Art to Modern Art & Everything in Between, with Carolyn Mazoomi, online, 3 to 4 p.m., scl.d.org
- **Spokane's Lunar New Year Festival,** Spokane United We Stand, Exhibit Hall A, Spokane Convention Center, 344 N. Spokane Falls, 1 p.m., 928-9664, spokaneunitedwestand.org
- **Duke Ellington: From Swing to Sacred,** Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, Gonzaga University, 7:30 to 9 p.m., Gonzaga.edu/events
- Feb 25** • **Taize Evening Prayer,** IHRC, 6:30 p.m., ihrc.net
- Feb 28** • **Low-Income Tax Clinic,** Gonzaga Law School, Spokane Public Library, 906 W. Main, 1 to 5 p.m. 444-5300, telref@spokanelibrary.org,
- **From Spokane to Dubai:** Field Notes from COP 28, Hemmingson Auditorium, Gonzaga, 6 p.m., Bernard-hoverstad@gonzaga.edu, gonzaga.edu/events
- Feb 29** • **Fig Tree Meetings,** Zoom, noon, development, 1-2 board, 535-4112
- **Visiting Writers,** Jeff Rutherford, A Perfect Day for Caribou, Hemmingson Auditorium, Gonzaga, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., Gonzaga.edu/events
- Mar 1-3** • **Engaged Encounter Weekend Retreat,** IHRC, 7 p.m. to 12 p.m., spokane.engagedencounter.com/reservations
- Mar 8, 13** • **Fig Tree Spring Benefits,** see page 3
- To Sept 8** • **Expo '74 Films from the Vault,** Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, T-S, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 456-3931
- Thursdays** • **Taizé Prayer** on Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartletts@gonzaga.edu

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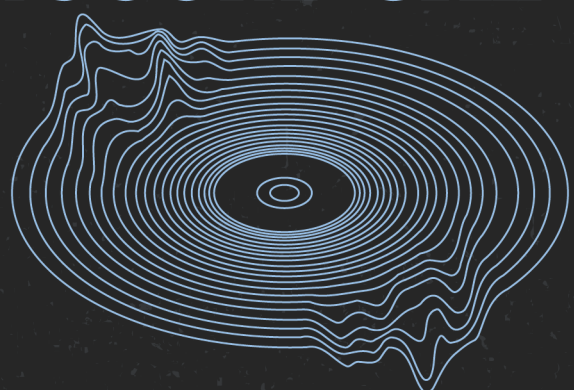
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Fig Tree webmaster Lorna Kropp connects tech skills with faith

By Mary Stamp

Fig Tree webmaster Lorna Kropp appreciates the opportunity and challenge of keeping up with web technology and connecting it with her faith outreach.

As an early adopter of technology, self-taught in coding and software, she finds it's an adventure to be challenged by emerging technology.

This work connects with her long-time education and faith commitment.

Fig Tree editor Mary Stamp saw the need to develop a website and began, also self-taught, publishing summaries of articles on a Netscape website.

In the June 2001 issue, she announced that there were summaries of stories and color photos online in a folder on a Quest users site. It included connections to congregations and agencies.

In November 2001, The Fig Tree established its domain name, thefigtree.org.

The goal of the initial website was to introduce people to the publication by presenting summaries of articles to interest people in reading the print edition.

Mary worked the next few years with an Interactive Website Team that included Mark Alfino, Steve Blewett, Jim CastroLang, Duane Nightingale, Raymond Reyes and Wesley Strait, discussing the mission, content and tech options for a website.

Today's website includes content back to 2004.

Mary began consulting with Lorna, who she knew through the United Church of Christ (UCC).

Lorna, as a founding parent for Discovery School in 1983 and starting as a volunteer technology teacher, built a full-time library/technology program for the school. She taught students and collaborated with faculty to integrate library/technology skills into their teaching until retiring in 2008. After that, she transferred some of those skills to learning a new web platform and helped Mary by taking on the web design for The Fig Tree.

Learning html code, Lorna started designing websites in 1999. She developed Discovery School's web presence and volunteered to help Westminster Congregational UCC and the Pacific Northwest UCC Conference develop websites.

In fall 2008, Lorna started working one day a week with The Fig Tree.

"I believe in ecumenism and wanted to keep learning about technology as the web designer," said Lorna.

The Fig Tree began using Dreamweaver as the website design software. Over the years it has offered many upgrades. Lorna does research, tests and proposes tools, and teaches Mary, who helps with updates,



Lorna Kropp offers new web design elements for 40th.

designs, ideas and corrections.

"The Fig Tree website has many stories of people of all walks of life acting out of their faith," Lorna said.

Because technology advances keep moving at such speed, she has to keep up with new coding and style changes—like "responsive" pages that change size to fit the screen—so the stories and directory are accessible regardless of the screen size a reader has.

Since she began, Lorna has kept a spiral notebook in which she has recorded what she has done every week.

For example, she opened the notebook and found that on April 28, 2023, she did research on Google's new approach to tracking website visits.

On first Thursdays, Lorna transforms the text of articles and photos into web pages, and

updates ads and promotional graphics for the website. Mary prepares a folder with elements of the current issue.

On second Thursdays, Lorna sends emails to all of those featured in the stories and their agencies, to encourage them to "share" the articles with others. She also loads the pages affected by template changes.

Lorna noted that The Fig Tree website has 19 years of 10 issues per year with about 12 articles each month. She estimates there are 2,280 stories available.

On third Thursdays, she may work with interns or on directory pages. Interns are assigned projects to improve the website. Last spring, Rawan Kassim developed a feature to introduce elements of peace/justice and solutions journalism.

Mary and Lorna have worked

since fall with Kai Teoh, a web designer who is volunteering, to refine the "mission" page with six photos and phrases describing The Fig Tree's approach to journalism. The words and graphics will be changed periodically.

Kai has also designed layout changes for the history, programs, staff and leaders pages under "About" in the menu.

On fourth Thursdays, Lorna explores new ideas on format or does updating on the Resource Directory web version.

"I am constantly trying to find and set up new elements on the pages," she said.

There are also regular redesigns for the donate page with changing events each season—the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference, the Spring Benefit Events, the Fall Festival of Sharing and Year-End Giving.

"Each update in the Dreamweaver software brings new elements and quirks," Lorna commented.

Not only does she need to keep up with technology, but she also strives to represent The Fig Tree journalistic design styles and nonprofit page design trends.

"My purpose is to create an engaging, eye-catching, informative design that makes the challenges The Fig Tree content expresses accessible to more people," said Lorna.

"Our message is needed in our divided world that seems more cynical than eight years ago," she said. "I'm continually amazed how Mary comes up with five to eight heartwarming stories that need to be shared, and I'm part of helping share them."

Lorna grew up in a Congregational Church in Fort Dodge, Iowa. While studying psychol-

ogy at Iowa State University, she was active in ecumenical campus ministry with the Iowa/Nebraska United Campus Christian Fellowship and the National Student Christian Fellowship Board.

Summer work camps with the American Friends Service Committee in Nashville, New Orleans and Ames introduced her to race relations, civil rights and poverty efforts to improve lives.

After graduating in 1964, Lorna spent two years in volunteer service at a German Evangelical Church young adult program in Stuttgart. Then she served with the American Friends Service Committee in Paris, doing work camps—in Italy, England and at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland.

Lorna returned to earn a master of arts in religion from Yale Divinity School in 1968. In 1970, she married Paul, who also studied at Yale. She worked at a mental health center in Hamden, Conn., with families of developmentally delayed children and adults.

In 1981, the Kropps moved to Spokane, and Lorna became active in education at Westminster UCC and as church school curricula resource person with Pacific Northwest and national UCC.

Making connections and sharing her time and skills to help others and build community are integral to Lorna's faith and way of living. The connections have grown and required a willingness to tackle new skills. In addition to The Fig Tree, Lorna shares her STEM skills with Lego robotics programs, FIRST Lego League and environmental advocacy with the Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge programs.

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

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