

41ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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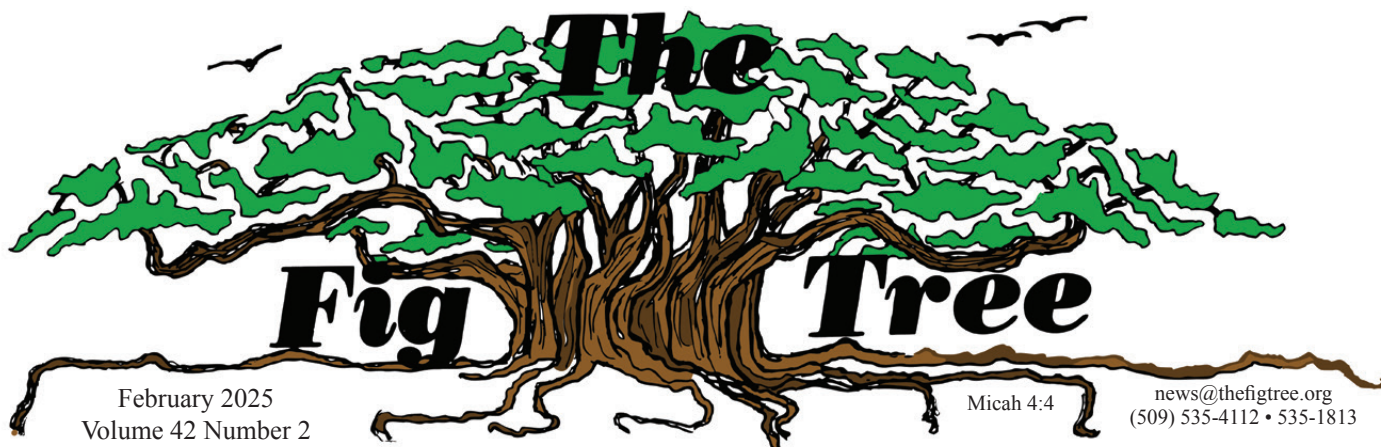
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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Black Lens editor gives youth a voice

By Mary Stamp

In January, April Eberhardt dropped “interim” from the title she had since July 2024. She is now officially editor of The Black Lens newspaper, while continuing the job she has held since August 2017 as college and career counselor at Shadle Park High School.

With the new title, she builds on her roots while attending George Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh, Pa., when she wrote news, features, op eds and more for The New Pittsburgh Courier, a historic black newspaper.

April started subscribing to The Courier again when she began writing for The Black Lens.

In 1995, April graduated from high school, where she met her husband, Eddie. She earned a bachelor’s degree at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1999 with a major in English and a minor in journalism.

After Eddie enlisted in the military, they were first stationed in Grand Forks, N.D., then 11 years at Beale and Edwards Air Force Bases in California—where their three children were born—followed by three years in Spangdahlem Air Force Base in Germany before he was assigned



April Eberhardt is The Black Lens editor.

to Fairchild. He retired two years ago to stay in Spokane.

April also earned a master’s degree in general administration from Central Michigan University in 2006 and a master’s in education in cross-cultural teaching from National University in 2013.

While Eddie was in the military, she taught English at base schools. The couple have two young adult daughters and a 15-year-old son.

April arrived in Spokane in 2017, the year the late Sandy Williams started The Black Lens. Sandy invited April to contribute articles “any time.”

Sandy was “a welcoming light” bringing April into the Spokane community. April began working at Shadle Park, where, on the heels of the pandemic, she helped recruit high school students for the Black Voices Symposium.

The signature event started four years ago under the Northwest Passages umbrella, an off-shoot of The Spokesman-Review in partnership with The Black Lens, under the vision, direction and inspiration of then Spokesman-Review and Black Lens race and equity reporter Amber Dodd.

April began leading workshops
Continued on page 4

FAN’s new executive director always concerned about oppressed people

By Kaye Hult

The new executive director of Faith Action Network (FAN), Joyce del Rosario, recently reflected on her path into and the substance of this position.

“When the opening at FAN came up, it just felt right. It intersected with what I teach, practice and believe,” said Joyce, who has always been about families and folks who are oppressed.

Since starting this position three months ago, she found that many of her family mem-

bers were already involved with FAN. They filled four tables at FAN’s Nov. 17 Annual Dinner in Renton.

FAN is Washington’s state-wide, multifaith, nonprofit through which thousands of people and more than 160 faith communities partner in work for the common good.

FAN seeks to organize people to become “powerful voices of faith and conscience advocating for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.”

That effort includes calling people of faith to communicate with elected officials about social issues and to advocate for a just, sustainable world.

“I’m in learning mode. I love the staff I work with, the volunteers and the board. I am traveling around the state to meet our constituency,” said Joyce during a recent visit in Spokane.

“I’m glad to meet the people who have been doing the work and to see resistance to oppression happening,” she continued. “We have to keep in touch with each other.”

Joyce left college at the University of Washington in 1996, expecting to be a journalist or be involved in communications in some manner.

Along the way communication came to include other skills, such as public speaking related to ministry and nonprofits.

While growing up in Seattle, she and her extended Filipino family were active with United Methodist congregations and Filipino activities through which

Continued on page 6

Fig Tree Benefits explore need to pass on wisdom

“Sharing Wisdom: Connecting the Generations,” the theme for The Fig Tree’s 2025 Benefit events emerges from articles in recent issues.

The Benefit Lunch will have 50 hosts to invite guests to hear speakers and celebrate 41 years of publishing from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, March 8, at the Hemmingson Center Ballroom at Gonzaga University. The presentations will be available on gonzaga.edu/livestream.

Those wishing to join in the Breakfast-Time Benefit from 7:30 to 9 a.m., Wednesday, March 12, will have an opportunity to view a video of the lunch program.

“**We filled the space at Cataldo Hall** last year with guests at 30 tables and already have hosts for nearly 40 tables,” said editor Mary Stamp. “We appreciate the enthusiasm to support our solutions journalism style of stories that share the faith and values of interviewees.”

Four speakers will briefly discuss how The Fig Tree shares wisdom among the generations. Those speakers will be Cameron Conner, Fig Tree columnist who offers reflections in people power; Pingala Dhital, who works with refugee women at Thrive International in Spokane to help them support themselves; Kristine Hoover, chair of Gonzaga’s master’s in leadership studies who helped prepare a documentary on Holocaust survivor Carla Peperzak, and Kassahun Kebede, Eastern Washington University Africana studies professor who started a library in Ethiopia.

In an overview video, eight others will describe the impact of The Fig Tree on their lives, their work and the community.

To host or attend, call 535-4112, email event@thefigtree.org or see ad on page 3 for a link.

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Religion News Briefs Around the World

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WCC welcomes Israel-Hamas cease fire

World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Jerry Pillay welcomes the ceasefire agreement reached between Israel and Hamas.

"We take joy in the relief that it brings to the families of those who will soon be released, and the hope that it rekindles an end to the catastrophic war in Gaza, which has brought so much death and destruction to so many people and communities," he said. "We are grateful to all the parties and people concerned who have worked tirelessly to bring about the ceasefire agreement."

He prays and hopes the ceasefire will be more than a temporary pause in this war and will open "a window for sustainable peace based on justice, accountability for crimes committed and recognition of the equal rights and dignity of Palestinians and Israelis." Meanwhile, the WCC urges urgent action to provide humanitarian assistance at the scale needed to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza and to assist the people of Gaza to recover and rebuild their communities.

"We share in the relief that the population of Gaza feels at this respite from constant bombardment and fear for their lives, as well as the despair of those who are returning to homes and communities that have been obliterated in the unrestrained violence of Israel's attacks," Jerry said, offering prayers that the respite extends to sustained peace.

"The WCC laments the fact that it has taken 15 months, and the loss of 46,000 lives—the majority of them women and children—for the conflict parties to reach this agreement," he said. "We appeal to them now to make the ceasefire permanent, and to commit to negotiations on the root causes of the violence and repeated cycles of conflict in the region, to ensure a sustainable peace founded upon equal human rights and justice for all in the region."

Jerry also recognizes that there is a renewed upsurge of violence by settlers in the West Bank since the war in Gaza. He also underlines the necessity of working a just peace that can be "the foundation on which we seek to build a better world for all people and creation."

Accompaniment Program continues protection

The WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel continues to offer a protective presence, and knows the need is growing, given the deteriorating humanitarian situation as revealed from recent incident reports.

From Sept. 12 to Nov. 24, 2024, in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Jordan Valley communities, ecumenical accompaniers reported on violence, displacement, access, attacks, infringement on sources of livelihood, arrests, injuries and harassment that make people's lives difficult. Violence against Palestinians amounted to 64 percent of violations, an increase from the 57 percent reported by the previous group.

Over that time, accompaniers filed 1,197 incident reports, of which about 853 were referred for follow-up and immediate assistance by the International Committee of the Red Cross or by Israeli, Palestinian, international and United Nations organizations. Accompaniers made 747 visits to provide a protective presence, monitor checkpoints, lead briefings, support nonviolent action, provide solidarity to Israeli human rights organizations and offer interventions.

From Nov. 25 to Jan. 8, 2025, ecumenical accompaniers deployed in the areas filed 775 incident reports, of which about 465 were referred for immediate assistance. The program is in its fifth placement since the war started in October 2023, amid escalating violence by settlers and growing need for protection of Palestinian residents.

People expressed appreciation for the ecumenical accompaniers, saying they felt safer and appreciated the visits to the communities and participation in the olive harvest.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Directory is online, updating is ongoing

Malcolm Haworth, who continues to receive accolades for his work compiling data and preparing The Fig Tree's annual, comprehensive Resource Directory: Guide to Congregations and Community Resources, has the latest and new data online in his ongoing work to keep up with the ever-changing information.

Congregations and nonprofits close and open. They also change the programs they offer based on community needs and funding, he said.

Malcolm is sending out emails

inviting people to update the information in their listings over the next several months.

Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate, is preparing to reach out to advertisers and community partners to invite their support, which is invaluable for making the publication possible. She works with editor Mary Stamp and administrative and volunteer coordinator Kaye Hult to make contact with those supporters.

"Given these changing times we expect there will be many

cuts to agencies affecting programs, but we have more data from visits to rural and tribal communities to expand and support the needs in those communities," said Malcolm, who is exploring options for expanding geographically.

"We will keep attuned to those who are left out, based on those who lack online access," Malcolm said.

To volunteer and for information, call 216-6090, email resourcedirectory@thefigtree.org or visit thefigtree.org.

End the Violence Conference planned

The 2025 End the Violence Conference, an event to empower domestic violence professionals in the Northwest, will be held Monday to Wednesday, Feb. 24 to 26, at Spokane Community College.

It will offer cutting-edge training, resources and collaborative opportunities to help professionals prevent, interrupt and address domestic violence.

Experts will lead workshops to share the latest research, best practices and effective strategies for intervention and prevention.

There will be networking opportunities to connect with other professionals, advocates and organizations seeking to end domestic violence and foster a supportive community.

There will also be resource sharing to support survivors and

promote safety.

The conference features four learning tracks geared to meet the needs of advocates, law enforcement, judicial members and youth violence prevention.

Continuing education credits will be available.

For information, call 242-3155, email info@srdvc.org or visit <https://endtheviolencespokane.org/etv-conference>.

VOA, Transitions host Mardi Bras

Volunteers of America (VOA) of Eastern Washington and Transitions are partnering again in 2025 to invite groups to participate in their annual "Mardi Bras" fundraiser in February and March to support women experiencing poverty and homelessness in Spokane.

Organizations and congregations host Mardi Bras parties and events through February

and March to collect donations of items to provide for basic needs for women at Transitions' Women's Hearth, a drop-in center and safe space for women in downtown Spokane, and VOA's Hope House, an emergency shelter that serves more than 500 women a year.

This fundraiser focuses on basic items that are needed most—tampons and pads, travel-sized

toiletries, socks, underwear and, of course, bras. Last year, groups gathered more than 12,000 tampons and 1,500 bras.

The Drive-Thru Mardi Bras Donation Drop Off will be from 4 to 6 p.m., Friday, March 14, at 920 W. 2nd Ave.

For information, visit voasokane.org/locations/hope-house and help4women.org/spokane-mardi-bras.

North Spokane Islamic Center relocates

Maryam Masjid and the Islamic Community Center recently moved from meeting at Lidgerwood Elementary School to 5702 N. Market St., where the mosque will provide worship, connection, community build-

ing, spiritual growth and learning for its community.

The mosque will offer all five daily prayers and Jumu'ah prayer at 1 p.m. on Fridays, according to an announcement on its Facebook page.

Seeking a permanent home for the masjid and school in North Spokane, they are raising funds to buy land or a building.

For information, email outreach@maryammasjidofspokane.org.

Helpers Network expands to Cheney

Spokane Helpers Network is expanding its service area to include Cheney.

Its mission is helping neighbors cope with temporary financial setbacks by guiding them to free resources and delivering necessities, including meal kits, adults and youth hygiene kits, toilet paper, feminine pads, tam-

pons, bus passes and referrals to the Teen and Kids Closet.

Housed clients in Cheney who are experiencing food insecurity and other setbacks may visit SpokaneHelpersNetwork.org/get-help.

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4th Annual Rosa Parks' Birthday Party

Cake and Rosa Trivia Competition

GIFTS for Rosa go to the MLK Community Center

1 to 2 p.m. - Sunday, Feb.2

Verdale United Church of Christ - 611 N. Progress Rd.

Suggested gifts for Rosa (for MLK Center)

Kids sneakers and socks
Whole grain rice and noodles
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Cheerios, pineapple tidbits
paper plates, paper bowls
paper cups, plastic spoons
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Palouse program trains community members

Alternatives To Violence of the Palouse (ATVP) will hold a Volunteer Hotline Training program aimed to equip compassionate individuals with the skills and knowledge to support community members affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, abuse, stalking and other crimes. The training will be offered from Sunday, Feb. 2, to Wednesday, Feb. 12, on Zoom.

ATVP's mission is to empower individuals and foster a safe, equitable community through education and prevention. Its services include 24-hour crisis intervention, emergency shelter, legal and medical advocacy, as well as individual and group support.

The Volunteer Hotline Training is a comprehensive, 40-hour program on crisis intervention techniques, understanding the dynamics of abuse and providing emotional support to those in need, said Kateisha Moreno, program manager.

This initiative not only aims to strengthen the hotline services but also to create a network of informed and compassionate community members who can contribute to the well-being of others.

For information, call 332-4357, email program.manager@atvp.org or visit atvp.org.

KSPS PBS Future Day introduces kids to jobs

KSPS PBS presents "KSPS PBS Future Day" from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 22, at On Track Academy, 4091 N. Regal St.

The free family event is part of the station's Ready to Learn Initiative, which involves hands-on play to spark curiosity in children about the world of work.

Children in kindergarten through third grade will engage in interactive challenges offered by local trades. Costumed characters of Daniel Tiger and Katerina Kittykat will make a guest appearance.

"It's more than an event. It's a celebration of play and an opportunity for kids to get excited about their future and explore different careers," said Angie Riley, KSPS PBS education director.

For information, call 443-7700 or visit ksp.org/events.

Yom HaShoah planners set art contest

The planning committee of the Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust has announced that the theme for the Jessica Stein Memorial Art Contest for middle school and high school students is "Survival and Life After the Holocaust."

The 2025 Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust will mark 80 years since World War II ended and the death camps were liberated. It will also be 30 years since the first Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust was held.

A flier for the art contest that seeks entries related to surviving genocide and how survivors resumed their lives afterward went to art, social studies and English teachers in Spokane area public and private schools. It includes information for teachers, students and parents about the contest—background, rules, deadlines and awards. Descriptions of the project are due on Friday, March 21, and delivery is on Sunday, March 23.

The Writing Contest, which is usually held for the observance, will not be held this year, said Hershel Zellman of the committee.

"By studying the Holocaust, we anticipate that students in our region will learn important lessons that they can apply to their own lives and that stimulate them to create pieces of art that reflect what they have learned," he said.

Prizes for the contest winners will be awarded at the annual Spokane Community Observance of Holocaust at 7 p.m., Wednesday, April 23, at Temple Beth Shalom, 1322 E. 30th Ave.

For information, call 747-3304 or email neveragain-spokane@comcast.net.

Gonzaga's new president starts in July

The Gonzaga University Board of Trustees has selected Katia Passerini as the university's next president, beginning July 15, 2025. She succeeds Thayne McCulloh, who steps down in July after serving as Gonzaga's president for 16 years.

Katia is currently provost and senior executive vice president at Seton Hall University, a Catholic university about 15 miles from New York City in South Orange, N.J.

She said she looks forward to coming to Gonzaga as "a dynamic university with a national reputation for quality, dedicated to the holistic education of students."

A native of Italy and a lifelong Catholic, she is an academic, a

university administrator and a leader. Before going to Seton Hall in 2020, Katia was chair and dean of the Collins College of Professional Studies at St. John's University, where she also was professor in computer science, mathematics and science.

From 2003 to 2013, she was professor and chair of management information systems at the Martin Tuchman School of Management, New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), where she also served in the information systems department in the Ying Wu College of Computing Sciences.

From 2013 to 2016, she served as the dean for the Albert Dorman Honors College at NJIT.

She holds degrees in political science from the International

Free University of Social Studies and in economics from the University of Rome Tor Vergata, both in Rome, Italy. She earned a master's degree in business administration in 1996 and doctor of philosophy in 2001 from The George Washington University. She also holds a certificate in business project management from New York University.

In addition, she was a Fulbright Student Scholar and Fulbright Administrator Scholar, as well as an Italian National Research Council Fellow (CNR). Katia also served as interim president at Seton Hall University for the 2023-24 academic year.

Her inauguration ceremony at Gonzaga is set for fall 2025.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/27th-president.

Health District seeks healthy outcomes

The Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) and partners—SRHD Beginnings Matter Program, Akin, Launch Northwest and Eastern Washington University School of Social Work—are presenting part two of its Social Connections Learning Series to create opportunities for people from the region to meet, learn together, network and envision possibilities for creating socially connected Spokane County communities.

The program follows the Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework, a strengths-based approach to providing access to positive childhood experiences

for all children, youth and families.

"It is an approach to health and prevention grounded in research about the protective nature of positive experiences, based on the understanding that children who have positive childhood experiences are more likely to be healthy and have positive mental health outcomes later in life, even in the presence of adversity," said Romyana Kudeva, early childhood specialist with the SRHD.

The HOPE program has four building blocks—relationships, environments, engagement and emotional growth.

In 2025, the series focus is

from prenatal to five years. Next year, it will look into social connections for those in the K-12 population. The following year will explore adulthood and how social connections can support people's wellbeing and prevent isolation and loneliness.

The fourth year will focus on older adults and how to support their health by ensuring opportunities for social connections.

"We hope that these learning series will be ongoing and will strengthen existing work around socially connected communities in Spokane," said Romyana.

For information, call 324-1605, email rkudeva@srhd.org or visit srhd.org.

**SAVE THE DATES
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**2025
Benefit
Events**

Benefit Lunch - Saturday, March 8

Buffet Opens at 11 a.m. • Program is 12 to 1 p.m.
Hemmingson Auditorium at Gonzaga University

Breakfast-Time - Wednesday, March 12

Gather at 7:30 a.m. to chat • Program: 8 to 9 a.m. - Zoom
There is no charge to attend. Guests are asked to donate

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Editor finds power in building community through newspaper

Continued from page 1
to rouse interest and participation in the symposium through The Links, Inc., Spokane Chapter, a Black women's organization founded in 1946.

It offers Black history workshops and services to youth, such as art classes, history study, poetry and essays.

The Black Lens paused in 2022 so Sandy could open the Carl Maxey Center, a Black resource center in East Central Spokane. She planned to relaunch it in 2023 but died in a plane crash in September 2022. When it relaunched as a non-profit, nonpartisan community newspaper for the Black community in 2024, April began writing articles for it again.

"I believe in Sandy's dream. I miss her," April said. "I want to do right by Sandy, to advocate for and celebrate the local and wider Black community."

Natasha Hill was interim editor of The Black Lens until she ran for the state legislature. Then April became interim editor.

"I began as interim to see how I would do working at the school and editing the newspaper," she explained. "I love it. It went well. The Black community needs it."

April put more energy into it over the summer and wanted to create opportunities for Black youth to build their writing skills, like opportunities she had with The New Pittsburgh Courier.

"I'm able to cross pollinate my work with The Black Lens and as

an educator increasing opportunities for kids," she said. "I know what journalism did for me.

"The Black Lens lets the community know who we are. It helps people know who is in the community—who is new and who has been here a long time. The Black Lens is unique to Spokane. It's a powerful force for media with the Black population that is just two percent of the city's population," she said.

April has learned that there are deep roots of Black history right here in Eastern Washington, history that is more than a century old. She has also recognized that Black people here are not a monolith.

"In interviewing and interacting with different people in the community, I have learned that there are servant leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs and activists right within our reach," she said.

"We are who we need. There is power in building community that reaches beyond us," she commented, aware of the need to "be patient, observant and bold when necessary."

April believes the divine has played a role in what she is doing.

While in the Air Force, she attended base chapels, helping with children's ministries, hospitality and gospel choirs.

After COVID, her family wanted to be part of a church in the community.

"Faith is how I got to where I am, helping me while I was away from family, raising children

without extended family support and navigating uncertain territory," she said. "I am tenacious, but I know doors have opened because of the Higher Power. I do not have to figure everything out. I trust in God."

Her faith reminds her there is something bigger than herself, helping her recalibrate her life.

April grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal Church but attended Baptist and non-denominational churches over the years.

"My mother made sure through our struggles that church was part of our lives," she said. "As an adult, I learned the peace of having a personal relationship with God, learning to trust in God."

April has also been involved in communities where she has lived in the last 24 years, aware that involvement in community is a way to serve God.

In Spokane, in addition to her involvement with NAACP Spokane, The Links, Inc., and The Black Lens, April participated in the 2020 class of Leadership Spokane and recently received their Alumni Lifetime Achievement Award as "a catalyst for educating and uniting diverse, collaborative leaders to ensure a vibrant Spokane." She will be recognized at their Leadership Lights the Way Gala from 5 to 10 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 1, at Northern Quest Resort and Casino.

April has given workshops at the Carl Maxey Center and helped with summer programs at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center.

"Ministry is not always within church walls. Christians need to be in the community where folks can see their goodness as an invitation to be involved, too.

When we build relationships, we can uplift each other. That's how we show God's love," said April.

With the NAACP, she brings to her volunteer involvement with the Education Committee her perspectives from working in a school, involving youth in newspaper work and planning a documentary screening on literacy and equity in schools.

"The NAACP is a century-old civil rights organization serving the underserved," April said. "That's in line with my faith. We do difficult work, standing up for issues and fighting for people. We prioritize the least among us. Jesus served the people who were shunned and stood up for people who were treated as underdogs because of race, economics or gender.

"We are not to allow personal gain to overshadow what we do for others," she said. "I am now learning how to define ministry with people who are wronged. That is where my faith intersects with my actions."

April sees The Black Lens as a way to help people advocate for themselves.

Spokane surprised her. Here she has had an opportunity to grow as a person, gaining a sense that her purpose in life is serving people, building relationships and understanding community.

"When we live for a purpose, it does not matter where we are,"

April commented.

In the last two years, April has seen how "God uses us wherever we are. God was preparing me to come to Spokane," she said, adding that God guides her steps so she knows what she is to do and why she is here.

April said The Black Lens is a labor of love because it places her in the community where she has relationships that lead her to story ideas.

As editor, she selects articles, writes, edits and makes editorial decisions.

Recent issues include articles contributed by 10 to 20 writers on issues such as financial illiteracy, menthol cigarette impact, City Council news, Spokane Office of Civil Rights Equity and Inclusion, State Representative Natasha Hill, Kwanzaa and Black mental health, Black genealogy, Black Americans with kidney disease, the ownership vs. worker mentality, the NAACP Gala and various community programs.

Production support comes from Comma Community Journalism Labs with some volunteer assistance from current and former members of The Spokesman-Review newsroom.

April clarified that, despite the help, it is independent from The Spokesman.

For information, contact 360-320-6449 or email april@blacklensnews.com.

Habitat in Pasco ties with DNR

Habitat for Humanity in Pasco will partner with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, entering a land use agreement to build 100 affordable housing units on 16 acres of state land and using revenue from it to fund K-12 education and libraries.

The DNR has more than 3,000 acres of state land classed as "residential transition" land—empty lots, vacant plots and open lands—in and around cities across the state that do not generate revenue for DNR's trust beneficiaries because they are surrounded by other developed land.

During the 2024 legislative session, Representative April Connors developed legislation to motivate developers to build on public lands. For example, House Bill (HB) 2003 removes a 12.84 percent leasehold excise tax for developers who commit to maintaining housing for low- to moderate-income homeowners. The legislation makes constructing housing on public lands easier while providing a new revenue stream for local schools and libraries.

"Washington is the nation's fifth most unaffordable state for housing and faces having

the fewest housing units per household. Addressing this crisis requires bold solutions like this Habitat for Humanity project that demonstrates the impact and scalability enabled by HB 2003. By reducing barriers to building on state lands, we can increase affordable housing options for families, keep young workers in Washington and ensure seniors have the stability they deserve," said April.

For information, call 360-584-3916 or email ryan.rodruick@dnr.wa.gov.



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Spokane church will build apartments as part of post-fire rebuilding

By Mary Stamp

After a fire destroyed Bethany Presbyterian Church's worship space in 2022, the congregation began to re-imagine their future.

For several years, Sharon Rodkey Smith, Brian Royer and the church's Re-Building Team guided listening sessions that led to a redevelopment project to bring much-needed housing and community space to their campus.

Now they anticipate breaking ground on their campus for a model of ministry with their 100-seat worship center and fellowship hall standing as a community center next to two three-story apartment buildings, which will offer housing for 22 low-income families.

Their mission is to "integrate an inspirational, flexible, adaptable church and housing community that demonstrates radical hospitality for our residents, immigrants, refugees and community."

This project aligns with their decision to be a "Matthew 25 church" that builds congregational vitality, dismantles structural racism and eradicates systemic poverty.

Early on, they challenged the city to rezone their property to allow for multiple dwellings.

Their effort challenged the city to realize that more areas needed to be zoned to allow for multiple dwellings. The City Council changed resident zoning in December 2023.

To make their vision possible, they are partnering with Proclaim Liberty, a nonprofit created in 1971 by the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest, which will be the project sponsor. They also partner with Kiemle and Hagood, a real estate company with experience developing affordable housing.

By the end of 2024, the project secured \$8.4 million in funds toward the \$12.4 million they need. Committed funds include anticipated insurance from the fire and awards from the Spokane City HOME funds, Banner Bank and the Federal Home Loan Bank Affordable Housing Program.

The land will be Bethany's, and the buildings will be owned by Proclaim Liberty. Bethany will pay \$1 a year for a 100-year lease to use the building, said Sharon. In return, Proclaim Liberty will pay \$1 a year for a 100-year lease to use the land.



Bethany Presbyterian Church members Sharon Smith and Brian Royer are working with their church's team and with partners at Proclaim Liberty and Kiemle and Hagood to build apartments and community center/sanctuary.

In 2025, they expect to reach their funding goal so they can begin construction in spring 2026 and occupy the buildings in spring 2027.

Before the old building is torn down, the fire department has requested permission to use it to train firefighters, Sharon said.

Eight units will provide permanent housing for refugee families who graduate from Thrive International's program. Three units will be for graduates of Family Promise. The other 11 units, four of which will be ADA handicapped accessible, will be used for low-income families.

Sharon and Brian recently shared their journeys of faith that drew them into leadership for this project.

Sharon grew up in Spokane where her father was the principal of North Central High School. Her family attended St. Paul's United Methodist Church until they joined her mother at First Presbyterian, where she was a paid singer in the church's quartet. In 1971, Sharon earned a degree in music education at Pacific Lutheran University where she met and married Dennis, another music education student. For six years, she taught music in Tacoma schools while Dennis was director of music at Little Church on the Prairie United Presbyterian.

In 1978, they moved to Omaha, Neb., where Dennis was director of music at the 2,800-member First United Methodist Church. She taught in public schools until

2006, when they moved back to Spokane so she could care for her aging parents.

Sharon and Dennis joined Bethany while her brother, Paul, was half-time campus minister at Eastern Washington University and half-time pastor at Bethany. He served 30 years until retiring in 2016 and entering the Peace Corps with his wife Kerri. Sharon and Dennis joined Bethany in 2007.

Brian grew up in Spokane, attending the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John until his family moved when he was eight to Tri-Cities, where they attended Episcopal churches. After high school, he attended the University of Washington in Seattle to study pre-med, until he was radicalized by the Vietnam War, became a hippie and joined a Skagit Valley commune in the 1970s.

He led a group of nonprofits challenging the Skagit Nuclear Power Plant, then promoted water rights for family farms with the Washington State Grange and joined another effort to halt nuclear power.

Brian, his first wife, her sister and brother-in-law moved to a farm in Curlew. They joined a fundamentalist community church. Once he met and married Sandi, she convinced him to go to a church where women did more than make meals and change diapers.

They moved to Republic, where they lived for 20 years, raised their children and attended

First Presbyterian Church. Brian worked for four years as county assessor. Then he traveled from city to city promoting energy conservation and started a business doing community development and low-income housing.

His housing work brought him to Spokane in 1999 to work with Northwest Regional Facilitators. In 2000, Brian and Sandi joined Bethany Presbyterian.

After he retired in 2014, Sandi and Brian served with the Presbyterian Church (USA), a partner of the Guatemalan Presbyterian Church, working in ministry with women throughout Guatemala.

They returned to Spokane in 2019 and established a fair-trade business, Resilient Threads Guatemala—resilientthreads-guatemala.org—selling products made by Guatemalan women.

When Sharon, Dennis, Brian and Sandi joined the church early in the 2000s, it was at 4th and Freya. The church knew for 15 years that the Department of Transportation wanted the land for an off-ramp when the North-South freeway was completed.

In 2009, Bethany sold that building and land for \$875,000. They worshiped at Good Shepherd Lutheran on South Ray St. while looking to relocate.

The Assembly of God church across from Good Shepherd wanted to sell their building, which was originally built as a community center. They agreed to sell for \$700,000.

"The building was too big for us," Sharon said. "One floor of classrooms was not used. We talked with Mark Finney, then director of World Relief, about housing refugees there."

When COVID hit, that idea went on hold but had sparked the idea of using the building to house needy people.

On Epiphany Sunday in 2022, a fire destroyed much of the interior, making it unusable. They are still waiting for the insurance settlement.

Bethany began renting space at Knox Presbyterian in North Spokane. Bethany currently has a temporary pastor and is in the process of calling a new pastor to lead the congregation.

"We were an aging congregation with 40 members and no pastor, but we wanted to do a housing project that would include a sanctuary/community center," said Brian. "It took two

years of listening sessions to convince the congregation. We know many Protestant churches were seeking new ways to do more than survive. We wanted to serve refugees, homeless and low-income families."

Sharon said Bethany's building was used for 12-step groups and childcare, so the building was always used to reaching out to others.

Because Brian had worked with faith-based nonprofits that created housing in dying churches, he had connections in the housing community to show the congregation their vision could happen.

Two years ago, Brian said, "God introduced me to Brian Grow of Proclaim Liberty, which was doing housing as part of the Presbytery."

Brian Grow introduced them to Shannon Meagher at Kiemle and Hagood, which partnered with Proclaim Liberty to build a childcare center and 51 apartments in the Liberty Park area.

Brian said the Presbytery has formed a Land-Use Committee to help churches decide what to do with excess land or if they close. Bethany is a pilot project. "This project gives me a tangible way to plug into what my faith journey says needs to be done," said Sharon.

Brian noted that Bethany is a small church and shouldn't be able to do this.

"In faith, we are the little engine that could. God is guiding us and blessing us as we go forward," he said.

Once the buildings are built, Brian said the church will connect with residents in the apartments, organizing gatherings and potlucks to share hospitality and build community. He expects 12-step programs to return. Supporting agencies like Thrive and Family Promise will use classroom space for classes or counseling.

The redevelopment project is a tangible expression of the church's mission to "extend radical hospitality," said Micaela Kostecka, marketing director at Kiemle and Hagood. Along with providing affordable housing, it will offer the community resources for education, connection and well-being.

For information, call 220-1806 (535-6034 or 714-0656), email sharonrodkeysmith@yahoo.com or visit bethanyspokane.org.

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'Have no fear! Just love!' invites FAN's new executive director

Continued from page 1 she learned about Filipino culture and issues.

From 1996 to 2000, she attended Princeton Seminary, where she earned a master of divinity degree.

"I knew I was called to be in ministry, not so much in church, but in the community," she affirmed.

When Joyce returned to Seattle, she worked with World Vision's domestic youth program and with Young Life's urban training in the Beacon Hill area. There her involvement was with the interfaith community and with many Filipino churches.

When funding went dry in 2006 in Seattle, Joyce moved to Daly City, Calif., to continue her outreach with youth in a community that was more than 50 percent Filipino.

Joyce became a counselor at a private school and took a weekend job with young mothers on subsidies. That job led to her being executive director of New Creation Homes for mothers aged 15 to 22 years. She learned about their needs and coordinated services for them.

New Creation Homes provided the young mothers with a home and 24/7 care. It was supported by Silicon Valley churches. Joyce began to focus on the intersection of those who could afford to live in the area and those who had little.

Joyce next earned a doctoral degree in intercultural studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, continuing to seek how best to bring together those with privileges and vulnerable folk, and how to advocate for and with vulnerable people.

From 2019 through 2022, she taught Christian practice at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, training students to go into nonprofit or church jobs.

Returning to Seattle in 2022 as director of multi-ethnic programs at Seattle Pacific University, she served students of color.

Since starting Nov. 1 at FAN, she has met with people in different faith communities and congregations, connecting with the rich and the poor.

"This is so right for me now to be here," she said. "It's encouraging to me that my own family and community is already involved."

Joyce is one of three full-time staff along with Kristin Ang, the policy engagement director, and Elizabeth Dickinson, partnership coordinator. Other staff are Jess Ingman, North Central Washington regional organizer, Blake Alford, operations coordinator,



Joyce del Rosario found many family members active in FAN.

and Brianna Dilts, Eastern Washington regional organizer.

Joyce's goals include increasing the capabilities and capacity of the staff.

"We need more folk," she said. "I hope to add more hours for our part-time community organizers so they can better mobilize our faith communities for just action."

Pleased that FAN surpassed its fundraising goal at the Annual Dinner, Joyce said her priority is developing the scope of funding for sustainability and growth.

"FAN has a stable base, and is needed in these times," she said.

"I am inviting people from different cultures in different parts of the state to work together. My idea is that we all be in solidarity across culture and geography," she continued. "We can't just BE. We want to broaden, diversify and multiply our base."

"We seek to develop and inspire high school- and college-aged students to mobilize their already passionate and educated generation toward justice," she said, as part of a call to expand diversity in FAN throughout the state.

"In my studies of scripture and the sacred texts, I have come to believe that God has a special

love and compassion for the poor, the vulnerable and the oppressed," she said at the dinner.

"Because that is my understanding, I know we should spend our time and resources loving the most vulnerable among us," said Joyce, who, as a brown Filipino woman, is aware of the vulnerabilities people in her own family experience.

She quoted her pastor, Gilson Bantam at Quest Church in Seattle, "Faith is not the absence of struggle but the strength to stand upright against it in the face of it."

"We seek to create a Faith Action Network that is equipped to answer the inevitable harmful and violent actions planned for the most vulnerable among us," she said.

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"Dream with me," Joyce invited dinner attendees. "As we take action, we need to have faith that we, as the beloved community, can resist and create change for the common good."

She also invited FAN partners to help "educate our faith communities about local and state initiatives."

During January, FAN announced the legislative priorities they shaped along with their coalition partners, statewide network, the FAN policy committee and the FAN governing board.

FAN's priorities include advocating for and implementing policies that advance shared values grounded in faith and spirituality. Those values are belonging and human dignity, justice and equity, interconnectedness, collaboration and pluralism.

The agenda calls for strengthening climate justice and environmental stewardship; advancing immigrant and refugee rights; fostering community safety, democracy and civil rights; increasing safe affordable housing and preventing homelessness, and expanding access to health care.

Joyce shared the concluding words of her address to the Annual Dinner.

"I am honored to be part of the Faith Action Network," she said. "I am honored to join you in the resistance. Friends, I encourage you today: Have no fear, just love, and as the young people say, 'Let's go!' I'm here in this place. I'm ready! Let's go!"

For information, call 206-624-9790, email joyce@fanwa.org or visit fanwa.org.

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Questions about what it looks like to be a just society are ongoing

By Emma Maple

For Gonzaga Religious Studies professor Ron Large, times and social issues may change, but what remains constant are life's big questions.

"I don't think questions like what does it mean to be a just society, what does it look like or how do we bring it about are ever going to go away," he said.

Ron, who is in his final semester before retirement, specializes in Christian ethics with an emphasis on Christian social ethics and peace studies.

His courses, specifically his nonviolence course, are "not really a religion course in terms of what people think that means," he said. "I'm not trying to convert people.

"My classes are more dealing with ethics and how religion informs the way in which we think about making ethical decisions, and how that shapes our moral lives," he explained.

Ron frames these questions around the Vietnam War and nonviolent movements like the 13-month Montgomery bus boycott that began in 1955 and Mohandas Gandhi's general strike in 1919.

"We examine the ways those areas have become case studies for thinking about our ethical lens or our moral capabilities," Ron said, asking, "How do we look at war or nonviolence? How does this shape our own lives or thinking about decisions?"

He suggested that these topics also tie into the question of how to act in such a way that other people's lives can be changed.

Some nonviolent leaders that play heavily into Ron's worldview and classes are Indian nonviolent activist Gandhi and American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.

While both these leaders are dead and their immediate movements are over, Ron said their principles are still relevant to movements today.

Students will often ask how these principles tie into modern day events like the Black Lives Matters protests, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and more.

Because of this, he tries to shape courses in ways that students will find compelling.

For Ron, all of these studies and ideas center around one fundamental question.

"How do we bring about social change, in all honesty, without killing each other?" he asked. "Can we do that?"

He also focuses on larger questions such as how humans



Ron Large inspires students to think about big questions.

make decisions and what it means to be human.

"Teaching ethics, it is a little easier to frame those sorts of questions," he said. "Nonviolence is a way to get students to think about that."

Ron's interest in peace studies grew out of major world events during his childhood.

"My growing up was shaped by two events: the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement," he said.

At the University of Virginia, he took three religion courses in one semester.

"It was fascinating," Ron said.

When he realized he could spend his whole life thinking, studying and reading about these topics, he decided to major in religious studies. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1972.

In 1975, he received his master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J., and a doctorate in 1985 from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif. His dissertation was on social change related to King and Gandhi.

After graduation, Ron taught at several different universities before landing at Gonzaga in 1988.

In addition to serving as a tenured professor, he was Gonzaga's associate academic vice president from 2012 to 2019, as well as the associate provost for educational effectiveness from 2019 to 2022. He's in his 37th year at Gonzaga and his 45th year in higher education.

Ron enjoys teaching at Gonzaga because of the freedom that a private university affords.

"I had quite a bit of freedom

to teach within my specific area, to develop courses that would be helpful and useful for students," he said.

The department as a whole also stays aware of the need to hold student interest in creating courses, he said. This has resulted in the department broadening its religion courses to include Native American studies, Catholicism in Africa, African religions and Buddhism.

"We've expanded our focus," he said. "That's the direction that the religious studies program has been going."

The department has also diversified, Ron said. Overall, there are fewer Jesuits and more women professors.

This has corresponded with the expansion in the field of ethics. While Ron said ethicists used to be mostly white men, it has seen many women and feminist ethicists shaping the field in recent years.

"They began to ask questions that weren't being asked," he said.

Ron and his wife have had three children—one born in California, one in Montana and one in Michigan.

When he retires at the end of May, not only will they visit them, but also Ron said he would love to explore Ireland and practice photography in more depth, staying based in Spokane.

Both in teaching and life, Ron said the questions he focuses on are eternal.

Ethicists have been asking them for years, he said, noting that "they haven't gone away, and they aren't going to go away."

When students enter his class, Ron said they often come in with a preconception that there will always be war and violence. They think nonviolence is too idealistic or not effective.

By the end of the semester, students realize that nonviolence can work and that questions of war and violence are nuanced, not simplistic.

Ron still has questions of his own, such as whether war and violence can ever be completely eradicated.

"I'm an idealist," he said, "but I'm also a pragmatist."

Ron quoted King's famous saying, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

"It's a big arc," he said, asking, "How much more bending can this do?"

In the end, he said that while violence may seem to be inevitable, it is still a choice.

"We can choose to be violent or nonviolent," he said. "Violence is a choice that people make, and they can unmake it or not make it."

It's a long haul, and violence is not going to stop tomorrow,

but we have to keep working at it and teaching it," he said.

Part of his mission is to challenge students' assumptions that war is inevitable, and violence is the only choice.

"We're more nonviolent than we are violent. We just don't think of it," he said. "How do we sustain that? How do we get to the point where we don't think violence is the only solution to our problem?"

Nonviolence is not an easy choice, according to Ron.

"It means that people put themselves in danger, they risk their lives," he said. "What does it mean to take that sort of risk?"

Gandhi and King were able to convince people to take that risk, Ron said, largely through the promise of hope.

"Give people some level of hope," he said. "Sometimes violence is born out of hopelessness."

"Without hope, the people perish," he added. "Give them the sense that we may not get the ideal, but we'll get further down the road."

"I present students with two competing visions," he added. "This path and that path. Neither one is inevitable."

Ron encourages students to think about the choices that they make and how those choices will impact others.

He pointed to the irony that nonviolence is risky. While Gandhi and King took that risk and advocated nonviolence, both were assassinated.

"How do we bring about social change toward a more just and inclusive society—what King called the beloved community?" he asked. "That's the subtext, from my personal perspective, for the students."

For information, email large@gonzaga.edu.



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YWCA Spokane names Women of Achievement to be honored in 2025

YWCA Spokane will recognize nine women for 2025 Women of Achievement Award in February and March at the Women of Achievement Awards event from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Friday, March 14, at the Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

For 43 years, YWCA Spokane has honored more than 260 women for their achievements and commitment to giving back to the community.

Those receiving the 2025 Women of Achievement Awards were nominated by the public and evaluated by a committee of YWCA Spokane board members, community volunteers and staff based on their impact.

The goal is to increase community awareness and appreciation for the contributions of women leaders in Spokane.

The women selected for the 2025 Women of Achievement Awards are the following:

- Charity Bagatsing-Doyl, arts and culture award
- Julie Honekamp, business and industry award
- Dr. Ping Ping, Carl Maxey Racial and social justice award
- Kiantha Duncan, community enhancement award
- Jennifer Hansen, education award
- Marlene Feist, government and public service award
- Amy Washington, science, technology and environment award

- Athena Mangano, young woman of achievement award
- Janet Mann, lifetime achievement award

Along with honoring these women, the luncheon raises awareness to address the epidemic of domestic violence in the Spokane region and raises funds to support survivors through YWCA Spokane.

During 2023, YWCA Spokane provided life-changing services to more than 14,000 individuals, children and families through a 24-hour helpline, safe shelter, legal advocacy and mental health services designed to disrupt cycles of trauma and create pathways toward healing and

independence. With the support from event sponsors—Providence Health Care, Numerica Credit Union, Kalispel Tribe of Indians and Northern Quest Resort and Casino, MultiCare, AgWest Farm Credit, Hanna Agency and Hamilton Studio—proceeds of the luncheon benefit the YWCA's services and programs for those experiencing domestic violence, homelessness and unemployment.

"We envision a community where domestic violence is no longer tolerated," said Erica Schreiber, director of community engagement. "Working at intersections of inequality, poverty and domestic violence, we aim to disrupt societal patterns of trauma."

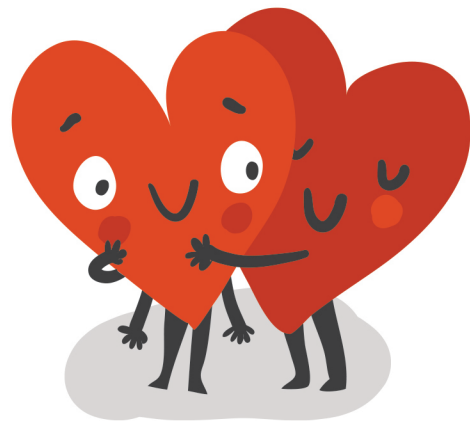
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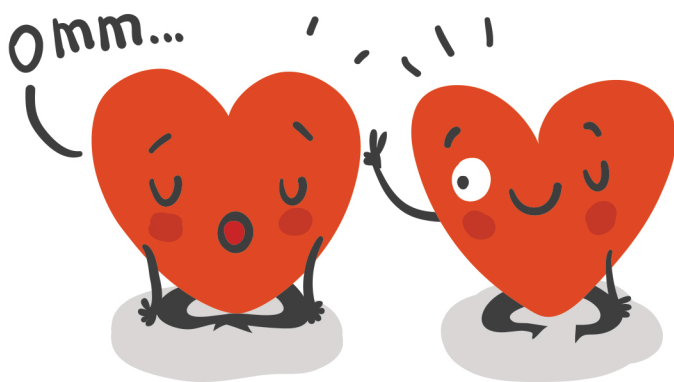
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Church invites medically fragile homeless into its upper rooms

In his Jan. 12 sermon, Bob Feeny, pastor at Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC), observed that when he writes sermons, as well as in his church's life and ministry, he often asks, "Where is Jesus?"

The sermon was partly a stewardship sermon on the church's budget and seeing Jesus in the light and heating bills. It was also about the church's decision to house vulnerable homeless neighbors who are released from a nearby hospital or chronically going to an emergency room or urgent care.

Bob wavers between feeling that the church's approval of offering space for the respite center has taken much thought, prayer and work, and feeling it "fell into our laps." He is glad to be working with partners in the community.

Westminster UCC voted on Dec. 8 to open a respite/recuperation center in 3,000 square feet of its second floor, working in partnership with Providence Community Clinic and Jewels Helping Hands, who will staff and run it, and with the City of Spokane and Empire Health Foundation, who are funding it. The respite center opened on Jan. 13.

"Where is Jesus?" Bob asked, answering that Jesus is found when "we are doing what we are supposed to be doing as a church by welcoming those who are suffering and in need."

Church moderator Kelly Cox said, "I have often passed brothers and sisters on the streets and wished I could do something to help them. This is what I can do."

"In many places in the Bible, Jesus told us to care for the poor," he added. "This program will not only do that but also help people navigate through the system to be 'homed.' I also realize we also need to bring along any in the community who are hesitant about having a shelter in their backyard."

He hopes the church will impact people's lives as a caring community offering shelter.

"We realize that when we worship, people in the respite care will hear the music and sounds," he said, adding that they will be welcome to join in worship and fellowship if they wish.

Kelly, who grew up Presbyterian in Texas, moved after college to work in business in New York City. He attended Marble Collegiate Church there for several years. When he retired in 2018 and moved to Spokane to be near his mother and sister, he found Westminster UCC online. He has been the church's moderator since June.

In August, with a grant from Avista, he said Westminster replaced or weather sealed the windows in its 135-year-old building to improve energy efficiency as part of its plan to install a new HVAC system. Last year, the church repaired its elevator, not knowing about the possibility of being a respite center.

Westminster UCC has a history of involvement with homeless programs, such as Family Promise, Crosswalk and Shalom Ministries.

In 2019, it opened its doors as a pop-up emergency warming center for youth under 21 during



Bob Feeny, pastor, and Kelly Cox, moderator, facilitated effort.

the winter. Youth came at night and slept on mats in the fellowship hall.

When the city proposed scattered sites for shelters, Jewels Helping Hands partnered in December 2023 with churches to start the scattered site model.

Morningstar Baptist Church in Northwest Spokane and the Cedar Center in the former New Apostolic Church in the Garland district each opened 30-bed centers for medically fragile and elderly people experiencing homelessness.

The scattered-sites proposal has a goal of eight sites housing 20 to 30 people.

In the summer, Bob joined faith leaders invited by the Land Development Group and Spokane Mayor Lisa Brown to see those sites and explore ways churches can be involved to serve unhoused people.

Laurel Fish of the Spokane Alliance and hadley morrow of Cool Spokane, which offers water and shade at pop-up sites in the summer, called a meeting in September.

Bob met with Zeke Smith, director of Empire Health, who facilitated connections with Julie Garcia, executive director of Jewels Helping Hands, and Robert Lippman, a behavioral health clinician who is the manager of the Providence Community Clinic and the president of Spokane Homeless Coalition.

"We realized we would not be acting alone," said Bob. "Every church faces challenges. We have a well-maintained facility, located close to the hospitals at the edge of downtown near services."

"Homelessness is a problem the city can't solve alone. The community needs to be involved. It fits in with our mission," said Kelly.

During 2024, the city closed the "warehouse" approach at the Trent shelter, designed to house 300 people, and began conversations on a scattered site approach to connect people on the streets with services and avenues into permanent housing.

The goal of the Westminster Respite Center is to relieve pressure on hospitals and Providence Community Clinic and other urgent care centers, said Robert.

"We seek to stabilize people released from hospitals, those needing long-term support and those who go in and out of acute care at emergency rooms and urgent care for colds, infections and chronic needs," said Robert.

He said the Providence Community Clinic was started in 1976 by Providence Sr. Peter Claver to uphold the Providence

mission and her vision of serving the poor and vulnerable.

The community clinic team, which will coordinate care, includes a medical director, a nurse practitioner, registered nurses, visiting nurses and psychiatry support.

For Westminster, opening the center meant that three weeks after the church voted unanimously to offer its space for the center, church and community groups needed to move out of the rooms on the south side of the second floor and into rooms on the east side.

The church's choir, bell choir and Sunday school classes, plus a Lego League team and a yoga group relocated to that space. The Spokane Area Youth Choir, which was outgrowing its space, and the community women's choir moved their practices and storage to the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John.

"The church needed time for conversation, but the people were ready and had a heart to do it," said Bob.

After the groups moved, Jewels Helping Hands' volunteers sealed cracks and painted the walls, took down window coverings, tore up the carpet and installed plank flooring.

Julie said people will stay as long as they need medical care and then be transferred to a care facility or housing.

"We will need more centers, so we will record data for six months on this model," she said. "Then we will recruit funds and other sites."

"Jewels provided beds with memory foam mattresses and bedding," said Julie, adding that donations of twin sheets, pillowcases and towels can be dropped off at the Cedar Center.

"We have taken a chance," said Bob. "Now every dollar we spend operating this building will also support a safe place for people to get back on their feet. Our mission is to be the hands and feet of Christ in our world, caring for our neighbors."

"What is the purpose of this sturdy, creaky old building but to open our doors to unhoused people," he said, "and to work with partners to reorient our world to justice, healing and hope."

Kelly noted that for many churches with excess space and shrinking finances, this is a way to turn a dilemma into ministry.

Once he began negotiating with the partners, Kelly said his business side kicked in, identifying risks and concerns to include in the contract.

Those coming to the center are referred by the hospital system,



Robert Lippman of Providence Community Clinic is one of the partners providing care.



Julie Garcia of Jewels Helping Hands coordinates staffing.

Providence Community Clinic and have a background check that screens for sexual offenses and violence, following legal requirements related to its location next to a school.

Those receiving care also sign an agreement not to use drugs or alcohol, and to respect the premises, people and neighborhood. Those coming are escorted from the door, up the elevator and down the hall to the door of the respite center.

Jewels Helping Hands will provide 18 staff and volunteers trained to care for patients, keep the space clean, transport people to appointments and assure safety in the neighborhood.

It is not a walk-up shelter.

People in the respite center are not to congregate outside. They are there to recuperate, Kelly said. As their health improves, they will be assigned a case manager and relocated.

"I hope this will be a healing, loving space for those in the respite care," Kelly said.

For information, call 624-1366, email office@westminsterucc.org or visit westminsterucc.org.

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Second Harvest seeks donations of shelf-stable foods to meet needs

Typically, Second Harvest Inland Northwest has 2.5 million pounds of food in its inventory in Spokane and Pasco warehouses in January, but the warehouses have just 1.25 million pounds of food.

"We bought some food to help for two weeks, but it's a struggle even to buy food," said Eric Williams of Second Harvest. "Ninety percent of our food is donated through the generosity of grocery stores, food processors, farmers and individuals."

The dilemma, Eric explained, is that it is harder to access dry, shelf-stable food. Ten years ago, 60 percent of Second Harvest's shelves held dry, shelf-stable food and 40 percent of the storage was for fresh produce. Now those percentages are flipped.

"Farmers have been generous, so we have a lot of fresh Washington produce, but less shelf-stable foods are available," he said. "It's a result of companies improving their efficiency through computer technology, so there are fewer errors in inventory."

In addition, consumer demand for ready-to-eat meals is rising, so more food is being directed to ready-to-eat packaged meals, he added.

Roy Lamb and his brother had built Second Harvest's first cooler in its warehouse in 1990. In 2023, they expanded that cooler and freezer space, adding 3,025 square feet to 13,000 square feet, so Second Harvest can handle the produce donations it receives.



Eric Williams builds community partnerships.

"**Most food banks**, however, have just two family-size refrigerators, so they cannot keep as much produce on hand," Eric said.

"The world is changing, and we need to figure out how to stay ahead of those changes," Eric commented.

Because Second Harvest needs to buy more food, it needs to have more monetary donations.

Meanwhile, the needs of people continue to rise.

"We thought the pandemic was in our rear-view mirror and things would settle down, but our partners are seeing more working people come to their food banks," Eric reported.

"Each of the last three years, Second Harvest has distrib-

uted 35 million pounds of food, enough for about 29 million meals, but demand has continued to creep up since the pandemic," he said.

While Second Harvest supplies the same amount of food to the 250 urban and rural partners in 26 counties, with less of it shelf-stable, it is hard for local food bank partners to keep it with their limited refrigeration space.

"We are letting people know that, as the need continues to rise, we need more monetary donations so we can purchase more shelf-stable food," Eric said, adding that more funds are also needed because the price of food is going up.

Second Harvest's partner,

Feeding America, is able to buy some shelf-stable food, but it bids in competition with other providers.

"**Everyone in the food bank** community across the country is facing similar challenges," Eric said. "We seek to be optimistic in the face of the challenges."

The Washington State budget deficit will have an impact on the Washington Department of Agriculture, which is requesting additional even though the state legislature says the budget is tight and there will be cuts.

"**If a farm or processing plant** donates food, there is a need to transport it from the farm or plant to our warehouse," Eric said. "So, there is a request for the legislature to provide funding to do that."

Related to the need to keep

up with continual changes, he quoted philosopher Eric Hoffer: "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

"**We have to pay attention** to how the world is changing in order to continually adapt to keep ahead of the changes," Eric said.

"We are thankful that generosity continues," he added. "Without generosity we could not do what we do."

Some people donate food. Some volunteer to help Second Harvest do what it does. Others donate funds.

"That's how we are sustained," he said.

For information, call 535-6678 or email eric.williams@2-harvest.org.

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Lisa Gardner activates NAACP Spokane chapter with new energy

By Mary Stamp

As president of NAACP Spokane, Lisa Gardner seeks to inspire more of the 366 members re-engage with the 100 active members, both to strengthen the NAACP in the community and to build relationships when challenges arise.

Lisa referred to 2024 as a year of “peaks and valleys in responding to systemic racism”—highlighted by 460 people filling a Convention Center Ballroom for the Freedom Fund Banquet in November and the “phenomenal work” NAACP Spokane is doing to address some ugly incidents.

Lisa is grateful that leaders of the Spokane and Mead school districts were responsive and worked with NAACP Spokane to gather teachers, parents and community members to address recent incidents of racism.

At the Wilson Elementary, a music teacher invited children to dress as “slaves and hoboes” for a jazz concert. Football players at Mead allegedly hazed, bullied and racially intimidated athletes of color. Meetings on those incidents show the need to be vigilant, she said.

Along with annually educating the community for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History Month, Lisa listed some high points of 2024.

- Lisa recruited Priya Osborne who, as the new Youth Council advisor, built it to 28 members. It has been nearly 40 years since the branch has had a youth council to mentor youth to carry on the work.

- Civic Engagement held its second annual “meet and greet” events to spread word about the NAACP and involve more people. They also held candidate forums.

- The Healthcare Committee started a program to train students at Rogers High School to be lifeguards and took 24 students to Providence to learn about health care jobs.

- The Criminal Justice Committee is planning a program, “Building Restorative Communities,” to promote restorative justice in city and county legal systems.

- The Education Committee is supporting staff and students of color in the school system, including screening a documentary, “The Right to Read,” on the importance of literacy for black and brown children, and all children.

- For the Nov. 21 Human Rights Spokane Champion Awards, NAACP Spokane nominated The Black Lens for “its dedication to highlighting Black excellence through photography and storytelling.”

Lisa shared the career, faith and community journey that brought her to be president of NAACP Spokane starting in



Lisa Gardner speaks at Spokane's People's March on Jan. 18.

Photo by Gen Heywood

January 2024.

When she was eight, Lisa began to tag along with her grandmother, Sarah Gardner, who was active in the NAACP, volunteered at the East Central Community Center and attended City Council meetings. Sarah, the first Black woman to run for City Council, lost in the primary. Soon after, she was murdered in the beauty salon she owned in 1987.

Lisa's mother and uncle left Spokane, but Lisa, who was then 13, stayed with her 80-year-old grandfather. In World War II, he had moved to Portland to work at a naval shipyard and settled in Spokane in 1946 as a Pullman porter and later retired from Spokane Community College maintenance staff.

In 2000, Lisa earned a bachelor's degree in communications and public relations. Then in 2003, she moved to Baltimore, Md., to work with public relations firms and earn a master's degree in management and public relations at the University of Maryland Global Campus.

There she shifted from navigating as a Black woman in a community where two percent were Black, to a large urban center that was 68 percent Black.

“It was culture shock for me to navigate in a bigger city, work in different industries and go from being a minority to being part of the majority with space and voice,” said Lisa, who worked there with the National Institute of Health and a public relations firm that had McDonald's as their client.

In 2016, she moved to Seattle and started a marketing and communication consulting business, MQG Consulting, LLC. In addition to contracts with Microsoft and other entities, her primary contract was with the Office of Economic Development with the City of Seattle, consulting with 50 small businesses, giving each one eight hours of free marketing advice. In 2020, COVID ended

that work in Seattle.

When visiting her father in Spokane, she wondered if the City of Spokane would have a similar job. It didn't, but it needed a director of communications for the City Council. She applied and was hired.

Lisa said she was readily and graciously welcomed back to Spokane.

She did not think the NAACP was “her thing” until soon after she returned.

Kiantha Duncan, then the president, invited her to dinner and urged her to continue her grandmother's legacy. Lisa joined NAACP Spokane in 2021 and worked with the communication committee.

The late Sandy Williams also embraced Lisa on her return, inviting her to share her marketing expertise with small businesses through the Carl Maxey Center. Sandy relished that Lisa, like her, was “home grown” in a community where many Blacks are “transplants” who come and go. In contrast to the “racial utopia” Lisa experienced in Baltimore, where she felt embraced as a Black woman, in Spokane she has to work to make space and have a voice for the NAACP. “Growing up in Spokane, I was taught to be seen but not heard, to stay in my place,” said Lisa, noting that's how her grandparents were raised in the Civil Rights era in the Jim Crow South.

The trauma of her grandmother's murder reinforced that idea, but Baltimore opened Lisa to new ways of seeing herself as a Black woman.

Lisa was baptized in Calvary Baptist Church and attended Mount Olive Baptist for two years.

In Baltimore, she did some church hopping, because there were so many Black churches. She attended a megachurch for two years, and another church with a popular, flashy preacher, a band and multiple services.

Then she found Reid Temple in the Maryland suburbs of D.C., an African Methodist Episcopal church. Because it was 30 miles away, she began attending online.

“Fundamentally, faith gives us a foundation to do good and be a good human being,” Lisa said. “With the dos and don'ts, we can easily lose sight that we are to love one another regardless of our different skin tones, backgrounds and beliefs. We are to treat each other with dignity and respect.

“Raised by grandparents from the South, faith is about respect,” she said. “Once the foundation of faith is established in a child, it makes us grounded. We take it wherever we go.”

She now sees her involvement with the NAACP, the City Council and Martin Luther King Jr. Day events as part of “my divine path.”

As president, Lisa is encouraging the committees—Economic Justice, Environmental Justice, Youth Council, Legal Redress, Education, Civic Engagement, Criminal Justice and Healthcare—to build relationships in the community to challenge systemic racism and drive change.

Because NAACP members are community leaders and stretched thin, Lisa wants to recruit new members and activate more current members.

In 2025, the branch is using the national NAACP theme, “Keep Advancing.”

Lisa suggested that not only is Martin Luther King Jr. Day a “day on,” but so is every day.

“We must keep vigilant,” she said.

“The work of challenging racial injustice may never be done, but we must establish relationships so when racial injustice rears its ugly head, we have partners,” said Lisa.

She and branch leaders foster relationships in businesses, schools and the community so “we do not just call for help when things are bad, but partner when things are good,” she said.

“In Spokane, Black people are often the only people of color in workplaces or at meetings. Partners in businesses and organizations can mitigate their experiences of racism, tokenism or insensitivities, so Black people feel they belong,” Lisa said.

NAACP Spokane leaders were busy with speaking engagements for Martin Luther King Jr. Day and now with Black History Month events to build partnerships.

- Jaime Stacy, first vice president, spoke on living together in peace and love in a beloved community at the Spokane North Stake Center of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

- The Criminal Justice Committee co-hosted with the Spokane Jewish Film Festival a 6 p.m. reception and 7 p.m. screening, “Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round,” on Thursday, Jan. 30 at the Magic Lantern.

- Lisa spoke Jan. 20 at the MLK Rally.

- NAACP Spokane is partnering with the Spokane Community College Black Student Union for Black History Month.

For information, visit facebook.com/spokane.naacp or naacpspokane.com.

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Faith communities give ongoing response to disasters, like CA fires

As media attention to the California wildfires that began Jan. 7 wanes, depending on future fires, people in the faith and non-profit communities need to be reminded that the recovery will be ongoing, and their disaster relief programs are channels for ongoing financial support.

The Red Cross usually provides immediate relief, plus there are some funds specifically set up for the California fires.

Church and faith organizations can direct their funding to emergency and long-term recovery. Typically, they already have people in the communities and are ready to respond with food and other aid.

A November editorial, which is at thefigtree.org/nov24/110124editorialstamp.html, reminds that these offices provide trusted ways to support disaster relief and recovery. Their efforts are continual and

not driven by news cycles.

For example, while U.S. media provided heavy coverage of the Los Angeles area fires, there was a 7.1 magnitude earthquake in Tibet killing 126 people, injuring 188 people and damaging 1,000 homes. That had less coverage.

Faith and nonprofit organizations and partners also respond to those needs.

In Southern California, in addition to homes and other structures, at least 15 churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other religious institutions were completely destroyed.

Frequently, those buildings are used by the Red Cross and FEMA as shelters and places where people can come to sign up for relief and recovery aid.

Faith and nonprofit groups in the communities affected by disasters usually form Volunteer Organizations Assisting in Disasters (VOADS), that meet

regularly regionally to coordinate efforts so when disasters strike, they are ready to respond for the long haul as the response does not end when the cameras turn to the next disaster.

As California wildfires continue, so does the call to care for one another.

Rachael Pryor, conference minister with the Southern California Nevada Conference United Church of Christ, commented, "We know this is the future we are facing with climate change. We need to have a disaster response team in place because we know disasters will happen."

These wildfires are reshaping her priorities as she considers how churches respond to disasters.

"Disaster response is not isolated to the initial incident. There are many layers, and our response needs to be viewed through the eyes of the marginal-

ized and vulnerable," she said.

In addition, an article in the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest newsletter pointed out that many in the region have friends and loved ones affected by the Southern California wildfires. So, along with prayers, they directed people to contact Presbyterian Disaster Assistance nationally and donate directly to the San Gabriel Presbytery.


The article listed names of people who had served at churches or at Whitworth University and who were evacuated or safe. That gives a personal sense of the connections.

The Episcopal Diocese of Spokane newsletter noted that "in the face of devastating wildfires in Los Angeles, we are called to stand together in love and support." Along with prayers, they invited donations to their national Disaster Relief

Fund to help provide aid and bring comfort to those in need as a way "to be the hands and feet of Christ, offering hope and restoration in this time of crisis."

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WCC leader in San Jose tells of fires affecting people and churches helping

Amid California fires in January, "we have the certainty of the accompaniment of the love of God," said Neal Presa, executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San Jose, California and member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) central and executive committees.

He reflected on how people are affected by the ongoing wildfires, how churches are helping, and how God's love serves as a comfort during times of disaster.

Neal and his family, who live in northern California, are safe, but they know many people who have had to evacuate, and many whose homes, churches and schools have burned.

"Churches in the Presbytery of the Pacific, the regional governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which encompasses Pacific Palisades and the surrounding communities, are providing shelter," he said.

Churches of many denominations are providing beds, food, showers and a caring presence

to help people through great trauma.

"The ecumenical family can pray for all the affected individuals and communities in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, the thousands of residents who have lost their homes and businesses and are dislocated, firefighters who have been working tirelessly to contain the fires, first responders who are providing aid, caregivers who are providing care to the aged and infirm, and, overall, hope and resilience in the midst of the smoldering ash, and a shared sense of community," he urged.

"We mourn the devastating and heartbreaking losses by so many in this and in every natural disaster," he added.

Neal noted that there will be many kids who will wonder where they will go to school, many families who will wonder where they will find long-term shelter as they figure out what to do next, and many pastors who already feel overwhelmed who

will work with their congregations for how and where to continue worshipping and serving.

"In the midst of this, in the fragility of our lives and in the uncertainty of where winds blow and when winds and storms will end, we have the certainty of the accompaniment of the love of God and the God who is in the midst of the storms," he said. "May the Lord and our shared sense of community be with all those in southern California and all of us who are in solidarity through prayers and who are ready to provide whatever support that would be helpful in the days, weeks and months to come."



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Haitians share the community and caring they know in their culture

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

With hate crimes on the rise and stereotypes of Haitians making the news, Katia Jasmin started Creole Resources in 2023 to educate people in the region about Haitians and to share resources with Haitians living here.

They organized a celebration of Haitian Independence Day on Jan. 6 at the Spokane City Council meeting. More than 50 people from several organizations came to sample food, learn about Haitian culture and meet Haitians who live in Spokane.

Raised by her grandmother, Katia learned the importance of helping others.

“My family are people persons. We help people,” she said.

After she moved to Spokane, she started Creole Resources, an organization for Haitians who find it hard to navigate in a different culture.

Because Haitians speak Creole and have the shared experience of struggles and violence they left, it is easier for them to ask each other for help.

When she first established Creole Resources, 70 Haitians showed up to an early event. After that, Haitians enjoyed gathering more often to share concerns.

When the U.S. government started the temporary workers permit program, some local Haitians began to sponsor their parents and other family members.

Katia estimates that there are now about 500 Haitians in the region.

“Every week, two to three Haitians arrive and are helped by Haitians who have jobs, own businesses, provide homecare and childcare, and work in industries,” she said. “The Haitians here work hard supporting their families at home and bringing them here.”

Katia said that Maranatha Ministries is the faith home for many Haitians in the community. Having a faith community that worships in Creole with English translation is important.

“We feel the spirit. The way we worship may be different, but we worship the same God,” said Katia, whose father, Luc Jasmin Jr., is the pastor.

Katia, who was born and grew up in Haiti, came 11 years ago with her family from the Dominican Republic. She is now a U.S. citizen.

“At one point when I was 16, gang members came to my house and put a gun to my head. They took me. I panicked. I thought they were going to do bad things to me,” Katia said.

After that, her family moved to the Dominican Republic, where she lived for 10 years and studied business management. Haitians, like Katia’s parents, believe in the importance of education.



Katia Jasmin organizes to provide resources, translation.

Even if they lack food, they will sell items to send their kids to school.

Before moving to Spokane, she visited her grandmother who was living in Boston.

Katia held several jobs, working first at the call center her brother owned and then working at cell phone companies.

She began to teach at a daycare center and was assistant director for seven years. She also trained as a pharmacy assistant and was the office manager at the Jasmin Group, LLC.

Now she is the director at Parkview Early Learning Center and a part-time organizer with the Spokane Alliance, along with running Creole Resources.

The main work of Creole Resources is to help Haitians learn the basics for survival and find jobs, housing and interpretation.

“We accompany Haitians to doctor’s appointments and help them fill out job applications. We partner with Teamsters and Peirone Produce who provide work for Haitians,” she said.

Creole Resources provides an interpreter for job trainings, so Haitians know what a job entails. Interpretation helps Haitian girls with college degrees find daycare and jobs in daycare.

“Some people say we are here to take their jobs, but we are here to help fill in gaps,” Katia said. “Hospitals need people to clean. Haitians with higher education—even doctors and law-

yers—are cleaning, because they need a job to help support their parents and siblings in Haiti.

“Haitians are hard workers. We and other immigrants are filling a gap, doing jobs others are not willing to do,” Katia said.

Another role of Creole Resources is to dispel prejudice about immigrants, such as false rumors that were spread by politicians about Haitians in Ohio.

“We welcome people who want to know who we are to come to our gatherings, sit with us and ask us questions,” said Katia.

“We are here because life at home is terrifying. If things were better, we would have stayed,” she explained.

“We are human beings and believe in the Savior. We are all children of God. Let’s work together. Let’s not fear or hate each other,” she appeals, based on her experiences in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and now in the U.S.

Katia cries reading hate-filled messages sent to her and other Haitians, wondering how some people can be so hurtful toward people with a different skin color.

“Those who hate don’t know my heart, but judge me because of how I look, not what kind of person I am,” she said.

After the unrest in Haiti since the Haitian president was assassinated three years ago, the Dominican Republic sent many

Haitians back because of the color of their skin, even though they need Haitians to work in construction, Katia said.

Dominican Republic citizens are white people of Spanish heritage, while Haitians are black people of African heritage.

Katia would like there to be more local channels to accept college-educated Haitians—such as doctors, lawyers and accountants—so they can contribute more to U.S. society, which has a shortage of doctors and professionals.

Creole Resources helps Haitians overcome the language barrier by encouraging them to take English classes at Spokane Community College or from Creole Resources.

“Out of my faith, I believe we are all brothers and sisters. The Bible invites us to help people in need and to feed the hungry,” Katia said. “The little I have I share with others. It makes me happy. To see that my neighbor and their children are happy, I try to help, to be available to those who need me.

“I am blessed to have the family I have. My grandmother is a strong woman. My family is strong and models the faith we have in God and our desire to help people,” said Katia.

“When you see someone who looks different from you, don’t judge them, don’t push them

away, don’t mistreat them. If they are lost, show them the way. If they are hungry, help them out,” she invited.

Haitian children are experiencing trauma from conditions they left. Now some children in school are being told by classmates to go back to Haiti, Katia reported. “Show them love, because they are going through struggles and are here in peace to prepare for their futures.

“We’ve been through a lot, but we did not know depression or other mental health issues before. We come here to learn and to offer our help. Even though we are from another country, we are educated, we speak several languages, and we have expertise. We fill jobs where there is need.”

Katia said for Haitians in Haiti and here, neighbors are family and look after each other.

Responding to negative news stories, Katia reaffirmed that Haitians are good people. She hopes others will respect the Haitians who are in the Inland Northwest.

“Everyone matters. We all have a purpose. Only God knows that purpose,” Katia said, inviting people to meet Haitians, learn who they are and perhaps develop relationships by volunteering to teach an English class with Creole Resources.

For information, email info@creoleresources.com.



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We need to realize that America does not exist without refugees

On Jan. 20, our new U.S. President ended refugee admissions into the United States effective Jan. 27. The possibility exists to resume them at his sole discretion after a 90-day "review." I have a few thoughts as someone who has worked directly with refugees in Spokane for the past nine years:

1) More than 3,000,000 refugees have come through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program since 1980 and have successfully become hard-working, tax-paying permanent residents and eventually U.S. citizens.

They commit crimes at lower rates than those of us born here, start businesses at twice the rate of those of us born here, and are the most thoroughly vetted category of immigrants in the entire nation. There is no practical reason for this policy. It's foolishness born of xenophobia.

2) This is a denial of one of the most foundational values of America: we are a land of liberty for the oppressed and persecuted of the world. If this is how we are going to treat refugees, we might as well shove the Statue of Liberty off its pedestal and into the sea.

So many of us are descendants of pilgrims from other lands who came here to work hard, raise their children with freedom and make a better world that it's unconscionable for us to slam the door shut on those who come for the same reasons our ancestors did.

3) This is bad foreign policy. Many of our relationships with other nations include U.S. participation in alleviating humanitarian disasters and those displaced by war. Allies like Turkey, Jordan and Uganda agree to house millions of refugees annually, as well as support U.S.

interests in a myriad other ways in part because America has helped resettle less than one percent of the most vulnerable refugees living in camps in their countries.

4) This is bad economics. From the last time this president was in office, a report from his own staff showed that over a 10-year period refugees generated more than \$10 billion more in tax revenue than they cost in initial government-sourced support.

More recently, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said that strong immigration in general is one of the reasons our economy did not go into recession in 2023 when high inflation threatened to send us into a downward spiral. Immigrants come and fill labor vacancies that American-born workers won't fill—in healthcare, hotels, restaurants, agriculture and manufacturing—

and their increased spending grows the economy for everyone.

America as we know it does not exist without refugees. I am committed to standing together with refugees and other vulnerable immigrants until this country wakes up and remembers who we are. I hope you are too.

Thrive's Mission is to Empower Multicultural Communities to THRIVE.

Thrive International is innovating how local communities respond to the refugee crisis in America. We have two transitional housing centers in Washington State—Spokane and Seattle—that serve refugee families while providing on-site programming and education tailored to their needs.

Mark Finney
Executive Director
Thrive International

Seeing community organizing globally gives us lessons for today

Cameron Conner provided columns on community organizing in several countries working as a Watson Fellow in the past year. He continues to reflect on his experiences and the power of community organizing in an upcoming series of columns.

After a year working with organizers in Spain, England, South Africa, the Philippines and Peru, I returned in mid-August to a country that appeared to be tearing itself apart. I had spent a year trying to understand spaces where people felt like they had power and a vision for the future. Now, I was faced with making sense of the anger, distrust and growing fault lines in my own country.

The election showed that something fundamental is shifting in the United States. Frustration with the status quo, distrust of public institutions, and a sense of being both stuck and powerless has emerged as the pervasive feeling across many demographics.

The lesson of my work with organizers

was, "It doesn't have to be this way."

From community members in the Philippines celebrating the construction of 2,000 new homes for the Urban Poor Alliance to assemblies of nurses, teachers and parent-leaders in the United Kingdom taking on directors in the National Health Society, I found that where people had agency, they had hope.

Even though anger, resentment and distrust seemed to be on the rise in every country I visited, I found the best antidote where people felt like they had the power to hold their public institutions and officials accountable and that they were living out values of civic virtue and cooperation by organizing.

People with this type of power saw themselves as entitled to demand a say in their society. These were citizens who had begun to lay their hands on the levers of power that a constitutional democracy puts at their disposal.

I seek to reflect on the lessons gathered from organizers across the globe and to

apply them to the new political context we now face. I seek to make sense of the world through a new narrative that chronicles how people in the last 75 years gained power, lost it and forgot why it matters. From the stories I heard, what is the common thread that can guide us forward?

At the heart of this narrative is a central argument that the challenges we face will not be solved by finding and electing better leaders. They will be solved by investing in the peoples' ability to once again build enough power to hold their representatives accountable and ensure our interests are the ones driving the agenda. Our problems will be solved by us becoming better citizens.

I am able to explore these ideas in my work as a visiting fellow and professor of the practice through June at Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University. We exist at the crux of a great experiment.

Abraham Lincoln, facing a parallel inflection point in American history, once distilled the nature of this challenge in a

conversation with his secretary John Hay: "The central idea pervading this struggle is the necessity upon us of proving that popular government is not an absurdity... If we fail it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves."

We face a similar challenge today, with the same stakes.

In upcoming columns, I will explore 1) How did we get here? The story of why we, the people, gave up our power. 2) Where should we go? Democracy is a tool worth saving. What then must we do and how do we get there?

The work ahead of us is to restore faith in the conviction that our human ability for self-government is not absurd. This will not be done by finding and electing to office a Messiah who will lead us out of the wilderness. Rather, it will be by teaching ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs.

Cameron Conner
Editorial columnist

Sounding Board

MLK Day Rally Speech

King charged us to love each other: How can I love you better?

How Can I Love You Better?

I'm honored to share a piece of my heart, mind soul. I hope that the words and thoughts that I share will resonate within and kindle a fire that you will be able to camp around daily and receive the warmth you need to pursue your purpose.

We celebrate and honor the life, the journey and the purpose of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—a life that was lived with the intention of doing what God put him on this earth to do. A life dedicated to living out the two greatest commandments: loving the Lord God with all his heart, all his soul and all his mind, and loving his neighbor as himself. A life meant to serve as a footprint for the long walk towards freedom set before the Black community.

A life full of LOVE: Dr. King's journey had many stops, detours, roadblocks and dead ends, but yet he kept on moving. A journey dedicated to bringing the injustices against the Black communities across the county to light and to march with the people to activate LOVE, so it can drive out the hate that unfortunately filled the hearts of many. A journey dedicated to encouraging and uplifting, versus chastising and tearing down.

A journey of LOVE! Dr. King walked with a purpose of being the shepherd in a movement meant to give some of God's chosen people a level playing field in this country. A purpose to activate the call. A purpose to inspire a generation who will hopefully inspire another generation to

continue the purpose of Dr. King.

A purpose of LOVE. I know that the Dr. King, who was a man working in God's will, was working with the greatest gift, and the only tool that could make tremendous change with the activating of it...LOVE

Patience, kindness, gentleness, no record of wrongdoing, no envy, no boasting, no dishonoring, no self-seeking, not easily angered. A tool that does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres and it never fails.

I'm talking about Love. That agape love, the Love that God is. Dr. King decided to stick with Love, because hate was too great of a burden to bear.

We should too. In an attempt to equip myself with this powerful tool, and an attempt to convince us that not only is this strategy that Dr. King implemented effective and efficient but it's also powerful and life changing. I ask you, neighbor, my fellow man and woman,

How can I love you better? What can I do to show you that it's not about me getting over on you. Or me being more successful than you. It's not about me at all, but it's about us coming together to fulfill the needs of the hungry. Us coming together to help build up communities that have no foundation. Us collaborating to create an opportunity for our fellow man or woman to have the best possible outcome for their lives. It's about us serving

each other, in love.

So I ask, how can I love you better? Do you need a simple smile when you walk by me? Can I embrace you with a hug that you need because it appears that no one else wants to? Can I share half of my sandwich that I was looking forward to eating with you? Can I pray for you?

Can I forgive you for the wrong you did to me? Can I help you understand who I am and why I need your love?

How can I love you better? I implore you friends and family to ask the same question. Matter of fact, look to your neighbor and ask, How can I love you better?

What will it take for us to go from "me" to "we"? What will it take for us to leave the comparison and begin the companionship? What will it take? What will it take to teach your child and my child to love each other better from the beginning?

How can I love you better? Dr. King said that Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.

I agree wholeheartedly! He also said that hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it. So I ask again, how can I love you better?

In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is

redemptive." Let Patience have its perfect work. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only Light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only Love can do that."

I would be remiss if I didn't give honor to two pioneers who helped create this space for you and I to be here together. Two legends in our community who loved us. Who taught us to love and charged us to continue the work needed to love on each other. Mr. Ivan Bush and Pastor Happy Watkins started the work, and we have to continue the work.

We thank them for the sacrifice of love that they poured into us for inspiring us. Thank you, Grandfather, Bishop Ezra Kinlow for inspiring me to want to be here right now encouraging my fellow community to show me how I can love them better.

So let's leave here today, and continue to ask ourselves and others, How can I love you better?

Michael Bethely - Member of Holy Temple Church of God in Christ

Links to recent sermons on Martin Luther King Jr. Day and on leadership:

• **Bishop Marian Budde**, Washington Cathedral: youtube.com/watch?v=xwwaEuDeqM8.

• **William Barber II's** MLK Day sermon: youtube.com/watch?v=Nis49UDcwDk.

• **Baptist Bishop Garry Tyson** at Spokane's MLK Service: youtube.com/live/cSVg2lNmxAs?si=kzHAY3e2Cu-c4uwU.

Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed
Submit events to development@thefigtree.org by the third Friday before publication

- To Mar 9 • Woman, Artist, Catalyst:** Art from the Permanent Collection, NWMAC, 2316 W. 1st, Tues to Sat, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 456-3931
- Feb 1 • Spokane's Lunar New Year Festival,** 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 12 to 7 p.m.
- **Celtic Celebration for St. Brigid's Day,** St. David's Episcopal, 7315 N. Wall, 5:30 p.m., 466-3100, stdavidspokane.org
- **Leadership Lights the Way Gala,** Leadership Spokane Northwest Quest Resort and Casino, 100 N. Hayford, Airway Heights, 6 to 9 p.m., leadershipspokane.ejoinme.org/register2025
- Feb 1, 2 • ODC Dance: The Velvetine Rabbit,** Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 2 p.m., 313-2787, gonzagaperformingarts.venue.net/events/GMS0201
- To Feb 2 • Spokane Jewish Film Festival 2025,** Magic Lantern Theatre, 25 W. Main, 413-8254, director@sajfs.org, SpokaneJewishFilm.org
- **Sweat,** on race, immigration, slipping middle-class life, Spokane Civic Theatre, 1020 N. Howard, Sat 7:30 p.m., Sun 2 p.m., 325-3507, spokanecivictheatre.com
- Feb 2 • Rosa Parks Birthday Party,** donations for MLK Center, Veradale United Church of Christ, 611 N. Progress Rd., 1 to 4 p.m., 926-7173
- **Intentional Community Gathering,** Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 1 to 4 p.m., 993-2968, harmonywoods.org
- **Hot Jazz Sunday Night,** Hamilton Studio, 1427 W. Dean, 6 p.m., Hamilton.live/sunday
- Feb 2, 9, 16, 23 • Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR)** Coffee, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, 9 a.m., scarspokane.org
- Feb 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 • Alternatives to Violence** of the Palouse, online training, 332-4357, program.manager@arvp.org, atvp.org
- Feb 3, 10, 17, 24 • Heartistry: Artistic Wellbeing,** Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit Pkwy, 3 to 5 p.m., 279-0299
- Feb 4 • Coffee Chat,** The Isaac Foundation, 606 W. Sharp, 10 to 11:30 a.m., 325-1515, theisaacfoundation.org
- Feb 4-Mar 21 • Paper as Water:** Contemporary Indigenous Prints in the Bryan Oliver Gallery, Whitworth Art and Design Dept, Indigenous artists, M-F 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 777-3258, WUArt@whitworth.edu
- Feb 5 • Monthly Bird Walk** at Saltese Flats, Doris Morrison Learning Center, 1330 S. Henry, Greenacres, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., spokanecounty.org/5360/Doris-Morrison-Learning-Center-DMLC
- **Dementia: Warning Signs & Early Diagnosis,** for unpaid caregivers and healthcare workers, South Hill Library, 3324 S. Perry, 10:30 a.m., 444-5300, spokanelibrary.org
- **Nature-Positive Development** and Generous Urban Design, connecting climate to equity and health, Hemmingson, Gonzaga University and livestreamed, 6 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/events/2025/2/5/nature-positive-development-and-generous-urban-design
- Feb 5, 19 • Open Art Night,** Lunarium, 1925 N. Monroe, 6 to 9 p.m., facebook.com/Lunarium.Spokane
- Feb 5, 12, 19, 26 • SCAR Meeting,** Saranac, 19 W. Main, noon, scarspokane.org
- Feb 7 • First Friday, Spokane,** 5 to 8 p.m., firstfriday.org
- **Reception for Mo Stach,** Avenue West Gallery, 907 W. Boone, 3 to 7 p.m., 838-4999, avenuewestgallery.com
- **The Garment of Praise World Premiere,** opera by Kevin Waters, S.J., Gonzaga School of Leadership Studies, Office of Mission and Integration, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts, 211 E. Desmet, 7 to 8:30 p.m., gonzagaperformingarts.venue.net/events/GTR0207
- Feb 8 • Sons of Norway Craft and Culture Fair,** Trinity Lutheran, 812 N. Fifth, Coeur d'Alene, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., (208) 262-8020, son-cda.com
- **Journaling Toward Your Authentic Self,** Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 10 :30 a.m., (208) 769-2315
- **GirlConNW,** The Community School, 1025 W. Spofford, 12 to 5 p.m., 747-8091, girlconnw.com
- **Grand Opening Moeckel Studio,** Indigenous owned business and art exhibition, 217-6831, moeckelstudio.com
- **Lunar New Year 2025,** Spokane Chinese Association cultural fair, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 1 to 4 p.m., spokanechinese.org
- **The Princess Bride,** Interactive Movie Night at The Garland Theatre, Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition, 924 W. Garland, 4:30 p.m. open, 6 p.m. movie, bit.ly/3ZjgeTM
- Feb 9 • Lord of the Rings Trivia Fundraiser** for Get Lit, Iron Goat Brewing, 1302 W. 2nd, 12 to 2 p.m.
- Feb 10 • Visiting Writers Series,** classical texts on environmental crises, Gonzaga English Dept., Hemmingson, 7 p.m., marshall@gonzaga.edu
- Feb 12 • Executive Director Coffee Hour,** Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA), online 9 a.m., nonprofitwa.org/calendar
- **Leading Toward Liberation: Theory and Praxis**

- for Justice and Health in Higher Ed, Hemmingson Ballroom, Gonzaga, 10 to 11:15 a.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/
- **Celebrate EveryBODY Screendance Film Festival,** proceeds benefit Dance for Parkinson's, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 6 p.m., 313-2787, gonzaga.edu/dance
- **Baku at the Heart of Climate Action:** Insights from COP 29, Gonzaga and Spokane attendees share insights, Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, Hemmingson and livestreamed, 6 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/
- Feb 12, 19, 26 • Tools for Running an Effective Nonprofit,** NAWA, online, 1 to 3 p.m., nonprofitwa/calendar
- Feb 13 • Harold Balazs Reredos Artwork** Ribbon Cutting for donation from Messiah Lutheran, Whitworth Art & Design Dept., Hixson Union Building, 3 p.m., forms.whitworth.edu/calendar/event/detail/7818
- **Healthy Heart Powwow,** The NATIVE Project, Rogers High School, 1622 E. Wellesley, 5 p.m., 483-7535, nativeproject.org
- Feb 15 • Saturday with the Symphony,** Coeur d'Alene Symphony, book reading, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 11 a.m., (208) 769-2315, cdalibrary.org
- **Discovery Saturday: Cosmic Kids,** The Isaac Foundation, 606 W. Sharp, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 325-1515, hello@theisaacfoundation.org, theisaacfoundation.org
- **Register for Community Talent Show,** Africa Movement, 869-2020, brookrunner1@gmail.com
- Feb 15, 16 • Spokane Public Radio Record Sale,** 2426 Discovery Pl., Spokane Valley, Sat 9-5, Sun 11-5
- Feb 17 • Dementia Basics,** Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 5:30 p.m., 444-5300, spokanelibrary.org
- Feb 20 • NAACP Monthly Meeting,** Spokane Central Library, 3rd Fl, 906 W. Main, 6:30 to 8 p.m., facebook.com/spokane.naacp
- Feb 21 • The Expanse with Littles,** Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 9:30 to 11 a.m., 981-5698, harmonywoods.org
- Feb 22 • KSPS PBS Future Day,** On Track Academy, 4091 N. Regal, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 800-735-2377, kspks.org
- **El Mercadito,** West Central Community Center, Latino cultural market, health clinic, immigration resources, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- **Free Rein Therapeutic Riding's Annual Auction & Dinner,** Mukogawa Institute, 4000 W. Randolph, 4 to 8:30 p.m., 979-1468, auction@freereinspokane.org, freereinspokane.org
- **Viva Vino Gala,** Nuestras Raices benefit, Spokane Tribe Resort & Casino, 14300 SR Highway 2, Airway Heights, 4:30 to 10 p.m., 557-0566, hbpaofspokane.org
- Feb 23 • Meow Meow,** comedienne, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7:30 p.m., 313-2787, gonzagaperformingarts.venue.net/events/GMS0223
- Feb 24 • Transition is Inevitable, Justice Is Not,** Gopal Dayaneni on climate justice, Hemmingson, Gonzaga, online, 702 E. Desmet, 6 p.m., 313-6942, bonzaga.edu/climateevents
- Feb 25 • 2025 Quackenbush Lecture with Judge Raul Pangalangan,** former judge at International Criminal Court at the Hague, Barbieri Courtroom, Gonzaga Law School, 5 to 6:30 p.m., lawalumni@gonzaga.edu
- Feb 26 • Fig Tree Mailing and Delivery,** need volunteers, St. Mark's Lutheran, 24th and Grand, 9 a.m. to noon, 535-4112, kaye@thefigtree.org
- **William Douglas Lecture,** Judge Jennifer Sung, Gonzaga Center for Civil & Human Rights, Law School, Barbieri Courtroom, 5 to 7 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/events/2025/2/26/william-douglas-lecture
- Feb 27 • The Fig Tree Benefit and Board meetings,** noon for Benefit, 1 to 3 for Board, Zoom, call 535-1813
- Feb 28 • Winter Jazz Fusion Concert,** Myrtle Woldson Center, 7:30 p.m., gonzagaperformingarts.venue.net/events/GMD0228
- Feb 28-Mar 1 • Leadership Symposium,** Inviting Leadership: Dialogue and Inclusion, 12 a.m. to 12 a.m., gonzagalead@gonzaga.edu
- Mar 2 • Red Ribbon Gala,** Spokane AIDS Network, Historic Davenport Hotel, 815 W. Sprague, 4 to 9 p.m., givebutter.com/c/RRG2025
- **Northwest BachFest,** Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, Barrister Winery, 1213 W. Railroad, nwbachfest.com
- Mar 2,4 • Keberle Jazz Mass,** Dan Keberle, Chancel Choir, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 8:30 and 10:45 a.m., 747-6677, stmarks-spokane.org
- Mar 8 • The Fig Tree Benefit Lunch,** "Sharing Wisdom: Connecting the Generations, host table/attend, 11 a.m., buffet opens, 12 to 1 p.m., program, Hemmingson at Gonzaga and livestream, 535-1813, gonzaga.edu/livestream, secure.givelively.org/donate/the-fig-tree/2025-benefit
- Mar 12 • Fig Tree Breakfast-Time Benefit,** Zoom, 7:30 a.m. gather, 8 to 9 a.m., program, 535-4112, event@thefigtree.org, see givelively.org URL above
- Feb • Black History Month**
- **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**
- **Tu BiSjvat - Jewish holiday,** Feb 12-13
- **Ramadan - Feb 28 to March 29**

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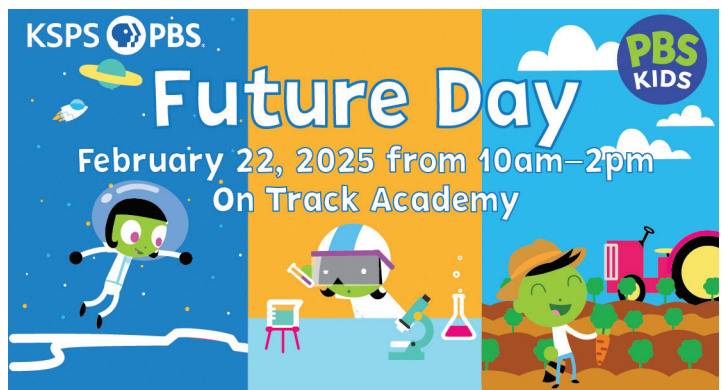


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Caring for natural world includes keeping track of numbers of birds

Catherine Ferguson SNJM

Many religions view caring for the environment as a core tenet, often interpreting their scriptures as a call for humans to take responsibility to protect and preserve the natural world as part of their faith.

Part of the natural world that may be especially threatened by the changing environment is birds.

The National Audubon Society, Birds Canada and Cornell Lab of Ornithology have announced the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), which will be held Friday to Monday, Feb. 14 to 17.

Launched in 1998, the Great Backyard Bird Count is the first online participatory-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time. This is a global effort. The more people who participate, the more knowledge will be gained to help preserve and protect the natural world.

Two passionate birders who will participate are Lindell Haggin, a past treasurer and board member emerita of the Spokane Audubon Society—a chapter of the National Audubon Society—and Alan McCoy, a current board member. Both are dedicated birders who have invested many years in Audubon’s mission of education and conservation.

Both have come to this avocation through family members.

When Lindell moved to Spokane from Cleveland in the 1970s, her first husband used to enjoy photographing orchids and carnivorous plants that grew in marshy areas.

“I decided I would take advantage of being outdoors and began to watch the birds,” she explained.

Lindell’s parents-in-law, Margaret and Morey Haggin, belonged to the Spokane Birders Club and instigated its transition to the Spokane Audubon Society.

Carrying on the tradition, her children in Oregon, Arizona and Minnesota are also in tune with the birds in their areas.

“All three of our children are interested in birding, although not to the extent of their grandparents and mother,” said Lindell, “It provides another topic of enjoyable conversation by phone, on Zoom or for the rare personal visits.”

Alan told how his passion for birds developed.

“It came from my mother. As a child, she taught me to observe the birds around our home. Then, I got my first pair of binoculars in my 20s. I got really interested in birds, but I’m not sure why I got the bird bug while others didn’t,” he said.

Today, 50 years later, he still loves watching birds – even common ones like the California quail and the chickadees that are abundant in his yard.

“I love birds, but I don’t have a favorite. All birds are fun to observe,” he commented.

Both Lindell and Alan lead nature field trips, advocate for birds and their habitat, and take part in bird counts and bird surveys. This is a part of the education and conservation that are the Audubon Society’s mission.

The bird counts are not just important because birds are interesting to watch, but because



Alan McCoy, left, and Lindell Haggin, right, are among the passionate birders in the Spokane Audubon Society.

birds are a bellwether for the planet and provide many benefits.

They keep ecosystems running smoothly by eating insect pests, dispersing seeds, pollinating plants and scavenging carcasses, which reduces the spread of some diseases.

They help inform people if the environment is healthy. Birds give an early warning about toxins and pollutants.

Bird counts monitor environmental trends because birds are sensitive to environmental change. The counts also help identify problems like habitat loss and climate change.

Lindell has seen the increase of the Eurasian collared-dove, which was introduced from Europe and now inhabits the Inland Northwest as an invasive species, taking over the habitat of native mourning doves. She has also tracked an increased northern migration of bird species because of the warming climate.

In 2019, she participated in a nationwide bird survey published by the National Audubon Society that drew on 140 million bird observations from across the country and focused on the effect of a warming climate.

The survey results warned that two-thirds of America’s birds face climate-change-related extinction by 2100. In Washington, 141 local breeding species, including pygmy nuthatches and mountain bluebirds are among those birds.

Bird count data helps resource managers make decisions about how to protect ecosystems and preserve habitat.

Alan described an effort by Audubon Society members and other conservationists to advocate for bird habitats and maintain a corridor between nearby natural areas in more than 200 acres of undeveloped woodland on Thorpe Road in western Spokane.

Recently, the Department of Natural Resources decided to transfer this land to the Redmond-based Blue Fern Management, which plans to build up to 1,000 homes on the land.

Bird counts also support research to track patterns and answer questions about bird populations. They educate people about birds and the natural world, and help people connect with nature.

Participation in the two bird

counts is open to anyone in the Spokane area.

One event is the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), which is structured and requires more preparation for participants.

The observations for this count take place within a designated circle on one day from Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 each year. In Spokane, the circle for observation is within a 15-mile radius from Division and Francis streets.

A second Christmas bird count in the region takes place in Cheney.

Each of the circles has a compiler. Those interested in participating in either of these CBCs can consult the Spokane Audubon website at audubon-spokane.org/christmas-bird-count. This past Christmas, the Cheney circle count was held on Dec. 15, while the Spokane area count was held Jan. 4.

The upcoming Great Backyard Bird Count isn’t as structured as the Christmas count, so it is easier for people to participate.

Anyone can take part—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It can be done from the backyard. Participants from all over the world are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes—or as long as they wish—on one or more days between Feb. 14 and 17. Then they may report their sightings online at birdcount.org.

Participating in the bird count can help the bird population in the long term, Alan explained, “because birds need our help, the Spokane Audubon Society has a place on its website for people who want to learn what to do for injured and diseased birds, or baby birds that have fallen out of their nests.

“I hope someday we will have a wildlife rehab facility in our area,” he said, reporting that, “Only Hunter Veterinarian accepts birds for treatment in Spokane. The only other option is to take birds to Washington

State University in Pullman.”

As an advocate for birds, Alan also informs people about three major threats to birds in the region.

“The first and greatest threat is habitat loss. The second is outdoor cats, for which the American Bird Conservancy has a campaign called Cat Indoors—for the safety of cats, birds and wildlife. The third is window strikes,” he said.

To eliminate the third threat at his home, Alan has applied a treatment to his windows that allows birds to actually see the windows and avoid hitting them.

Joining the Spokane Audubon Society is a way to learn more about the region’s birds. Their website lists opportunities to participate in activities that teach about birds through field trips, lectures, presentations, a newsletter and videos.

Another way to learn more is to attend the society’s monthly meetings, which are held from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on second Wednesdays of September through May at Shadle Library.

As an antidote to a stressful world, Lindell reflects on her experience.

“I enjoy being out in nature half an hour in the morning just being near the river, standing and looking,” she said. “There are lots of chickadees. I bring a handful of bird seed with me. Bold ones will hop on my hand and eat the seed. Some are territorial and won’t let others come near. Each has their own personality. Watching things wake up in the morning calms my whole system. It is a good base for the rest of the day.”

For information and to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, visit birdcount.org.