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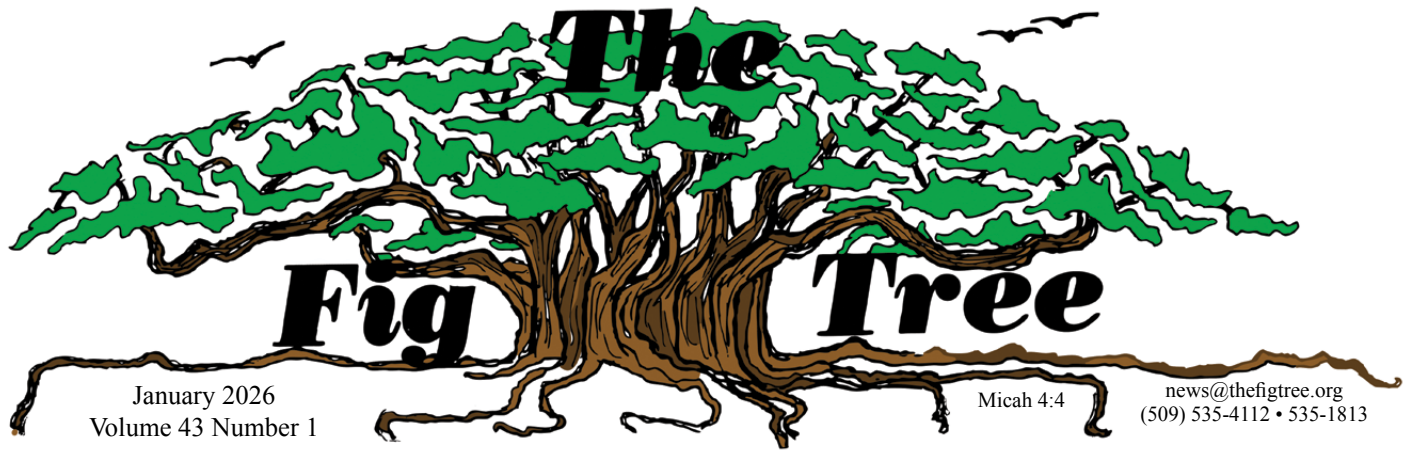
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# Ancestral Intelligence is first AI

By Mary Stamp

Jeff Ferguson, a Spokane Tribe member who creates documentaries on cultural preservation and issues facing Indian country, recently suggested that the original AI is Ancestral Intelligence.

For several years, he has learned and shared about Indigenous wisdom related to caring for the land, air and water as a solution to the climate crisis. He attended COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, in 2022; COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in 2023; at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, and in COP30 in Belém, Brazil, in November.

He will share about COP30 in an afternoon workshop at the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference on Saturday, Jan. 31, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church.

Since earning an associate's degree in photography from Spokane Falls Community College, a bachelor's in communications from Whitworth University and a master's in business administration with a focus on American Indian entrepreneurship from Gonzaga University, he has spent more than 15 years in historical preservation, documentary photo



Jeff Ferguson shows display of T-shirts he designed for Elk Soup.

and video production and fine art.

In 2020, Jeff and his wife, Eastern Washington University professor Margo Hill-Ferguson, started Elk Soup, a nonprofit that promotes health and wellness, arts and culture, education and entrepreneurship. It offers art displays, networking events and workshops.

Jeff lived on the Spokane reservation until he was seven, when his adopted father, a carpenter working with Western Nuclear, died.

To assure her children a good education, his mother moved with Jeff and his sister to Spokane, where he started in third grade at St. Charles' school, and attended Gonzaga Prep, Mead and Shadle Park high schools.

"My grandmother, the youngest daughter of Baptiste Bigsmoke, the last Kalispel chief, did all she could to keep her 10 children from going to boarding school, so she did not teach them the songs, language, culture or spirituality. In turn, they could not teach me or my 41 cousins," said Jeff, adding that it was illegal to teach native religion until 1978.

His grandfather, Clarence Campbell, a Spokane Tribe member, who had Scottish Catholic

*Continued on page 4*

## St. Gregorios' doors are open six days a week, plus Sundays for the liturgies

The doors of St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church are open six days a week for prayers, holy confession, pastoral guidance, in person and online Bible studies, Christian education classes and serving the needs of people coming for food, clothing, gas money and assistance with bills or finding a job. That's along with being open for Sunday liturgies and Sunday school.

"Ministering here, we serve the soul and body needs for members, people passing

through and people wanting to join holy orthodoxy," said Father George Hatcher, who serves the parish where he grew up with his father, Father Michael Hatcher, who started the church.

Fr. George noted that his mother, Gita, is a descendant of Pakalomattam, one of the first four converts of St. Thomas the Apostle, when he came to India in 52 A.D.

To build connection with a young woman at the church seeking help with a bill, Fr.

George introduced himself: "My mother is from India, and my father is Irish American from Idaho," he said. As he asked about her children, he added that his children are 10 and 17.

Fr. George emphasizes the church's readiness to meet with people in need who phone, email or just show up.

"Some are homeless or just out of jail. Some come to repent or for morning prayer. Some wind up joining the church. Some come to give two dollars, because they need to give something," he said. "Whatever their need, we serve them body and soul."

Rajiv, which was Fr. George's name before he was ordained, grew up in Spokane. His family attended Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church until St. Gregorios Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church started in 1984.

For the first 14 years, they rented: first on Saturdays at the Anglican Church of the Resurrection in Hillyard, then in space at Fort Wright College, and the basement chapel St. Andrew's

*Continued on page 6*

## Legislative Conference explores impact of music, art on advocacy

"We Shall Overcome: Building the Beloved Community Today" is the theme for the 2026 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference, which is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 31, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond, in-person and online.

LaRae Wiley of the Salish School of Spokane opens and closes with drumming and a prayer song, followed by interfaith sharing with songs and reflecting on the power of songs to sustain advocacy movements. Presenters are Raging Grannies, Jadrian Tarver of Gonzaga University, John Hubbe and Verne Windham of Westminster United Church of Christ and Susan Windham of the Jewish community.

**The Keynote Plenary** on "Spiritual Ramifications of Persistence" features discussion with Bishop Gretchen Rehberg of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, the Rev. Liv Larson Andrews, director of evangelical mission for the Northwest Intermountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Fr. Max Oliva SJ of Gonzaga University, Karen Stromgren of Muslims for Community Action and Support (MCAS) and Gary Jewell, a Mennonite pastor and moderator of The Fig Tree Board.

**Next youth advocates**—Nicolai Jagger, youth organizer with the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS), Li Velasco of Nuestras Raíces, Bella Rossi, a Western Washington University environmental education student, and a member of the NAACP Spokane Youth Committee—give a plenary presentation.

**The third morning session** is a briefing on legislation by Kristin Ang, policy engagement director of the Faith Action Network of Washington, Jean Welch Hill of the Washington State Catholic Conference and Luc Jasmin III, the Eastern Washington representative for Governor Bob Ferguson.

*Continued on page 3*



Religion News Briefs

Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100  
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111  
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Forum discussed multi-stakeholder approaches

During the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review 2025, the World Council of Churches (WCC) joined nearly two dozen other faith-based and community organizations, academics and refugee-led organizations in a dialogue on Dec. 16 to discuss refugee and stateless persons’ leadership and the practical, multi-stakeholder approaches that bridge humanitarian, development and peace agendas.

Faith leaders call for global tax reform

Religious leaders call for a “Zacchaeus moment” in global tax reform. Faith leaders gathered at the All Africa Conference of Churches chapel in Nairobi in November to demand tax justice as the United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation entered its third session of negotiations.

Racial justice and climate justice are linked

The WCC presented evidence at the International and Ecumenical Conference on Racial Justice in Berlin in December that communities of color face the heaviest burden of environmental harm, and climate justice cannot be achieved without racial justice. “When racial justice and ecological justice are pursued together, they strengthen each other, creating pathways toward a more equitable and sustainable future for all,” said Dinesh Suna, WCC program executive for Land, Water and Food.

Bossey Institute program applications due

The WCC Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, in collaboration with the University of Geneva, says applications are now open for the 2026 edition of its Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in Interreligious Studies. It is a unique, accredited program to equip emerging leaders with the knowledge and skills to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogue. The course comprises a three-week distance-learning component followed by a three-week immersive residential session at the Ecumenical Institute just outside Geneva, Switzerland. This year’s theme is “Creation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Interreligious Perspectives on Ecological Responsibility.” Applications are due by March 6 at [wcccoe.hire.trakstar.com/jobs/fk0pee7](http://wcccoe.hire.trakstar.com/jobs/fk0pee7).

WCC is long committed to human rights

On International Human Rights Day 2025, the WCC urged renewed support and engagement of churches and faith communities for international human rights law. Its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs contributed to drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then, the WCC prioritized speaking and acting for human rights for all.

WCC joins in declaration 30 years after Beijing

Marking 30 years since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, participants from the Asia Pacific member churches and partners of the WCC, met in Jakarta, Indonesia, to reflect theologically, contextually and practically on the commitments of the agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in the current global context. The consultation issued the “Jakarta Declaration 2025: Witnessing and Anticipating Gender Justice in Unity and Diversity,” which focuses on the past, present and future of the WCC’s commitment to gender justice.

Churches, faiths respond to hurricane damage

Hurricane Melissa, which made landfall Oct. 28 as a Category 5 storm, destroyed churches and homes in Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Continued rains compounded suffering, leaving communities vulnerable and exhausted. Immense needs extend across the Caribbean. Faith-based organizations and churches—many ACT Alliance partners—have been responding with prayers, funding and relief supplies.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Faith Action Network offers four events

Faith Action Network hosts its Spokane Winter Meeting from 5:30 to 7 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 8 at Westminster United Church of Christ, 411 S. Washington St.

It’s an opportunity for connecting across faith communities locally to build and renew relationships and imagine actions.

FAN also offers other events.

- Advocacy as Spiritual Practice on Tuesday, Jan. 6, includes a workshop on how to connect faith traditions and moral compasses to advocacy.
- Advocacy 101, a virtual training

for new and returning state advocates, will be held from 6 to 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 14. FAN staff will present tools and share how to find information on issues.

- Interfaith Advocacy Day from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 12, in Olympia is one of the largest gatherings for people of faith in the state Capitol.

“This session addresses budget pressures, protecting Washington’s social safety net and opportunities to advance justice in housing, immigrant rights,

climate, democracy and progressive revenue,” said Kristin Ang, policy engagement director.

FAN will introduce a bill to enable religious communities to provide low-income housing.

It will publish its legislative agenda in January. FAN’s priorities may shift because it is a short session. They will include climate commitments, equitable taxes, food security, housing stability and indigenous representation.

For information and to register, visit [fanwa.org](http://fanwa.org).

The Windfall funds activities for teens

The Windfall Thrift Store in Spokane’s Perry Neighborhood, a ministry of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist gave \$5,000 to the Liberty Park Community Development Center for a teen program to honor the late long-time manager, Pat Williams.

“While most understand the need for small children to have a safe place like our after-school program, middle and high schoolers are often home alone,” said Julie Cordero, director of

community life and empowerment. “However, they are at a vulnerable time, faced with new schools and friend groups, new temptations and insecurities, and the stress and drama teen years bring. Having a place to gather outside pressures of school and family life to meet inspiring adults is important.”

The center will provide sewing and art materials, special classes, outings to educational, cultural and sporting events, and participation in city and neighborhood

cleanups, and someone to work with the director on teen nights.

“Windfall volunteers decided to fulfill our mission of service by getting more involved in the Perry Neighborhood,” said Linda Finney, manager of the Windfall. “The Liberty Park program was the ideal fit. We are delighted with this partnership and look forward to seeing it bloom.”

For information, call 534-3888 or email [lindaфинney@gmail.com](mailto:lindaфинney@gmail.com).

Sravasti Abbey holds Retreat from Afar

Sravasti Abbey is opening its doors for a Retreat from Afar on White Tara and the Four Immeasurables from Jan. 6 to March 29, coinciding with the Abbey’s winter retreat.

They expect 200 to 300 participants to meditate on the same topic daily, to deepen their understanding of the Dharma and gain insights into their lives.

White Tara specializes in supporting long life and growing wisdom with special dedication by its teachers, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geshe Yeshe Thabke, Ven. Wuyin, Ven. Thubten Chodron and Ven. Sangye Khadro.

Ven. Thubten Chodron and Ven. Sangye Khadro, the Abbey’s senior teachers, will offer teachings and are available for spiritual guidance as needed, with the retreat managed by resident monastics.

Retreat from Afar options are available for people who will participate from a distance rather than joining in person.

For information, visit [sravastiabbey.org/program-overview/retreat-from-afar/?blm\\_aid=2611652609](http://sravastiabbey.org/program-overview/retreat-from-afar/?blm_aid=2611652609).

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MLK rally, service plans announced

The annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Unity Rally, March and Resource Fair begins with the rally at 10 a.m., Monday, Jan. 19, at the Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd. Organizers are recruiting agencies to have display tables at the resource fair to share their work from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

“We believe that by standing together, we amplify our impact and strengthen our shared commitment to equity and inclusion,” said Taleiya Williams, customer support specialist at Xfinity. “We look forward to making this a powerful, meaningful day. Let’s honor Dr. King’s dream through our collective action and build a stronger, more united Spokane Community.”

The Spokane Ministers’ Fellowship is organizing the annual Martin Luther King Jr Day Commemorative Service, from 3 to 5 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 18, at the Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 806 W. Indiana, to honor the spiritual side of MLK’s legacy through worship led by local clergy with songs by choirs from different churches.

For information, call 868-0856 or email [info@mlkspokane.org](mailto:info@mlkspokane.org) or to register for a resource table visit <https://form.jotform.com/mlkccspokane/resource-fair-2026>.

PJALS, WAISN partner to host advocacy day

Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) is partnering with the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN) for Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Day (IRAD) 2026, all day Thursday, Jan. 22, at the Washington State Capitol in Olympia. It is a day for communities from across Washington to come together to advocate for policies that impact immigrant and refugee families.

For information, call 838-7870, visit [pjals.org](http://pjals.org) or register at [bit.ly/irad2026eng](http://bit.ly/irad2026eng).

Gladiators plan ‘Hands off Libraries’ event

Eastside Gladiators is holding “Hands Off Libraries” as a thank you to the Library Alliance of North Idaho (LANI) from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 23, at the Post Falls Library, 821 N Spokane St. Their goal is to show love and support for the Library Alliance of North Idaho as they are on the front-line facing book banning, with an adults-only room in the works.

“We push back against censorship. We support our libraries and our librarians. We believe in parental rights, but those are being taken away,” said Theresa Birkett, president of LANI.

For information, call 425-941-7321 or email [petrahoy737@gmail.com](mailto:petrahoy737@gmail.com).

Jewish Family Services present film festival

Spokane Area Jewish Family Services (SAJFS) will present the 22nd annual Spokane Jewish Film Festival (SJFF) Jan. 22 to Feb. 1 at the Magic Lantern Theatre, 25 W. Main Ave. It features several Pacific Northwest premieres, including “Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire,” “The Other,” “31 Candles,” “Days Between Rest,” “Heritage Day” and “Fiddler on the Moon.”

Opening Night begins at 6 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 22, with appetizers prepared by Feast World Kitchen chef Maisa Abudayha. The film is “Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire,” on the author, activist and Holocaust survivor, preceded by a short documentary on Feast World Kitchen, a Spokane restaurant that empowers immigrant and former refugee communities through skill-building, cultural exchange and economic opportunity.

Since 2004, the Spokane Jewish Film Festival has showcased international films that explore Jewish life, history and culture.

“While SJFF enriches the cultural life of the Jewish community and the region as a whole, it is also a vital fundraiser,” said Neal Schindler, executive director of SAJFS.

Proceeds support SAJFS’s work to uplift seniors, low-income households and people with disabilities through advocacy, consultations, referrals, visits, rent and utility assistance, transportation, a caregiver support group, fall-prevention classes, a food bank and a medical lending closet.

For information, call 413-8254, email [director@sajfs.org](mailto:director@sajfs.org) or visit [SpokaneJewishFilm.org](http://SpokaneJewishFilm.org).

Advocacy event covers variety of issues

Continued from page 1

During the lunch break, there will be opportunities to visit displays by 40 organizations offering resources about their work and advocacy initiatives.

There will be two sessions of workshops in the afternoon.

At 1 p.m., sessions focus on resources for advocacy:

- “People Power: Creative Resistance” is led by Liz Moore, executive director of PJALS.

- “Faithful Education: Learning to Engage in Dialogue” features perspectives of different education institutions by Emily Clark of Gonzaga University, Steve Somers of Spokane Community College and Paul Schneider of Spokane Valley High School.

- “Art Expressing Advocacy” is offered by Shantell Jackson, community organizer with PJALS.

- “The Power of Music in Advocacy” is led by those sharing the opening reflection.

- “Faithful Advocacy: Building the Beloved Community” is the workshop topic for Gen Heywood, convenor of Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience with Karen Stromgren of MCAS.

- “Building Collective Power through Organizing” is the workshop by Laurel Fish, organizer with the Spokane Alliance.

The second set of workshops are focused more on issues.

- “Voting Rights” is led by the Youth Committee of NAACP Spokane.

- For “A Deeper Dive on Bills in the State Legislature,” Kristin Ang of FAN and Jean Welch-Hill of the WSCC share more on key bills before the state legislature.

- “Rent and Affordable Housing Issues” presenters are Joe Ader of Family Promise, Ami Manning of Spokane Low Income Housing

Consortium (SLIHC), Michelle Pappas of Futurewise, and Terri Anderson of the Tenants Union of Washington.

- “Weaving a Resilient Social Fabric in Climate Change” is led by Zoe Hartman and Ian Webb of the Gonzaga Climate Institute and William Aal of the interfaith committee of 350 Spokane.

- “Indigenous Issues and Climate” is the topic of Jeff Ferguson, photographer-videographer who recently attended COP30 in Belém, Brazil.

- “Refugee and Immigration Issues” is offered by the Eastern Washington Refugee and Immigrant Coalition with Margaret Hinson of International Rescue Committee, Deb Salls of Global Neighborhood Thrift, Christi Armstrong of World Relief, Luis Castillo of Refugee and Im-

migrant Connections Spokane, Maisa Abudayha of Feast World Kitchen and Pat Castaneda of Manzanita House.

**Registration information** is in the ad on this page and at [thefigtree.org/donate.html](http://thefigtree.org/donate.html).

Sponsors, along with The Fig Tree, include the American Civil Liberties Union WA, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, Dorothy Day Labor Forum, Faith Action Network, MCAS, NAACP Spokane, Partnering for Progress, Spokane Community Against Racism, Spokane Helpers Network, SLIHC, Thrivent Financial and Washington State Budget Policy Office.

For information, call 535-1813 or register by Jan. 26 at <https://secure.givelively.org/donate/the-fig-tree/2026-legislative-conference>.

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# Indigenous people and wisdom hold the solutions to climate change

*Continued from page 1*  
roots, served on the Kalispel Tribal Council.

When there was a threat the Kalispel reservation would be terminated, Jeff’s grandmother enrolled her children with the Spokane Tribe, but the Kalispel Tribe continued. Some family members stayed Spokane while some went back to the Kalispel.

“Our extended family hasn’t been close over the years,” he said. “Many practice Christianity, but for me it became hard to embrace both the colonizers’ religion and our heritage. I struggled for years attending Catholic, Baptist, nondenominational, Four Square and Orthodox churches, trying to figure out my spirituality.

“When I started to dance six years ago, the late Francis Cul-luyoh, an elder in the Kalispel Tribe, gave me an eagle bustle he received in 1963,” Jeff said.

“As I leaned into my cultural roots, I found an approach that connects everything for me,” he said.

At COP27 in Egypt, he went to Mt. Sinai for a sunrise ceremony with Indigenous spiritual leaders.

“I found a spiritual experience that connects me with the Creator,” Jeff said. “It took time to get here from questioning things that did not click. I found answers to fill the hole in Indian country. Now I understand where I come from and where I am going.”

After Jeff interviewed boarding school survivors 16 years ago, he better understood the effects of colonization, the relocation and termination of tribes and the impact of divide-and-conquer.

While East Coast tribes were introduced to colonization 500 years ago, tribes in this region only began to feel the effects of colonization about 170 years ago as settlers crossed the Cascades and Rockies and moved south from Canada, Jeff pointed out.

As colonizers taught their language and religious practices, they suppressed native languages and spirituality. They burned dug-out canoes, which people used for fishing and trade, he added.

Last year, Jeff visited the mass grave of children in front of the boarding school in Harbor Springs, Mich. A road construc-

tion crew had found bones in dirt before building a road over them.

In 2016, Jeff went twice to the protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline construction at Standing Rock, where the construction crew bulldozed through sacred gravesites. With the resulting threat to pollute the region’s waters, he asked how many could afford a \$5 bottle of water.

Jeff’s involvement with COP gatherings started 15 years ago when he met artist-activist Jacob Johns, who later worked with the U.S. Climate Action Network. Jacob eventually received a \$60,000 three-year grant to develop a Wisdom Keeper Delegation to represent Indigenous communities at COP.

At COP 27 in 2019, Jacob and Jeff met Pooven Moodley, an international human rights and environmental lawyer from South Africa and founder of Earthrise Collective. They leaned into Indigenous ceremony and the wisdom of ancestors.

“We realized that Indigenous communities have the solutions to climate change. We have lived sustainably for thousands of years,” said Jeff. “The Spokane Tribe flourished here for more than 10,000 years until 150 years ago. Now the Spokane River is polluted because of capitalism, industrialism and hyper-consumerism.

“The Indigenous community strives to live spiritual reciprocity, not just take from land, water and air but also to give back,” he said, pointing to the efforts to clean up and encapsulate reservation land polluted by uranium waste.

“What had worked for thousands of years was pushed aside, discarded, dismissed and devalued,” he said.

Jeff believes there is hope and a better way of life if the world shifts.

“Billionaires do not care what happens in this world, but if we care what happens here, respect Mother Earth and all species, the species will keep us alive,” he said. “As capitalism does away with keystone species, all are endangered, because we are all interconnected.”

“PFAs pollute water. Only 50 harvests remain before topsoil

worldwide is depleted. Forest fires exacerbate air pollution as average temperatures rise above 1.5° centigrade,” Jeff said, asking, “When is enough enough?”

“With 2 degrees, we will watch people die in catastrophic typhoons, tidal waves and forest fires. That’s how Mother Earth cleans herself. Mother Earth will come back, but we may not,” he said. “We will run out of food and clean water, clean land and clean air. Leaders need to learn we are interdependent.”

Jeff sees hope in learning from international ties of a global shift from buying and dumping to recycling, caring and cutting emissions.

“If we can learn social technology as a global society, we can remove PFAs, shift from genetically engineered seeds and grow organic food,” he said, adding

that “the Creator in the Bible says people are to love one another, just as our ancestors taught that all are brothers and sisters. No one will survive the pending climate collapse. We are all in it together. We need to do something before we can’t.”

At COP30, Indigenous people stormed the Blue Zone, and—unlike at previous COPs in police states where there were fewer protesters—their voices were heard.

“We know it takes hundreds of years to grow back rain forests that hold the cure to cancer and more,” he said.

COP30, however, offered just a “pittance of changes to policies, rather than phasing out fossil fuels,” Jeff reported, noting that many wonder how they can preserve and transport food without plastic or fossil fuels.

“Fossil fuels are detrimental

to our existence. They are in our air, water and land, but did not use to be. Fossil fuels are about take, take, take to line pockets of billionaires,” he said. “We are taught to consume, to want a new phone or shoes every year. We are bombarded with ads selling products as solutions, but they create new problems.

“If we care for our neighbor, we will care about what we put in the water and air, and what we dump on the land where we grow food,” he said.

“It’s time to realize that all we buy every day does not give us happiness,” Jeff said. “Happiness comes from connections with family, friends, Mother Earth and all creatures. It comes with reciprocity and gratitude.”

For information, email jfergusonphotos@yahoo.com or visit jfergusonphotos.net.



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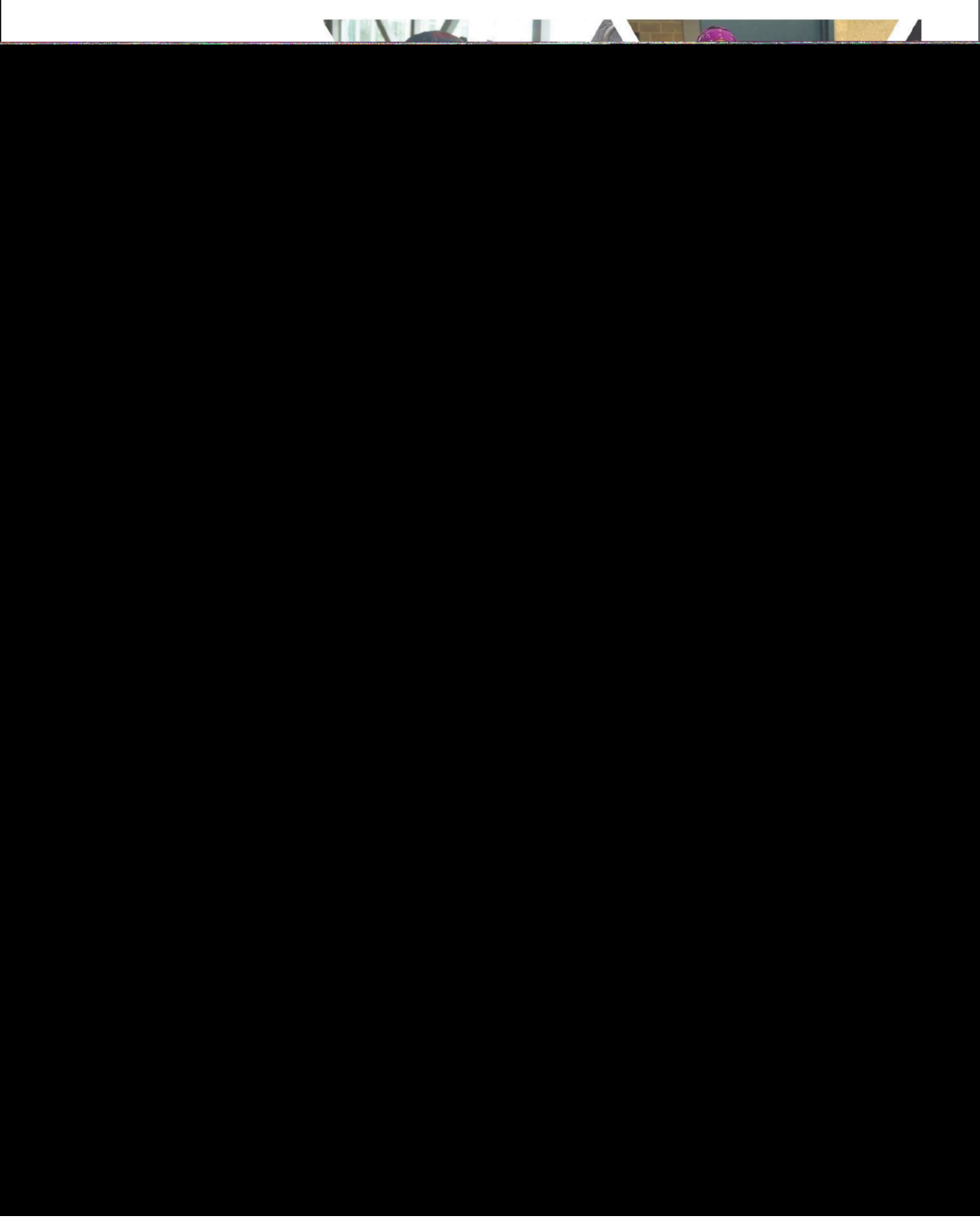
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# Theologians’, historians’ challenges bring change to Passion Play

Andrea (Andy) CastroLang, a retired United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor living in Spokane, experienced in her own family how it’s possible for people to change from ingrained assumptions and antisemitism.

Through her experiences and those of her family, she told of the transformation of the Oberammergau, Germany, Passion Play on Christ’s last week to communicate a positive message of faith.

**For centuries, the play,** which is performed about every 10 years from May to October—was like the seven-hour, medieval, antisemitic performance her father experienced in 1960. Today it is a modern, six-hour performance with updated theology and antisemitic overtones eliminated, she said.

Over time, villagers adapted the theology, script, acting, music, costumes, staging and sets to communicate a positive message for today’s audiences, Andy said.

The change came because Christian and Jewish theologians and historians challenged misrepresentations in the play that were conveyed by Jewish characters wearing horned hats and making stereotyped gestures. Other characters loudly blamed Jews for his death.

**Because Oberammergau is** Andy’s father’s home village, her family members were among those involved in efforts to make changes in the performance.

Her grandfather, Anton Lang, had played Christ in 1900, 1910 and 1922. Her father, Gottfried Friedl Lang, as a cultural anthropologist at the University of Colorado in Boulder, wrote articles that supported efforts of cousins and villagers to make changes.

Gottfried, who was known as “Friedl,” was 17 when he fled to the U.S. in 1937 to escape being conscripted as a pilot in the Nazi air force. Later, as a cultural anthropology professor, he did research and wrote articles challenging the tradition in order to restore integrity to the play.

**“He described pressures** on the villagers between holding on to cultural stability and embracing cultural change. He encouraged them to drop their resistance to change,” said Andy. “In the small village with a long tradition, people were afraid of change. He interviewed people and heard their many perspectives. He was an ally of young people trying to make changes.”

He appealed to and documented villagers’ self-interest to maintain their livelihoods around tourism and the play, as Christians, Jews and others threatened to boycott the production, said Andy, who retired in



Andy CastroLang is proud of her family’s role in bringing change.

2022 after 20 years as pastor at Westminster UCC.

She shared recently with a small group about her family connection with the Passion Play and its transition.

**Because her grandfather,** a potter by trade, had played Christ, he knew popes, bishops and priests around the world. He also knew pilots who flew priests to visit Indigenous people in the Hudson Bay region. Andy’s grandmother had hosted many international guests at her bed and breakfast (Gasthaus).

In 1937, Anton secured a visa for Friedl—the youngest of his six children—to leave with Friedl’s aunt Anna, before he was conscripted, said Andy. As refugees, they were tense during the whole voyage from Bremerhaven until they set foot on the ground in New York City. Friedl went by train to Chicago to join the pilot friends. His older brother was also already in the U.S. and a professor of German culture and language at Georgetown University in D.C.

**After Friedl graduated** from Brown University, he was drafted by the U.S. army, applied for conscientious objector status and was stationed as a medic in the Southeast U.S.

“He did not like to talk about the war years,” Andy said.

While earning a master’s degree at the University of Chicago, Friedl met Andy’s mother, Martha Baldwin, whose family went back to the Mayflower era. She was Presbyterian and converted to become Catholic. They had eight children.

After doctoral studies at Cornell University, he taught cultural anthropology at Catholic University in Washington, DC, and then at the University of Colorado.

**In 1960, he returned** to Oberammergau for the first time, taking his U.S. family for a year to teach on a Fulbright in Munich. They rented a house in Oberammergau, because he wanted his family to taste his early Bavarian village life in the mountains.

Andy learned of the war years

from villagers. Oberammergau had not been bombed, but villagers experienced hunger and difficult times.

“The mayor knew my grandmother hid Jews, including a woman on the Gasthaus staff. Andy’s grandmother convinced him to give her an extra ration card and eventually helped the woman escape,” said Andy. “Over the years, our family pieced together bits about the war years.”

**The 1960 performance** of the Passion Play was the traditional version.

“The old guard performers resisted changes, but many were retiring by 1980, when they faced a worldwide boycott,” Andy said.

“Conservative villagers did not want to change but the uproar from Catholic and Jewish leaders grew, saying the play was pietistic and antiquated, not true to Scriptures or historical-critical study,” she commented. “Catholic theologians and scholars were appalled that it continued the blaming that stoked hate of Jews.”

As her father joined others challenging the Passion Play, it began to change.

**Andy saw it in 2000** after some changes were made.

Villagers realized they would

lose their livelihood in tourism from the play and from alpine skiing, hiking and hang gliding, so they made the changes.

In 2000, her father arranged for her two children, Brigid and Nick, to be in the Palm Sunday crowd scene with 300 on stage. Only villagers or their family members are allowed to be on stage. By then, young leaders had changed the message, costumes, staging, music and acting quality.

**Changes also went on** in Andy’s life, from growing up with the influence of her devout, thoughtful, progressive Catholic parents. She had studied at Regis University in Denver, intending to serve the church as a Catholic lay woman, but she met Jim Castro, an Italian-Irish Catholic. A newly ordained priest, he was assigned in 1981 to a parish in Fort Collins. Her first job was as a Catholic lay worker there, too.

They fell in love and married in 1985, closing them off from jobs in the Catholic Church. They moved to Seattle, where Andy was a nanny and Jim worked in radio news, and then moved to Olympia, where Jim worked with the Democratic Caucus.

**“Our ecumenical involvement** led us to attend United Churches of Olympia, a UCC and Presbyterian federated church. They welcomed us and they encouraged me to go to seminary,” said Andy.

After graduating from San Francisco Theological School, she served churches in Weeping Water and Avoca, Neb., for four years before starting as pastor at Westminster UCC in Spokane. Jim’s ordination was recognized by the Pacific Northwest UCC Conference, and he has served as pastor at Walla Walla, Ritzville and Colville and interim pastor at Veradale UCC. He also assisted the Colfax, Chewelah and Wal-

lace churches.

Before her father died in 2010 at the age of 91, Andy and her sisters took him to Oberammergau, where he was in the 2010 Passion Play crowd one more time—as he had been as a child and in 1960, 1990 and 2000.

**“As an anthropologist,** he had communicated how cultural conflict can lead to cultural shifts and changes,” she said. “The play had become obsolete, dated and uncomfortable. People sat through seven hours of magical thinking, poor performances and antisemitism. It was change or die.

“The writers changed the theology to respect Jewish people as they were respected in the Gospel and in history, given that Jesus was a Jew,” Andy said. “With that change the performances became more artistic, creative drama.

**“The narrator now shares** theological messages that are relevant and make sense today,” said Andy, who appreciates her German heritage and growing up in a family who advocated for change.

“My dad taught inclusion, cross-cultural understanding and appreciation that I have always tried to include in my ministry,” she affirmed.

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# Orthodox English liturgy includes Lord’s Prayer in eight languages

*Continued from page 1*  
Episcopal. The Anglican priest, Fr. George Morse, later became Orthodox. Because of him and other important Georges in his life, including his grandfather, Rajiv chose to take George as his name when he was ordained.

In 2002, St. Gregorios bought a former Church of God building at 2803 N. Lincoln and were there 14 years.

**Eight years ago**, St. Gregorios bought the former Trinity United Methodist Church at 1725 E. Bridgeport.

“Over the years, we gave birth to the St. Mary’s Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which worshiped in our building until it rented the basement of Messiah Lutheran Church. When that church closed, St. Mary’s bought the building,” he said. “Ethiopian immigrants needed to give holy confession and receive pastoral advice in their mother tongue. An Ethiopian Orthodox priest came, and half of the congregation, including Eritreans, are now at the new church, which is growing.”

**Fr. George said** St. Gregorios is “a young community with more than 50 families and few over the age of 60. If everyone came on a Sunday, not all would fit. Usually 100 to 150 come.”

He added that several Ethiopians and many Eritreans, wanting their children to attend the liturgy in English, have stayed at St. Gregorios Church, which is also growing.

**“Our services are 99 percent** in English, with a bit of Syriac—an Aramaic language—and a few Greek Kyrie responses,” Fr. George said. “We say the Lord’s prayer in eight or nine languages, one after the other—English, Malayalam (South India), Tigrinya (Eritrea), Amharic (Ethiopia), Arabic (Middle East), Urdu (Pakistan), Spanish, and Greek, Slavonic, Armenian or Syriac.”

“It’s a way to realize how diverse this body is,” he said.

Most of the liturgy is sung, because “he who sings prays twice,” Fr. George said.

The liturgy is from the tradition of St. James, Jesus’ brother, who gathered the apostles in Jerusalem for the first Lord’s Supper without the Lord.

**“Our Syriac liturgy** developed during persecution when churches met secretly in caves and houses and could not afford iconography,” he said. “To add beauty, we have movement and touch.

“To participate in liturgy is to study faith and scripture with heavenly visions from Isaiah, elders in white robes, smoke and tambourines,” he described. “It is dynamic. People participate,



Fr. George Hatcher serves the church and the community.

singing, not listening to a choir. The liturgy is about being part of the body, so it’s only in the flesh, not online. People come to take eucharist and be anointed with oil, so they go out healed to serve those in need.”

**Before he was ordained**, Rajiv was a music teacher, choir director, guitarist and composer for 15 years. His bachelor’s degree from Gonzaga in 2005 was in music composition and Spanish. There he met and married Emily, now a clinical psychologist.

Moving to Portland, he earned a master’s degree in music education and choir conducting at Portland State University, not having a clear call to be a priest.

“When I was 10, I remember looking at my father celebrating the divine liturgy and thinking it was special and important for the world, and maybe someday I would do that,” he said.

**In college**, when he wanted to date Emily, but she did not want to date him, he felt sorry for himself and prayed, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” A voice said, “Feed my flock.” “I kept that in my heart,” he said.

The priest at the Syriac Orthodox Church in Portland asked him to be ordained as a minor deacon.

When they moved to Tucson, Ariz., they went to an Antiochian Orthodox Church and occasionally to a Syrian Orthodox one in

Phoenix, where the priest asked, “When will you be ready to go to seminary?”

**“Not now,” said Rajiv**, fearful about that step. Three years later when he moved back to Spokane, he consulted with his father and other priests about going to seminary. The bishop in Houston approved him to go to St. Athanasius Orthodox Seminary run by the Coptic Egyptian Orthodox Church in Florida.

Rajiv had taught music at public and private schools in Tucson and at All Saints Catholic School in Spokane, where he was working when he started the hybrid seminary program. He went to Florida for classes just twice a year. The rest was online, so he taught music half time and served at St. Gregorios, putting to practical use what he learned. He also studied liturgy and pastoral care with priests in Texas and Ohio.

**Eventually, the bishop** was ready to ordain him to the holy priesthood.

“I felt unworthy, but realizing none of us is worthy, I began to trust grace would come with ordination because God equips the called,” he said.

In January 2020, his ordination was set for March. He knelt in prayer: “God if you want me, I will obey. Help me serve your people.” He felt ready, but

the voice that had said, “feed my flock,” now said something would delay his ordination and cause suffering around the world, but it would be okay.

**COVID broke out** in Italy and Seattle. All Saints School went online. The bishop was stranded in India because flights were canceled. Four other dates were canceled before he and his brother, Pradeep, who lives in New York City, were both ordained there on May 22, 2021, as full deacons, and Rajiv was ordained as a priest on May 26.

**Along with serving** St. Gregorios, from 2021 to 2023 he served every four to six weeks St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church in Renton and for two years has been in charge of the South American mission of the South-West American diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church, which has 100 parishes in the U.S and 12 in Canada.

He recently visited Ecuador to help two priests and a deacon establish parishes in Quito and Santo Domingo. In January, he goes to Brazil to help eight communities who want to join the diocese. He is in dialogue with a group in Peru.

**“Orthodoxy is growing** in Latin America,” he said, reporting the conversion of 250,000 Guatemalans.

“Orthodox churches are growing in the U.S., too, particularly with immigrants who struggle to survive the onslaught of secularism,” Fr. George said. “They are drawn to the simple, beautiful way of life of orthodoxy in contrast to secular focus on entertainment and materialism.

**“There are two tragedies:** getting what we want and not getting what we want,” he said. “People are starving for something beyond arguing about religious philosophy. Many are looking for this ancient, timeless way of worship not created by men. Holy orthodoxy and love draw sinners to be repentant.”

“We are not a wealthy parish, but we try to do all we can for those in need,” he said.

For information, call 325-6432, email stgspokane@gmail.com or visit stgspokane.org.



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# Homeless Connect expects to serve 2,500

The annual Spokane Homeless Connect will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 28, at the Spokane Convention and Expo Center, 220 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

For 14 years, volunteers have been removing barriers to provide a safe space for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness to easily access resources.

The largest homeless resource fair in Eastern Washington, it brings providers together in one space for one day to offer direct services free and collaborate to help those in need find solutions.

“It’s a one-stop-shop for people struggling with homelessness,” said Aileen Luppert, vendor coordinator and event co-chair. “It’s

an opportunity to meet all or most of their needs in one day, instead of weeks or months.”

The Homeless Connect brings together volunteers and case-workers from various local nonprofits and service providers working to end homelessness.

Services on-site include emergency shelter referrals, housing assistance, medical and dental assistance, ID replacement and DSHS benefits assistance.

There will be a veterinarian available, food bank items that don’t require a kitchen to prepare, immunizations and cold weather items, said Reese McMullin, vendor coordinator.

The 2025 Homeless Connect featured 122 providers who

served around 1,900 attendees. With prices and needs rising, organizers expect about 2,500 will attend this year.

Organizers are recruiting sponsors, vendors and volunteers. Every year the Spokane Homeless Connect is made possible by hundreds of individuals and organizations. Sponsors financially underwrite it. Vendors offer their services to attendees. Volunteers help everything run smoothly the day of the event.

Organizers invite community members to give donations.

“As our houseless neighbors would say, ‘Anything helps!’” said Aileen.

For information, visit [spokaneconnect.org](http://spokaneconnect.org) by Jan. 9.

# Gonzaga offers lifelong learning programs

As individuals and organizations set goals for 2026, the Gonzaga University (GU) Center for Lifelong Learning (CLL) is offering opportunities that support personal growth, professional development and lifelong learning for adult learners.

CLL provides programs for adults at many stages of their lives and careers with international travel, professional

certificates, free webinars and customized trainings.

The group travel allows the GU community to experience “bucket list” destinations like Greece, Tuscany and Bavaria.

CLL also offers professional development courses in business, leadership, education, law, AI and other areas. Discounts and scholarships are available. The center hosts free monthly

webinars on current topics. Organizations can partner with GU to develop custom trainings.

“There are many ways to be a Zag. Many of them are with the Center for Lifelong Learning,” said Rachelle Strawther, founding director. “We connect people with GU’s mission and community.”

For information, email [CLL@gonzaga.edu](mailto:CLL@gonzaga.edu).

# Arts project plans student graphic novel

Spokane Arts Grant Awards funding is supporting creation of a student-produced graphic novel to share the story of Holocaust survivor and Spokane resident, Carla Peperzak.

It will engage 150 local middle school students with teaching artist Kim Vandervert, professional artist Corinna Ren and consultants including Carla Peperzak, Kristine Hoover, director of the Gonzaga University

Center for the Study of Hate, and Clement Lye, Gonzaga filmmaker who produced a documentary on Carla’s life.

Students will produce graphic art and learn how to transform the story into a visual narrative. The team will guide students to create work celebrating history, art, resilience and helping others.

Students will do research, storyboard scenes and design illustrations. Each will contrib-

ute a specific piece of work and participate in collaborative decision-making about the overall story. The aim is to prioritize student participation while maintaining professional quality.

The printed 30-page novel will be presented at a launch event and be distributed to Spokane schools, libraries and community organizations.

For information, call 321-9614, visit [spokanearts.org](http://spokanearts.org).

# Housing, Homeless Advocacy Day is Jan. 26

Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day (HHAD) will be hosted by Washington Low Income Housing Alliance (WLIHA) and Washington Low Income Housing Alliance Action Fund from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday, Jan. 26 at the Washington State Capitol in Olympia.

Advocates gather from around the state to meet with lawmakers and rally for housing justice. HHAD leaders include people impacted by housing injustice, including through the WILHA Resident Action Project.

They will meet near the Capitol campus in the morning to pick up materials and spend the day on the Capitol campus. WILHA legislative district leaders will guide attendees through

the day. There is transportation from Eastern and Central Washington, with support from Waters

Meet Action Fund for two buses. For information, visit [wliha.org/hhad](http://wliha.org/hhad).

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# Class compared laws in Europe, U.S.

This fall, Tony Zelle, president of the Earth Law Center in Colorado and the lead editor and author of a book entitled *Earth Law: Emerging Eco-centric Law* moderated an online course attended by The Fig Tree writer Catherine Ferguson SNJM.

One point was a contrast of the European legal approach to environmental regulations with that used in the United States, she said, noting the relevance of the dynamics to her page 9 article on the Green Amendment.

In Europe, courts use a precautionary principle as their standard. So in case of scientific uncertainty, an action or policy that has a suspected risk for harm to the public or environment, an

alternative action or no action is preferred to a harmful one.

On the other hand, U.S. law incorporates precautionary elements only through specific, congressionally mandated statutes and traditional legal principles, often allowing expert regulatory agencies discretion to act in face of scientific uncertainty.

In other words, in Europe, the proposer of an environmental project must prove it is safe, while in the U.S., those who oppose the project must prove it is harmful. Thus, in the U.S., it is easier for harmful proposals to be accepted than in Europe.

Tony noted that U.S. law prioritizes commercial and economic considerations, giving second

place to social and cultural harms in considering potential harms.

Other approaches he presented as potential legal avenues for preserving the Earth include laws based on the rights of nature, rights of future generations, rights of individual species, the doctrine of public trust and working within an Indigenous legal framework where nature is viewed as a relative of the human.

For information, visit [earthlawpractice.com/23](http://earthlawpractice.com/23).

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# Environmental activists promote the idea of a Green Amendment

**By Catherine Ferguson SNJM**  
Because 350 Spokane believes a new approach to environmental protection and regulation is needed, it is collaborating with 350 Washington to promote a Green Amendment for the Washington state constitution to ensure effective preservation of earth’s environment.

**While a Green Amendment** will not be proposed for the 2026 Washington state legislative session because it is the short session, members of 350 Spokane encourage education about the idea, recognizing that it was proposed in 2019 and 2021 but did not reach the floor.

Larry Luton, a board member and climate activist from 350 Spokane, and Trenton Miller, the board chair of 350 Spokane, know that there is need for a long term, persistent effort, aware of how slowly environmental policy is usually made.

In a December 2024 talk at the Unitarian Universalist Church (UUC) of Spokane, Larry advised those engaged in climate action to be resilient.

**“In climate activism,** if we have a small step backwards, it takes a long time to regain the position we had before, but we have to stay at it,” he encouraged.

Trenton echoes that sentiment and, as the head of the volunteer organization, exemplifies the commitment and resilience it takes to be an effective climate activist. A full-time software engineer and family man, he expresses his commitment through climate advocacy both with the Washington State Legislature and the Spokane City Council.

**He became a climate activist** out of the 2018 election when Initiative 1631 was on the ballot. The initiative proposed an escalating fee on polluters based on the carbon content of fossil fuels.

“The initiative had many supporters—individuals, tribes, organizations and faith groups. Only two organizations opposed it, the Western States Petroleum Association and the Association of Washington Business, both connected with oil,” he said. “They flooded the state with ads, spending twice as much as supporters. The measure failed.

“It made me angry, and so I decided to get involved and not allow that to happen again,” he said.

**Larry came to activism** as an academic. He moved to Spokane in 1984 from North Carolina and spent 30 years as a professor of public administration at Eastern Washington University, retiring in 2014. For at least 20 years, he has been a climate activist, joining 350 Spokane in 2017 and later becoming a board member.



Larry Luton



Trenton Miller

He worked with groups that developed Spokane’s first Sustainability Action Plan in 2009 and the second Action Plan from 2018 to 2021. He served on Mayor Lisa Brown’s transition team on climate and sustainability.

In his talk at the UUC, he suggested ways listeners could be engaged in climate action collectively and individually.

**Despite their different paths** to activism, Larry and Trenton agree that the current approach to environmental protection is not effective.

“Our laws do not protect the environment. They give project contractors the ability to pollute

legally,” Larry said, explaining that many environmental laws were formulated in the 1970s, a period of environmental activism and enthusiasm, but have since been worked around to allow harmful projects to take place.

**As an example,** he said the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allows pollution through permit systems like the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System for water and the Clean Air Act for air. Both set specific, monitored limits on discharges.

Rather than banning a project, this means the EPA let projects operate within federally mandat-

ed caps. So it legalizes pollution. Larry and Trenton said green amendments have been effective in establishing a self-executing, enforceable, constitutional right to protect the environment.

**They told how** Montana’s amendment protected the Earth in the Held v. State of Montana case. Article IX states in part: “The state and each person shall maintain and improve a clean and healthful environment in Montana for present and future generations. The legislature shall provide adequate remedies for the protection of the environmental life support system from degradation and provide adequate remedies to prevent unreasonable depletion and degradation of natural resources.”

**Using this right in 2020,** 16 youths sued the state, the governor and multiple state agencies, alleging its actions exacerbated the harm they experience from climate change. They challenged provisions of Montana’s State Energy Policy Act and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) as unconstitutional. They argued that these provisions violated their constitutional right

to a clean, healthful environment by promoting fossil fuel development and prohibiting consideration of greenhouse gas emissions in environmental reviews.

In 2023, the First Judicial District Court found in favor of the young people and in 2024 the Montana Supreme Court upheld the decision, showing that a case brought under the green amendment could result in a permanent injunction prohibiting the state from acting in accordance with the unconstitutional provisions.

**Although a bill for** the Green Amendment that 350 Spokane and 350 Washington are promoting will not be introduced in Washington this session, activists are seeking a sponsor for the bill and ways to address concerns from some who say a green amendment could impact the enforcement of Native American treaty rights or reduce funding education receives from the management of public lands.

For the current session, 350 Spokane focuses its climate activism on the issues of this session.

For information, email [info@350spokane.org](mailto:info@350spokane.org) or visit [wagreenamendment.org](http://wagreenamendment.org).



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#### Free Climate Event

**“Holding to our Values in a Changing Climate”**

**WA Commissioner of Public Lands, Dave Upthegrove**

**Tuesday, Feb. 24, 6:00 PM**

**Register today!**

[gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents](http://gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents)





# Fig Tree editor started Beyond Boundaries newsletter in 1996

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Institute at Bossey’s latest edition of its newsletter, “Beyond Boundaries,” offers a window into a period of learning, dialogue, prayer and global engagement at one of the world’s distinctive centers for ecumenical formation.

It captures Bossey’s vocation as a “living laboratory” for Christian unity, where students, faculty and visitors from across traditions and cultures share academic life, worship and daily community. Through personal reflections, updates and reports on events, “Beyond Boundaries” demonstrates how ecumenical formation continues to respond to a world yearning

for reconciliation, justice and peace.

**WCC program director** for Unity, Mission, and Ecumenical Formation, Kuzipa Nalwamba and new academic dean Lawrence Iwuamadi reflect on a year marked by transition, renewal and gratitude.

“Its stories testify to how our work in unity, mission and intercultural biblical and ethical reflection is nurtured here and then carried to every corner of the world by our graduates,” said Kuzipa.

**In October 2026, Bossey marks its 80th anniversary.** For Lawrence, the anniversary “invites us to honor Bossey’s rich legacy and renew our commitment to shaping the future of ecumenical engagement.”

Information on academic programs and applications for 2026–2027 are shared. It is at [oikoumene.org/resources/documents/beyond-boundaries-december-2025](http://oikoumene.org/resources/documents/beyond-boundaries-december-2025).

**The Fig Tree Editor’s Note:** What fun to see this! I started Beyond Boundaries when I volunteered with the U.S. Office of the WCC. I came up with the name. I also did a brochure to raise funds to remodel the buildings.

Seeing that 2026 is the 80th anniversary of Bossey, I remember taking Malcolm Haworth, now directory editor, in 1996 for the 50th anniversary. When we came back, Marijke Fakasiieiki, now development and editorial associate, signed up and

attended the graduate school in the fall.

**My contribution was behind the scenes,** but it’s exciting to see the legacy continues because Bossey was important in shaping who I am and the existence of The Fig Tree.

Sign up to read the World Council of Churches news at [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org). It’s the source for our page 2 column and awareness of many ways Christians and people of all faiths around the world are making a difference in their locales and as they gather from across the world for pilgrimages, forums and conferences to share their insights and calls for action.

**Mary Stamp - Editor**

# International ties strengthen local congregations in U.S. and abroad

*This is the first of several columns by David Gortner, pastor of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Coeur d’Alene, sharing observations related to his summer sabbatical journey in Mediterranean countries.*

Many of our congregations give to international missions through their national denominations or faith communities. We form connections across the world this way with important work, even though those connections may not be visible. When we donate directly and engage in partnerships that include visits, the work of the congregation and partner is enhanced.

**I saw numerous church and interfaith organizations abroad** that are doing incredible things with limited resources. These organizations we encountered are working to build relationships in their communities and among people of different faiths. Many programs, including the last three below, received support from USAID for decades, as our country sought to support positive development abroad.

**The Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church** (Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal) is a scrappy church born from Spanish and English people together in the late 1800s with support from American

and Irish Episcopal churches. They built and consecrated their cathedral in Madrid in 1892. They have small churches across Spain, about the size of many congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane. Like many Episcopal churches in the Inland Northwest, across Spain they are “the little church that could,” contributing significantly to care and defense of refugees and people in poverty, distributing food and clothing, teaching English and job skills, hosting ecumenical and interfaith gatherings and providing a gracious and loving form of Christian faith.

**The High Atlas Foundation** has grown over 30 years from the efforts of Yossef Ben-Meir, a Jewish American Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco. He fell in love with that country and boldly approached the young new king with his idea for restoring and using neglected holy sites of Jewish, Christian and interfaith pilgrimage. He proposed creating practical learning centers for environmentally sound agriculture, economic development of villages and empowerment of women in a spirit that honors the Abrahamic faiths together. They plant, grow and distribute fruit- and nut-bearing trees to plant in villages—more than 5 million

so far—train rural women and men in ecological and agricultural care, empower women through their unique IMAGINE workshops and family literacy program, and help people develop cooperative businesses. They also train volunteers, especially college students, partnering with universities from around the world.

**The Memories for the Future Foundation** is a small, growing organization, led by political scientist Lamia Radi. Since 2008, it has focused on bringing young people together to learn and honor their shared and diverse heritage as Moroccans by participating in the renewal of important historical sites where people from different religious and cultural traditions shared life together in harmony and mutual respect. They are renewing sites like the Catholic Monastery of Toumliline, where Benedictine monks offered deeply respectful care and support for their Muslim neighbors and launched far-reaching interfaith gatherings of religious leaders from around the world. The foundation hopes to rekindle the unique work of this monastery, reopen its library and anchor its brief shining work in Moroccan cultural history. Working and learning together on these projects help young

people—especially young men—broaden their minds, open their hearts and develop strong resistance to forces that seek to radicalize young people.

**The Albanian Orthodox Church and Interreligious Council** exemplify how religion has experienced resurrection and reemerged with strength after its attempted destruction and burial by the repressive Communist regime from 1946 to 1991. Albania is noted internationally for its leadership in positive, productive interfaith relations and partnerships among Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Sunni Muslim and Bekhtashi Muslim communities. The Albanian Orthodox Church stands out as an example and central leader in these efforts, even as it affirms the beauty and truth of the Christian faith. Funding helps strengthen ecumenical bonds across Christian denominations and affirms their work with other Abrahamic faiths.

These are places where peacebuilding and mutually strengthening efforts are happening between people of different faiths. It’s important to be aware of programs like these and the example they set for all of us.

**David Gortner, Episcopal priest**  
**Fig Tree Board Member**



# FAN, FLLC call for solidarity vs. violence, share in response to floods, rain

**As people of many faiths** and moral traditions, we hold close in our hearts the communities whose sense of safety, joy and belonging has been shaken. We grieve with the Jewish community reeling from the violence at Bondi Beach, and we affirm our care and solidarity with Muslim immigrants—especially Somali and Afghan families—who are being targeted, vilified and made to feel unwelcome. We also stand with Sikh immigrant drivers and others whose livelihoods and dignity are threatened by fear, scapegoating and hate. We also continue to organize and act alongside our immigrant justice coalitions for dignity, safety and freedom—particularly for Black and Brown people.

These acts and policies diminish the joy and light that are meant to mark our shared public life. They wound not only those directly harmed, but the moral fabric of our communities as a whole. Our faiths teach us that every person is sacred, deserving of safety, dignity and the freedom to live without fear.

**Joyce del Rosario**  
**Faith Action Network**

**We express our respect** and concern for our Jewish Neighbors

As Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, we celebrate our Jewish neighbors during Hanukkah Season. We grieve the evil that happened in Australia. We recognize the fear this brings to all Jews, especially to friends and neighbors here

in our region. We pour out our love and prayers for all the families who have suffered from this violence. We are mindful of the hatred and gun violence in our own country and even in our own communities.

May we work together to love and support one another through these times of political and ideological darkness. Check in with our Jewish neighbors. Ask what will help them feel safer in our local community. Offer what you can do.

During the holiday season, we called on all our neighbors to join our little lights of compassion, justice and hope. Let’s work together in all the days ahead to make our communities safer through a new year filled with the light of respect and solidarity.

**— 38 members of the Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, Eastern Washington and North Idaho** from Catholic, Ecumenical Catholic, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Muslim, Presbyterian, Sufi, United Church of Christ, United Methodist congregations and faith communities, community members, community organizers and nonprofit leaders. The names will be published online at [thefigtree.org](http://thefigtree.org).

**In response to historic flooding** and wind damage in the region, many denominational offices shared what their congregations, regional offices and national bodies are doing to assist in the disaster.

**NW Intermountain Synod** of the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Bishop Meggan Manlove and evangelical mission director Liv Larson Andrews met with staff from other synods, the head and several staff of Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), and Ray Shjerven, their representative on the Washington VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster). They learned LDR plans a state appeal.

Most Holden Village staff were evacuated. Camp Lutherhaven had several large trees fall, one on a structure. Roads were closed by floods. For information, visit [elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/lutheran-disaster-response/our-impact/us-flooding](http://elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/lutheran-disaster-response/our-impact/us-flooding).

**Pacific Northwest Conference (PNW)** of the United Methodist Church (UMC) reported that some navigated evacuations, property loss and loss of life—in a few thankfully rare cases,” Patrick Scriven, director of communications, heartened with reports of churches partnering in “holy work” with organizations to shelter people, open parking lots for RVs, fill sandbags, offer prayers and give financially.

**Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA)** monitored flooding in Washington through the state VOAD and contacted impacted presbyteries and synods. For information, visit [pcusa.org/donate/dr000191-disaster-relief-us-flooding](http://pcusa.org/donate/dr000191-disaster-relief-us-flooding).

**Northern Lights Region Christian Church, Disciples of Christ (DOC)**

Paul Allen, regional minister was contacted by the DOC national Week of

Compassion, a benevolent wing of the national church that does disaster relief.

“We are in the first stage helping congregations and members impacted by the flooding with temporary disaster relief,” said Paul, who has contacted ministers and congregations of the region, reminding them that assistance is available. When there is more information, the Week of Compassion will send funds to local nonprofits and organizations for long-term recovery. For information, visit [weekofcompassion.org/domestic-disaster-response--preparedness](http://weekofcompassion.org/domestic-disaster-response--preparedness).

**The national United Church of Christ (UCC) Disaster Ministries Team** continues to communicate with affected areas to monitor the situation and are ready to accompany those who have been impacted. Visit [support.ucc.org/globalHOPE](http://support.ucc.org/globalHOPE).

At N-Sid-Sen, the Pacific Northwest UCC camp, wind blew down 33 trees, two on structures.

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

**Many good and interesting** things are happening in our little corner of the planet. The December Fig Tree tells of New Story that is part of a national movement to turn guns into garden tools. I have known one of the remarkable fellows for decades.

I have read The Fig Tree faith in action publication for decades as well.

**Spokane Mayor Lisa Brown**  
**Edited from a post on Facebook**



# Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed

Submit events to [development@thefigtree.org](mailto:development@thefigtree.org) by third Fridays

- Jan 3 • Haitian Independence Day Party**, Creole Resources, Hamilton Studios, 1427 W. Dean Ave., 6 to 9 p.m., 990-6472, [info@creolresources.com](mailto:info@creolresources.com)
- Jan 4 • Fireside Chats on Immigration**, Refugee and Immigrant Connections, Greg Cunningham of Educator's Immigration Resource, Zoom, 10 to 11:30 a.m., [ricspokane.org](mailto:ricspokane.org)
- Festival of Carols**, Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, 1115 W. Riverside, 2:30 to 4 p.m., [spokanecathedral.com/sacred-music-concert-series](http://spokanecathedral.com/sacred-music-concert-series)
- Jan 6 • Advocacy as Spiritual Practice**, Faith Action Network, online 6 p.m., [fanwa.ourpowerbase.net/civirm/event/info?reset=1&id=319](http://fanwa.ourpowerbase.net/civirm/event/info?reset=1&id=319), [fanwa.org](http://fanwa.org)
- Jan 6, 20 • Passage Meditation Group**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 8-Point Program for daily living, 6 to 7:30 p.m., [spokanebuddhisttemple.org](http://spokanebuddhisttemple.org)
- Jan 6, 13, 20, 27 • Heartistry**: Artistic Wellbeing, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit Pkwy, 3 to 5 p.m., 279-0299
- Jan 6-Mar 29 • Retreat from Afar**, meditating on White Tara and the Four Immeasurables, [sraavastiabbey.org/program-overview/retreat-from-afar/?blm\\_aid=2611652609](http://sraavastiabbey.org/program-overview/retreat-from-afar/?blm_aid=2611652609)
- Jan 7 • Nonprofit Advocacy 101**, Kevin Bailey, VP of Impact and Idaho Nonprofit Center, Zoom, 10:30 a.m., [web.idahononprofits.org/events/NonprofitAdvocacy%20101%20%202026-767/details](http://web.idahononprofits.org/events/NonprofitAdvocacy%20101%20%202026-767/details)
- Jan 8 • The Fig Tree Development and Board Meetings**, Benefit 12 p.m., Board 1 p.m., [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto:mary@thefigtree.org)
- Winter Gathering, Faith Action Network**, Westminster United Church of Christ, 411 S. Washington, 5:30 to 7 p.m., [tinyurl.com/FANWinter](http://tinyurl.com/FANWinter)
- Free Immigration Clinic**, Latinos en Spokane, 1502 N. Monroe, 5 to 7 p.m., [latinosenspokane.org](http://latinosenspokane.org)
- Jan 8, 22 • Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733
- Jan 8, 15, 22, 29 • Taizé Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., [bartletts@gonzaga.edu](mailto:bartletts@gonzaga.edu)
- Jan 9 • "Healing Us,"** Meaningful Movies Spokane and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., 325-6383, [uuspokane.org](http://uuspokane.org)
- Jan 10 • The Decorated Journal**: Mini Vision Board Workshop, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon, [cdalibrary.org/events](http://cdalibrary.org/events)
- Climate Chats Café**, ACL Spokane, Jupiter's Eye Book Café, 411 W. 1st, Ste 101, 1 p.m., [bity.ly/climatechatscafespo](http://bity.ly/climatechatscafespo)
- Jan 12 • Lunch & Learn**, Your Nonprofit Wrapped: Leveraging Your Data to Communicate Your Impact, online, noon, [nonprofitwa.org/event/online-lunch-learn-3](http://nonprofitwa.org/event/online-lunch-learn-3)
- Native Cultural Craft Nights**, American Indian Community Center, 10125 W. Indiana, 5 to 7 p.m., 535-0886, [aiccinc.org](http://aiccinc.org)
- Jan 13 • Eastern Washington Legislative Conference** Planning Team, Zoom, 1 p.m., 535-4112, [kaye@thefigtree.org](mailto:kaye@thefigtree.org)
- Jan 14 • Advocacy 101**, virtual training with FAN and other advocates, 6 to 7:30 p.m., [fanwa.ourpowerbase.net/civirm/event/register?id=321&reset=1](http://fanwa.ourpowerbase.net/civirm/event/register?id=321&reset=1)
- Newspapers in the Movies Night**, Northwest Passages Book Club and Comma Community Journalism Lab, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 7 p.m., 227-7638, [bingcrosbytheater.com](http://bingcrosbytheater.com)
- Jan 14, 21 • Powerhouse Boards**, Innovia Foundation, Zoom, 4 to 6 p.m., [innovia.org/events/powerhouse-boards-training-that-transforms-your-board/](http://innovia.org/events/powerhouse-boards-training-that-transforms-your-board/)
- Jan 15 • Spokane Society of the AIA Lecture Series**: Early Peoples in the Plateau: Nimiipuu Knowledge and Landscape Adaptation in the Bitterroot Mountains, The Northwest Museum of Arts or Zoom, 6 p.m., [sales.northwestmuseum.org/Performance.aspx](http://sales.northwestmuseum.org/Performance.aspx)

- Jan 15, 22, 29 • Strategic Planning in Nonprofits**, 3-part series, online, 4 to 5:50 p.m., [nonprofitwa.org/event/online-strategic-planning-in-nonprofits-series](http://nonprofitwa.org/event/online-strategic-planning-in-nonprofits-series)
- Jan 17 • Earth's Greatest Enemy**, Inland Northwest Coalition for Liberation of Palestine, Magic Lantern, 3 to 6:30 p.m., [jvpspokaneadmin@proton.me](mailto:jvpspokaneadmin@proton.me)
- Know Your Rights Training**, Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network, online, English and Spanish, 6 p.m., [waisn.org/events/](http://waisn.org/events/)
- Spokane Symphony Masterworks 4**: Symphonic Dances, Bernstein's West Side Story, Creston's Fantasy for Trombone, Rachmaninoff's Symphonic Dances, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:40 to 9:30 p.m., 624-1200, [spokanesymphony.org](http://spokanesymphony.org)
- Jan 18 • Free Yoga at St. John's Cathedral**, Eclipse Yoga, 2 p.m., [stjohns-cathedral.org](http://stjohns-cathedral.org)
- Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (Waisn)** General Meeting, online, English and Spanish, 3 p.m., [waisn.org/events](http://waisn.org/events)
- Martin Luther King Jr Day Celebration**, Spokane Ministers' Fellowship, Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 806 W. Indiana, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Jan 19 • Martin Luther King Jr Day Rally, March and Resource Fair**, Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., [mlkspokane.org](http://mlkspokane.org)
- Jan 22 • Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Day**, PJALS and Waisn, Olympia, 4 a.m. to 12 a.m., [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- Jan 22-Feb 1 • Spokane Jewish Film Festival**, "Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire," Magic Lantern, opening reception 6 p.m., film 7 p.m., 413-8254, [spokanejewishfilm.org](http://spokanejewishfilm.org)
- Jan 23 • Hands Off Libraries**, Eastside Gladiators a peaceful sidewalk rally, Post Falls Library, 821 N. Spokane, 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., [petra@bethechange509.com](mailto:petra@bethechange509.com)
- Jan 23-25 • Sourdough Retreat**, Chef Matt McDaniels, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 6 p.m. to 1 p.m., [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Jan 25 • Grief Tending Circle**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 4 to 6 p.m., [harmonywoods.org](http://harmonywoods.org)
- Taizé Hour of Prayer**, IHRC, 5 p.m., [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Jan 26 • Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day**, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, Washington State Capitol, Olympia, [wiha.org](http://wiha.org)
- Jan 27 • "Hear the People, Heal the River,"** Virtual Action Hour, Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition, Zoom, 5:30 t p.m., [wildsalmon.org/events.html](http://wildsalmon.org/events.html)
- Jan 28 • Spokane Homeless Connect**, Spokane Convention Center, 202 W. Spokane Falls Blvd, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., [spokaneconnect.org](http://spokaneconnect.org)
- Jan 30 • Engage in Real Life Winterfest**, Launch NW, 507 N. Howard, kids activities, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., [launchnw.org/event/engage-in-real-life-winterfest](http://launchnw.org/event/engage-in-real-life-winterfest)
- Engage in Real Life Community Reception**, Launch NW, Spokane Public Schools, Gesa Credit Union Pavilion, 574 N. Howard, 4 to 6 p.m., [launchnw.org/event/engage-in-real-life-community-reception](http://launchnw.org/event/engage-in-real-life-community-reception)
- Jan 31 • "We Shall Overcome**, Building the Beloved Community Today," Eastern Washington Legislative Conference, Spokane Valley United Methodist, 115 N. Raymond, 8:30 to 3 p.m., [register.atthefigtree.org](http://register.atthefigtree.org)
- Spokane Symphony Masterworks 5**: Stolen Melodies with Jess Walter's take on Britten's "Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," The Fox Theater, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., 624-1200, [spokanesymphony.org](http://spokanesymphony.org)
- Feb 3 • Spokane Black Voices**, "Art as Activism: Seasons, Cycles, and Finding Your Destiny," Northwest Passages Book Club, The Black Lens, African American students, Montvale Event Center, 1019 W. First, 7 p.m., 844-5672, 360-320-6449, [blacklensnews.com](http://blacklensnews.com)
- Feb 5, 12, 19 • "Solo Aging,"** Spokane Area Jewish Family Services, ALTCEW, Zoom, 2-3:30 p.m., [sajfs.org](http://sajfs.org)

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# YWCA Spokane new CEO continues core programs, collaborates

After 22 years of working with the U.S. State Department and seeing the world, Janine Wynne recently settled in Spokane as CEO of YWCA Spokane to support survivors of domestic violence and to empower women and girls.

Since starting on Nov. 3, Janine has had two months to shadow her predecessor, Jeanette Hauck, who is retiring after 14 years.

Janine has been impressed with the network of people who bring to life the YWCA Spokane programs including its board of directors, staff, volunteers and partners to meet the needs of vulnerable people in the community.

**“How the YWCA supports** domestic violence victims, works to eliminate racism and empowers women resonates with me as a mother. I want to help each woman realize her potential in all areas of life,” Janine said.

“We use a trauma-informed model to support survivors of domestic violence, providing pathways to safety, stabilization and healing. We also help families and children experiencing poverty and trauma access early childhood education and build the economic and life skills needed for long-term stability,” she said.

She sees that YWCA Spokane, which serves 14,000 people each year, is a trusted place for domestic violence survivors to come in the door, have their immediate needs addressed and access programs and services to help them thrive.

**“The needs in the community** are increasing. We are on track to receive more calls this year on our domestic violence helpline than we did last year because the economic outlook is more uncertain. This creates pressure on us to respond to survivors,” Janine said.

“As funding across the non-profits faces challenges and as public funds are more constrained, there is more pressure on nonprofits. The nonprofits cannot fill the gap in public funding,” she explained.

**Janine also will engage** “the dedicated network of people” who support domestic violence survivors and other vulnerable people in the community.

YWCA Spokane now has a staff about 83 people, plus volunteers from the community helping in programs like Our Sister’s Closet to assist women needing clothing for job interviews or because they fled their homes and left their belongings.

Volunteers make sure donated clothing is appropriate and schedule appointments to help women find the clothing they need.

“We also have a 24-hour help



Janine Wynne is the new YWCA Spokane CEO.

line and a confidential safe shelter with 20 beds. When it’s full, we rely on hotels as a temporary option,” she said.

As services shift, Janine said the need for shelter beds has increased with shelters for single women closing.

**Our Sister’s Closet** is part of the Women’s Opportunity Center that offers support groups and classes to help domestic violence victims connect with each other. YWCA advocates also offer classes to improve women’s economic empowerment. One is called “The Road to Renting.”

Janine said YWCA Spokane operates Early Childhood Education Assistance programs that provide free preschool, health and support for families facing economic insecurity.

“Early intervention prepares kids for kindergarten,” she said.

**Since coming,** Janine has met with staff providing direct client services, learning how they try to understand the needs of those seeking help,” she said. “We then guide survivors to access a range of resources. As systems are overwhelmed and needs continue to escalate, we also rely on The Fig Tree Resource Directory to find support outside what we offer.

“It provides details on who other helpers are, what services they provide and how we can collaborate,” she said. “There are so many organizations doing critical work. We need to help each other.”

**Janine grew up in** a family of five children in Gardnerville, Nev., and left home after high school, intent on seeing the world. She completed undergraduate studies in political sci-

ence at the Washington University in St. Louis. She continued studies to earn a master’s degree in public affairs in 2001 at the University of Texas in Austin. That program included studying the Russian language in Irkutsk on Lake Baikal.

**Her years as deputy** assistant secretary in the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration involved overseeing programs that addressed gender-based violence prevention, health and shelter for refugees and other vulnerable communities worldwide. From that experience, Janine brings dedication to advancing safety, dignity and opportunity for all people.

For example, when visiting the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh, she saw how important it is for children, who are displaced because of war and conflict, to have even a few hours of education, especially for girls.

**Janine values** the YWCA’s programs to support women and girls in meeting their dreams and in building a healthier community.

“Our advocates give survivors hope in a time of extended vulnerability,” she said, expressing her commitment to continue such services.

Because her job required much travel and living in Arlington, Va., Janine wanted to find a position on the West Coast near family, including family in Spokane.

“I left the State Department to change my priorities, to focus on my family and my health, and find deeper professional connections,” she said.

In her work with the State Department, Janine observed the struggles women and girls face globally, including heightened risks of gender-based violence in times of crisis. She also saw the importance of deepening engagement with local communities and women in seeking solutions.

“Spokane has an incredible community of people supporting their neighbors in need, working to help those facing barriers to opportunity,” she said.

**Janine outlined what she sees** as priorities, challenges and opportunities at YWCA Spokane.

“Our first focus is to maintain the work in core areas the com-


munity expects of us, particularly in supporting domestic violence victims,” she said. “Pressure is up as needs increase and funding challenges grow, so we need to look at what is essential, what our strengths and core values are.”

Her second goal is to support the many compassionate staff “who show up to serve every day. I am overwhelmed with their commitment,” she said.

Her third emphasis is to build partnerships in the community, so the YWCA collaborates across Spokane, the state and the nation.


**“We need to understand** where community partners need the YWCA to be strong, as we strengthen collaboration and partnership to direct people to the best support,” she said.

For information, call 326-1160 or visit ywcaspokane.org.



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