Web Copy for Summer 2019 Fig Tree

Campers grapple with nature, values

I: Church youth, adult and family campers grapple with nature and values.

P: In playful. wild-and-crazy moments, teen campers forge lifelong friendships at Ross Point Camp. For July 4 last summer, they painted red, white and blue stripes

on their cheeks to celebrate the holiday. Photo courtesy of Ross Point

Over The Fig Tree’s 35 years, dynamics of camping and retreats for faith communities have changed in some ways and remained the same in other ways.

Camp facilities are less rustic and offer more motel-style rooms, so the grounds can be used for year-round retreats for adults and intergenerational groups from congregations, nonprofits and businesses, as well as summer camps for children, youth and families. but it’s still an integral part of outreach to youth with a goal of faith formation and relationship building.

Camping is as vital to churches as ever, but there is more competition in summer for the time and attention of youth, said John Batchelder, executive director of Ross Point on the Spokane River at Post Falls.

Because many parents of younger children had no camp experience, it’s not a priority for them, he said. “Parents who went to camp are likely to send their children.”

Some feel uncomfortable about packing, leaving home, meeting new people, disrupting routines and dealing with “nuisances” of nature like bugs or poison ivy.

A recent American Camping Association article, however, extolled the vital role of camping in gaining decision-making skills, community building, managing conflicts and developing resilience. John said those are innate values of camp as people live in community with people they didn’t know before. They gain skills for adulthood.”

Another draw of camp is lifelong friendships as camps “bring people together in short-term community,” John said. “Every year, campers come back to see their friends.”

Most who go to Ross Point relate to American Baptist or other churches. For three of five weeks in the summer, 250 elementary through high school youth come to camps Ross Point organizes. Two weeks, they organize a family camp and Camp Journey for children with cancer. The other five weeks, Ross Point hosts other groups.

Each year, Ross Point adds activities, like elements to its ropes course for skill and relationship building. It has a 38-foot climbing tower, swimming and canoeing.

Through the year, Ross Point hosts retreats and conferences on weekends and midweek.

For information, call 208-773-1655 or visit rosspoint.org.

Four young adults spend 10 months serving agencies in Spokane

I: Young adult team explores faith and justice ties while they serve agencies

P: Emily Newsom, Nathaniel Nelson, Colby Robb, Greg Smith and Rachel Bechtol share XPLOR story.

For nearly 10 months, four young adults living in a house beside North Hill Christian Church have been exploring what it means to care while serving with four community nonprofits through XPLOR, a program of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)’s National Benevolent Association.

Their program ends June 17.

Greg Skinner, pastor at Country Homes Christian Church, has been their spiritual companion, meeting with them each Friday for breakfast, what they call “Gregfast.”

• Colby Robb, who is from Hallsville, Mo., has worked with Family Promise’s program for homeless families.

• Rachel Bechtol, who is from Sacramento, has been equity and inclusion coordinator with the YWCA-Spokane.

• Emily Newsom, who is from Virginia Beach, Va., has done case management at Northwest Fair Housing.

• Nathaniel Nelson, who is from Los Angeles, has worked with Transitions’ Women’s Hearth, New Leaf Bakery and Café.

Colby and Rachel participate in North Hill Christian Church. Emily and Nathaniel are at Country Homes Christian Church. Both churches have about 100 members, with 50 to 60 attending Sundays.

The four told of their paths into XPLOR and their experiences with the nonprofits.

Colby, who is finishing a degree in religion and philosophy at Culver-Stockton College, said he wants go into religion to help people.

“I didn’t know what that looked like. Coming from a conservative church, I had a faith crisis in college, learning to question things I took for granted and becoming more open minded.”

He attended a conservative church with his grandmother, then in middle school attended a small Disciples of Christ (DOC) Church. In college, Ben Bohren, national coordinator of XPLOR, came to his campus. Seeking spiritual and vocational discernment, and a break before graduate school, Colby signed up.

As the assistant supervisor at Family Promise’s Open Doors program, he maintains the shelter, keeps people safe and comfortable, talks with people about their daily struggles, contacts services and helps people address small stresses that add up.

“I have discovered my vocation,” he said. “There is nothing like Open Doors/Family Promise near me in Missouri, but there are many homeless families, so I’ll work with Family Promise nationally to start a program.”

Emily, who grew up Presbyterian, graduated in May 2018 in business at Lynchburg (Va.) College.

“I learned about XPLOR as a sophomore at a leadership training program. My senior year, I applied.”

“I’m passionate about housing, dealing with conflicts with business and corporate America,” she said.

At Northwest Fair Housing, Emily has accompanied people when they file complaints about discrimination in housing and has planned a conference.

“I like both collaborating with people and working independently. We work under grants, government funding and do fund raising,” she said.

When Rachel, who uses the pronoun “their,” was ready to start community college, “their” parent also wanted to go to school. Needing to earn money, Rachel worked as caregiver in an assisted living center and then in data processing. For three years, Rachel worked at a call center for the Gap and plans to return to that job.

Rachel, who is a member of the Manchester Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians, helped start a church with “their” parent and sister. Heartbeat Organic, which affiliates with the DOC, challenges the Doctrine of Discovery, which justified European settlers converting indigenous people and taking their lands.

Learning about XPLOR, Rachel decided to step away from “their” life to do something different. With the YWCA, Rachel leads discussions on inclusion with staff and is liaison on the YWCA’s racial and social justice work.

“Working with a nonprofit, I have learned how hard it is to gather busy people to partner,” Rachel said.

Rachel has also met with the Black Prisoners Caucus at Coyote Ridge Prison in Kahlotus and the editor of The Black Lens.

“Spokane is a petri dish for what works when nonprofits come together to build a just city,” said Rachel.

Nathaniel’s parents raised him in the inner city of Los Angeles with his younger siblings, a brother adopted from Guatemala and a sister from foster care. His parents were church planters with World Impact, a nondenominational organization.

He majored in creative writing and minored in dance at Hope College in Michigan, graduating in December 2017.

“I needed a transition that provided structure after college to gain life skills,” said Nathaniel, who did an internship at Koinonia Farm in Americus, Ga., in the spring of 2018. He wanted to do a year of service and after learning about XPLOR, he applied.

Working with homeless women at the Women’s Hearth drop-in center downtown has been “adventurous” because it’s open to women whatever their condition.

At New Leaf, he makes deliveries, works in the kitchen, hosts events, holds bake sales and provides lunches. Participants learn job skills in catering meals and baking.

“I have no illusion that nonprofit work will save the world. Nonprofits often clean up after the mess systems make,” Nathaniel said. “We could operate shelters for 5,000 years but still have women living on the streets.

“Nonprofit work was a natural step for me, because I grew up believing people of faith are to do justice. From connecting with the Spokane Alliance, I gained clarity on my sense of purpose. I want to do community organizing,” he said.

Three years ago, Greg and some other Disciples in Spokane discussed doing XPLOR. They built a team and recruited nonprofit sites. This year, there was an opening for Spokane in XPLOR, which is in its seventh year nationally. Spokane has a three-year commitment.

Greg came to Country Homes seven years ago from Vacaville, Calif. Previously, he earned a master’s in pastoral ministry at Gonzaga University in 2001 and was interim pastor at North Hill Christian after he was ordained in 2008.

“As pastor in an aging congregation and denomination, I had limited interaction with young adults. I wanted to intersect with young adults to learn from them. A spiritual companion is not a spiritual director or counselor,” he said. “We discuss the world and our place in it.”

In the first month, Colby, who had felt crippled by his faith in college, figured out his faith direction.

Nathaniel finds it refreshing to be with spiritual companions sharing frustrations with church and doubts without considering it dangerous.

Not seeing a future for the church unless it is involved in working for justice, he has been excited to learn about churches’ roles in challenging the Doctrine of Discovery in the U.S. and ending apartheid in South Africa. “Inspired by faith, hope and love, we will act for greater purpose,” he said.

Emily is relearning that the role of faith is to work with people and the community “in authentic relationships despite our background stories or political views.” She enjoys working with older people at Country Homes.

Rachel was accustomed to wrestling with faith in Heartbeat Organic, but has been learning about liturgical order and selecting songs for worship.

Emily and Nathaniel are helping Country Homes look at alternative uses for land the declining-member mainstream church owns. They are helping the church explore ways to use its land for the greater good.

Emily believes it may be possible to match church-owned land with the need for affordable housing.

Nathaniel is applying relationship-based organizing in the church, learning about decision makers and change makers in the 1960s church.

At North Hill Christian, Colby and Rachel help as lay leaders planning worship, events and a retreat.

On Bloomsday, they helped plan a joint afternoon service with the Ukrainian Church, which meets afternoons at North Hill. Rachel is helping North Hill participate in the PRIDE Parade.

The four-member young adult team for 2019-20 will work with Family Promise, Transitions, Volunteers of America and Northwest Fair Housing.

“This first year of XPLOR has been an exciting learning experience. We had the best team of XPLOR residents. It will be sad to see them leave, but exciting to see what life brings them next. We will welcome the new XPLOR residents in August,” said Debbie Jennison, who is the site coordinator for XPLOR in Spokane

For information, call280-4888, email dejennison@gmail.com or visit nbacares.org/xplor.

Camp presents timeless truth, adapts to change

I: Camp Spalding near Newport presents timeless truths while it adapts to changes

P: Boys at Camp Spalding interact through a game. Photo courtesy of Camp Spalding

The challenge for Camp Spalding since 1957 has been to hold to its mission as a camp of the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest, while it adapts to the ever-changing culture.

“The truth of the Gospel is constant, but we need to present the timeless truth in a way that makes it relevant in the changing culture,” said Andy Sonneland, who has been executive director for 28 years.

He said church camps still bring record attendance as they draw children and youth away to be with older, “cool” role models, talk faith with peers in the midst of a week that is “a blast” with many activity options and facilities that keep pace with expectations of youth today.

Activities at Camp Spalding on Davis Lake near Newport include boating, swimming, horseback riding, rock climbing, craft projects, camp games, new friends and new memories.

From June 9 to Aug. 19, campers come by age groups to regular or pioneer camps, arts camp and family camps.

More than 80 percent of Camp Spalding’s support comes from fees from summer camps and guest groups through the year. Individual donors contribute $150,000, and four percent of its income is from churches.

This summer the camp has a new infirmary and is breaking ground for other projects.

Andy said the main change is that 20 years ago, two-thirds of campers were from families attending area Presbyterian churches. Last summer, 30 percent were from Presbyterian churches and 70 percent were from the community.

For information, call 509-731-4244 or visit campspalding.org.

‘The Way of Love’ permeates camps and all of diocesan life

I: Episcopal theme, ‘The Way of Love,’ permeates camps and all of diocesan life

Camp Cross, a rustic camp on 110 acres on the east shore of Lake Coeur d’Alene, continues to impact lives and retain traditions developed since it opened in 1923, said John Palorine, director for the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane’s camp and year-round canon for youth ministries.

“I hear many stories of how camp changes lives,” he said. “We seek to develop future church leaders at camps and in youth ministry.”

Families across generations—children, parents and grandparents—are part of Camp Cross’ tradition as a place outdoors to gather and grow in faith, as well as to hike, swim, canoe and kayak, he said.

This year, the camp, youth ministry and diocesan ministries are reflecting on the theme, “Walking in the Way of Love,” inspired by national Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.

Summer camp staff on site all summer oversee facilities and camp life. Volunteer resource teams of clergy and lay leaders develop activities and lead discussions on how the power of love can change lives.

“Our leadership model is a community or sacred circle,” he said. “Everyone is a leader—campers, staff and volunteers. Each has gifts and is equally important. Each listens with respect. That’s how we love.”

As last year, national musicians and leaders are coming through Youth Presence Ministries, an organization John started in 2013 to train youth ministers. For senior high camp, Aug. 4 to 10, a team from the Episcopal Diocese of Utah’s Camp Puddle will come.

There are two adult sessions and family camps from June 14 to Aug. 10, plus other groups also use the camp until October.

In addition to camps, John will lead a youth pilgrimage to Ireland and Northern Ireland for 22 young people ages 16 to 22, from Aug. 14 to 22. The group will connect with the Church of Ireland’s peace and reconciliation work and explore Celtic spirituality.

For information, call 624-3191 or visit campcross.org.

Holden draws people away from the world to see the world

I: Holden Village draws people away from the world into the wilderness where they explore issues of the world.

P: Holden community gathers for summer vespers. Photo courtesy of Hannah Lauber

For more than 100 years, Holden Village has drawn people away from the world’s distractions into the mountain wilderness in the Cascades above Lake Chelan. In week-long communities, they explore issues of the world.

Chuck Hoffman, co-executive director of Holden Village along with his wife, Peg Carlson Hoffman, said Holden is always evolving. Its beautiful setting was changed by a the 2015 Wolvertonforest fire and then by remediation of mine tailings and water pollution from the copper mining once done there. Full summer programs resumed in 2017.

“We transform with people who come, changing leaders and staff, and reflecting the world,” he said. “Holden tries to stay in tune with what we are called to do next. Our topics and conversations relate to the needs of the world.”

Through community conversations, dialogue with faculty and inner reflections, community participants potentially go from their mountaintop experiences back into the world with new ideas and another way of being, he said.

“We consistently focus on our responsibility for the Earth and creation. How can we change our lives and gain discipline in the ‘pursuit of less’?” he said. “We need to live simpler lifestyles with our food, purchases and consumption. We need to make changes in our lives so we preserve the Earth. For its part, Holden uses food from sustainable, local sources.

“We need to reform our relationship with the Earth, one another and the Divine,” said Chuck, anticipating a “robust summer” from June 10 to Aug. 26 around conversation on the “Unity of Love.”

About 100 faculty, including some from South Africa and Northern Ireland, will help guests look at “how deeply fractured we are” and “how we are called to love and justice.”

About 120 staff serve the 300+ who come each week in the summer. About 60 year-round staff serve smaller guest communities who come fall, winter and spring. Powered off the grid by a hydro plant, there is less power because of lower water flow from fall through spring. Professors from several colleges lead January classes, and a growing number of colleges bring May-term classes.

We continue to grow our community around the world from those who were the forerunners in their 20s in the 1960s to the newest generation of young people and families, Chuck said. About a third of those who have come in the last two summers and this summer are new to Holden.

“The fire and remediation changed the landscape, leaving scars, but new growth coming up through gray landscape is like resurrection,” he said.

“The fire and remediation are a backdrop to learn about climate change, and fires replenishing as well as destroying,” he said. “It makes us appreciative of God’s creation and the Earth, from which we come, and calls us to manage its gifts and resources.”

For information, visit holdenvillage.org.

Lutherhaven finds new ways to recruit campers

I: Lutherhaven finds new pipelines for recruiting campers to growing program.

P: Lutherhaven camper gains confidence on ropes course. Photo courtesy of Lutherhaven

For 26 years, Bob Baker has been executive director of Lutherhaven, which was founded in 1946. Lutherhaven Ministries now includes Camp Lutherhaven on Lake Coeur d’Alene, Shoshone Mountain Retreat and Ranch up the North Fork of the Coeur d’Alene River, Idaho Servant Adventures and Lutherhaven Day Camps.

It’s the 100th year for Lutheran camping, which started near Pittsburgh, he said.

“Church camps change with changes in the culture, society and churches,” Bob said.“With mainline churches declining in numbers, fewer campers come from the church pipeline. We have new pipelines and have 120 percent more campers this year than in 2018, when we had a 120 percent increase over 2017. About a third are Lutheran, a third from other churches and a third unchurched.”

While many baby boomers went to church camps, generation X and millennials did not, so benefits of camp “are not in their vocabulary,” he said.

Another shift is from paper registration to online registration.

“We keep our website up-to-date and have ‘real-time’ feedback about the registration process,” Bob said. “We have hired a social media manager. This is our second summer with no paper brochure.”

Another change is that camp once drew more middle and upper middle class youth. With more single parents, last year Lutherhaven Ministries gave $190,000 in write-offs, helping 64 percent of campers, subsidizing 1,000 children and youth. A Tanzanian camper learned about Lutherhaven on the internet. Last year 18 from Shanghai, China, found the camp through connections. This year 24 campers are from Shanghai.

Over a year, about 14,000 use Lutherhaven facilities, and 6,000 in the summer. About 450 come from around the nation to Idaho Servant Adventures—to paint houses, build fences, repair homes, do roofing, clear trails, do weeding and other services.

To keep up with demand, Lutherhaven is building a $800,000 dining hall at Shoshone, now in its 21st year, because the program there expanded to fourth graders through high school.

“The camp teaches that God loves and forgives, and Jesus loves us, because it’s easy in the world to be pulled away from that truth,” said Bob, adding that camp draws people into churches as campers bring friends.

“Instead of being plugged in to a device eight hours a day, they are out in the beauty of God’s creation building relationships with peers, guided by caring young adult mentors,” he said.

The 2019 theme is “Adventure Awaits,” based on Ephesians 5:1 and 2 on walking the way of love.

Different age groups come at the same time, so parents send all their children one week.

Lutherhaven has also started a camp for 180 seniors—in their 80s and 90s—to come with wheel chairs, walkers and canes.

For information, call 208-667-3459 or visit lutherhaven.com.

Disciples peace interns travel camp-to-camp to lead discussions

I: Disciples peace interns travel camp-to-camp to lead discussions during the summer

While most Northwest Region Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) campers in 2019 will go to Gwinwood Camp near Lacey, some may go to Cane Ridge Camp near Lincoln, Mont., because in January 2020, the Northwest and Montana regions will become one region.

This year, the region promoted both camps, said Chris Snow, who is in his second year as youth and children’s ministry coordinator for the region and his sixth year as pastor at North Hill Christian Church in Spokane. He also advises the Regional Youth Commission, which plans a winter retreat for middle to high school youth at Camp Koinonia near Cle Elum.

Gwinwood is owned by West side congregations. Cane Ridge West is owned by Montana congregations. Zephyr, previously owned by east-side congregations, was sold six years ago.

“Peace Works” is the theme for 2019 Gwinwood camps. Elementary children going the week of July 8, and junior and senior high sessions the week of July 14. Weekend camps include a grandparents and grandkids camp, an intergenerational camp, and a camp on Oregon Trail Theology at Cane Ridge West.

In the last 30 years, Chris said the region has grown aware of how to include and care for children and youth with developmental and physical limits. Because some may need to rest from sensory overload, camps are looking to provide a space with two adults so they can take time out to rest and re-center, he said.

Volunteer staff lead programs, and counselors oversee cabin time and facilitate small groups.

Each year, national Disciples of Christ trains young adult peace interns. They then travel camp-to-camp across the U.S. to lead conversations on reconciliation, peace and justice.

“It unites the camps across the country and provides young leaders experience in guiding justice conversations,” said Chris, who graduated from Eden Theological Seminary in 2009 and served three years as youth and outreach coordinator at First Christian Church in Salem, Ore., before coming to Spokane.

For information, call 326-5400 or email csnow@disciplesnw.org.

Twinlow’s new director was its assistant

I: Twinlow’s new director was its assistant camp director

United Methodists account for 30 percent of campers and retreatants at Twinlow Camp on Spirit Lake near Rathdrum, Idaho, said Kristen Moon, who was assistant director for five years and became director March 15 when Tyler Wagner retired.

Having grown up in camping, she was on the staff three years at Lazy F, another United Methodist camp near Ellensburg, after graduating in political science from Central Washington University in 2013.

Growing up in Douglas, Wyo., she went to a Baptist camp. She became United Methodist in college.

“I felt a call from God to do camp ministry,” said Kristen. “As director, I keep camp on track with its mission.”

Twinlow staff and board are reviewing the long-term vision of providing children with hospitality on holy grounds, and welcoming everyone in a safe space for retreats, relaxation, renewal and experiencing God’s love.

“There’s a new twist in the modern world. With everyone bringing their ideas to camp and with social media connectivity, it’s hard for them to get away. Things change fast. Camp needs to keep up, but not stray from what we do,” she said. “With cell phones, 24-hour news and a barrage of information, camp is an important place to retreat.”

Summer camps are June 23 to Aug 16, and Twinlow is also open year-round for retreats with partner groups.

There are four programs each week—third to sixth grade elementary, sixth to ninth middle school, and ninth to 12th high school, plus Idaho Mission Projects. Age-groups have separate programs but come together for meals and games. There are shorter primary camps for first to third graders. Family camp is July 3 to 7.

The Idaho Mission Projects will draw 13 youth groups this summer.

Twinlow and Lazy F are two of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church’s four camps in the region. The others are Ocean Park Camp at Ocean Shores and Camp Indianola on Puget Sound.

For information, call 208-352-2671 or email Kristen@twinlowcamp.org.

Many youth coming to camps want to learn about social justice issues

I: Many youth coming to camps want to learn about social justice issues

P: Children play games in meadow at N-Sid-Sen. Photo courtesy of N-Sid-Sen

At N-Sid-Sen Camp and Conference Center on Lake Coeur d’Alene, managing director Mark Boyd sees an increased desire among youth coming to camps to be connected to social justice issues.

“While they may be stepping away from the world for a chance to breathe and relax, issues are important and are the focus of discussions,” he said.

“Peace Works” is the 2019 theme campers will reflect on in five weeks of UCC camps—two weeks of youth camps and three weeks of family camps.

Summer staff includes three from Turkey, one from Poland and one from England, coming through Camp America to be part of the hospitality team providing food service and housekeeping.

“We do not distinguish between guests and the hospitality team/staff. All are partners and connect with each other in the setting,” said Mark, who came to N-Sid-sen in 2012 after being on the staff of Pilgrim Firs, the other camp of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ.

He has seen a slight growth in numbers overall, with family camps growing quickly.

The United Church of Christ Conference’s outdoor ministries program is now holding all the traditional, age-based youth camps at N-Sid-Sen so Pilgrim Firs in Port Orchard, Wash., could establish “Common Fire,” a service camp in the Kitsap Community.

Last year, one youth group came. This summer, two youth groups are coming, one from Minneapolis and one from a conference church.

“Both of our camps are encouraging churches to ‘come home’ to our camps by coming to weekend retreats, often sharing the facilities with other churches as opportunities for members to become better acquainted,” said Mark.

About 45 percent of camp use is by other faith groups—including Catholics, Unity, Unitarians, Buddhists, Sufis and evangelical churches—as well as nonprofits, schools and other groups.

“We consider all who use the camp as partners,” Mark said.

For many years, the East Side Coeur d’Alene Fire Department held a dinner at N-Sid-Sen. Now it has a deeper partnership. This year it built a new dock for the camp and has a boathouse at the end for one of its fireboats that serve people on and along the lake.

For information, call 208-689-3489 or visit n-sid-sen.org.

National Veterans for Peace convention to discern ways to work for peace

I: National Veterans for Peace convention participants to discern ways to work for peace

P: Hollis Higgins wears shirt about ship promoting nuclear-free world.

About 300 veterans and supporters from the U.S., United Kingdom, Vietnam, Mexico and Okinawa will hold their 34th Annual National Veterans for Peace Convention Thursday to Sunday, Aug. 15 to 18, at the Doubletree Hotel in Spokane. The 2019 theme is “Sacred Land, Sacred Lives – Peace Knows No Borders.”

Hollis Higgins, secretary of the 22-member local chapter, said they decided to host the event to “leverage the peace voice in Spokane.” He hopes a peace convention can counterbalance war-promoting events.

Chapters in Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia and Portland helped the Spokane’s chapter plan the event.

Veterans for Peace’s 8,000 members in more than 140 chapters in the United States and 40 more chapters worldwide believe peace—peaceful ways—is the way to bring peace in the world.

Veterans For Peace (VFP) was founded in 1985 by five U.S. veterans in response to the nuclear arms race and U.S. military interventions in Central America. That year, chapter #4 was organized in Colville. In 1989, Rusty Nelson, former co-director of the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) established Spokane’s chapter #35. It includes vets from Kettle Falls, Coeur d’Alene, Pasco, Colorado and Oregon, aged from 46 to 94.

Hollis, who joined in 2010, said he was doubtful about the potential for such a group to be effective. Rusty said cynicism was appropriate, but it was important to move beyond cynicism to avoid the danger of giving up.

Nationally, the VFP has a permanent Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) seat at the United Nations and was the first veterans’ organization in the International Peace Bureau based in Geneva, .

Veterans For Peace has three emphases in its goal to abolish war: 1) educate people on the full, unsustainable cost of war; 2) resist militarism through efforts to end current wars and change U.S. foreign policy to diplomacy, and 3) heal wounds of war and build a just and peaceful society.

The convention begins at noon, Thursday, with a forum and reception, followed by a Poetry Soiree. Each day begins with yoga/meditation, a 12-step group and Tai Chi.

The Friday opening plenary includes greetings from local peace activists, indigenous leaders and dignitaries. Morning and afternoon workshops will inform and motivate delegates on antiwar issues.

Three plenaries Friday feature speakers on U.S. military interventions around the globe, the history of anti-war organizing in the military (GI resistance), and the importance of seeing all lands and lives as sacred, Hollis said.

A community event at 7 p.m., Friday will feature local musicians and guest speakers.

From 10 p.m. to midnight, there will be movies and conversations.

After Saturday business, there will be a banquet, a keynote address, awards and dancing.

After a Sunday “open mic” session from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m., the closing plenary will feature Spokane’s Spectrum Singers.

Several non-violent actions are planned during the event.

Hollis invited members of the community to join Veterans For Peace in its work for peace and justice globally, removing the barriers between countries, cultures and the people of the world.

Hollis, who grew up in Porterville, Calif., was drafted in 1968 after graduating in English from Fresno State College. The culture shock of seeing the extreme poverty of people living in shacks made of crushed cans, timbers and plastic roofs in a Korean city with a golden domed cathedral overwhelmed and disabled him, so he was honorably discharged early.

He worked 21 years with the County Parks and Recreation in Fresno, where he helped found the Fresno Center for Non-Violence. In Spokane, after 12 years with the postal service, he retired in 2016.

He has helped the Spokane chapter prepare two Memorial Day editions. One published in 2015 is Vet Lit: How We Remember War and a 2017 anthology is titled, Vet Lit 2: So It Goes. These publications share veterans’ voices that are not often heard.

VFP, which meets at 6:45 p.m., second Wednesdays at 25 W. Main, organizes for peace, carries its banner in parades and does displays at events to raise awareness and offer resources to educate people. They often join PJALS events.

In Hollis’ words, VFP exposes the “travesty of U.S. empire building around the world” to expand the influence of corporations.

“We also expose effects of militarism on civil society, including environmental destruction, glorifying war to youth, pollution from military deployments, bases and installations globally, and assaulting indigenous populations and other cultures,” Hollis said.

In August 2018, VFP urged the Spokane City Council to declare the city a nuclear free zone to commemorate the 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Veterans For Peace around the world—in Ireland, Russia, Japan and countries listed earlier—includes military veterans, family members and allies seeking to build a culture of peace, expose the costs of war, heal war wounds, support returning veterans, counter military recruiting in schools, counsel and mentor veterans affected by PTSD, seek justice for veterans and war victims, and works to end all war forever.

Some VFP national projects include promoting reconciliation of North and South Korea; assisting non-citizen veterans who are deported after serving in the U.S. military; defending religious freedom, equality and individual rights; urging truth in recruiting young people; and confronting racism and discrimination that dehumanize people to justify violence.

For information, call 209-3585, email treebarkhh@yahoo.com or visit veteransforpeace.org.

Community meeting urges health study, services for Spokane Tribe

I: Community meeting urges health study, services for Spokane Tribe

P: Brian Crossley, Carol Evans and Ricky Sherwood report tribal issues.

Two new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) staff responsible for the Midnite Mine Superfund site on the Spokane Indian Reservation recently presented an overview of the background for the site and the cleanup at community meetings in Wellpinit and Spokane.

Others at the Spokane meeting advocated gathering data to improve health services and education for people experiencing after-effects of exposure to radiation.

Linda Meyer, EPA remedial project manager, and Kay Morrison, EPA community liaison, said they prepared the presentation partly for their own awareness and understanding.

They updated the EPA Midnite Mine Superfund website, which is at https://www.epa.gov/superfund/midnite-mine. It includes the background and information on cleanup activities, health and environment, updated reports, photos and videos, and more.

“The Newmont Mining Corporation, which is responsible for the cleanup, asked the EPA a year ago to change the background radiation level that determines the cleanup,” said Linda.

“Based on technical analysis, we are not doing that,” she said. “It took 12 years and much legal work to put the agreement in place. We have no reason to change the cleanup level.”

Ricky Sherwood, Spokane Tribe Midnite Mine community liaison, said the 2019 spring through fall construction will move 2.1 million cubic yards to fill Pit #4 three-fourths full.

Brian Crossley, manager of the Spokane Tribe Water and Fish Program, said a new water treatment plant will reduce radioactivity in water and pipe it downhill beside Blue Creek into Lake Roosevelt.

Linda said that while those working on cleanup today wear protective clothing and are tested for radiation exposure, early miners were given no protective clothing and wore contaminated clothing home, and women were exposed by doing laundry.

Some at the meeting said the road, which was paved with mine rocks, has been cleaned up, but driveways were also made with mine rocks. Some also brought rocks into their homes to use for mantels and fireplaces.

A representative of the Indian Health Services (IHS) was at the Wellpinit meeting.

Carol Evans, chair, said the Tribal Council recently passed a resolution for there to be a health assessment.

Deb Abrahamson, who facilitated the Spokane meeting, said the Indian Health Service needs to share its data for a mortality study to help the tribe compete for funds for health care.

“There are a tremendous number of cancer-related deaths now. In the 1970s, young mothers who cleaned workers’ clothes first got cancer and died. Many women also worked at the Sherwood mine,” she said. “For 50 years, people had access to unfenced areas around the mine’s open pits.”

The SHAWL (Sovereignty, Health, Air, Water, Land) Society initiated community education with the EPA, the Department of Ecology, the Department of Health, Tribal Social Services and Tribal Education.

“We need an adequate database of the number who died of cancer, the number in treatment for cancer and the number diagnosed with cancer, so we can address the health needs of present and future generations,” Deb said.

“Chronic exposure means our community has experienced horrendous health problems,” she said. “It will compound in future generations because the half-life of uranium is thousands of years.”

Kay knows the community wants to understand health impacts. She said that while the Center for Disease Control’s Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) analyzes effects of toxic substances on health and teaches people how to prevent exposure, it does not provide health services.

Deb is glad the EPA revamped the website to provide relevant information. She hopes Indian Health Services will eventually provide services and cancer education.

Tracey Morgan, who worked on a study by Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, reported that the study found a 46 percent rate of cancer on the reservation compared with 18 percent in the U.S. as a whole.

Kim Kreber of the Spokane Regional Health District told of a free mammogram program that also helps tribal members navigate the health care system.

Deb said the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act of 1990 included the Spokane and other tribes that mined uranium in the Cold War era. There were more than 32,700 claimants from 1992 to 2017, but it ends in 2022.

“Some individuals received $150,000 payments, but it took tribes nine years to be included. When we were, they helped some former workers, but families who applied did not have information they needed to be eligible, because Indian Health Services records were confidential,” she said.

After a suggestion that, with three universities at Riverpoint in Spokane collaborating on medical education, they might develop an innovative program, Luis Manriquez, clinical assistant professor at the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine, said he is conversing with the tribe on developing health services with students.

In closing, Carol thanked SHAWL and the community for bringing concerns to the Tribe.

“Many were ignorant about having ore in their houses,” she said. “We need to be vigilant and bring experts to do assessments of homes even now.”

Regarding studies and surveys on causes of death, she pointed out someone with cancer may die of something else. Her father worked at the mill site and qualified for a Radiation Exposure Compensation Act benefit. He had cancer, but COPD was listed on his cause of death.

“We can’t change the past. When the mine came, our parents had no place to work. We were fed because they worked there. They did not know what it would mean,” she said. “Now we pay the price.”

Sharing stories, as Carol did, is one way to gather data that may not be in records.

It’s not easy, Deb said, because “people in pain do not want to talk about family members who passed. It may be painful, but it’s important for future generations and our leaders.”

For the Earth Day Vigil in April, she wanted to do an exhibit with faces of people who died of cancer, but few families responded.

Some don’t share because they don’t want to be a burden, but sharing can be a way to challenge injustice, bring health services and educate people, she said.

For information, contact Linda at 206-553-6636, linda.meyer@epa.gov, or Ricky at 458-6586, rickys@spokanetribe.com.

Retired teacher informs herself and community on proposed smelter

I: Retired teacher informs herself and community on proposed smelter

P: Phyllis Kardos researches and reports on Newport smelter.

For 55 years, Phyllis and Ted Kardos have had a 240-acre farm seven miles outside Newport. Now they have retired there, and most of their six children, 19 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren live in the area.

Although pollution from a proposed silicon smelter four miles away might not blow over their farm, the facility would disrupt their rural lives.

So Phyllis joined others in the community and region to challenge it.

She read in the newspaper that a Canadian company, HiTest, now called PacWest, bought three parcels of land—187 acres—up from Highway 41 a mile outside Newport and 14 acres from the Public Utility District (PUD)—to develop the smelter. PacWest first inquired about power in 2015 and was working with state representatives.

After a 2017 county commissioners meeting, she and others began acting.

While silicon is used in solar panels for renewable, clean energy, and Newport needs jobs, smelting would generate 766,131 tons of greenhouse gases, 649 tons of sulfur dioxide and 935 tons of nitrous oxides a year, Phyllis said. In the first phase, there would be two furnaces, a 150-foot stack and an 11-story complex, plus a coal rail spur through forests, agricultural land and open spaces disrupting rural life, she said.

Because Pend Oreille County has a high poverty rate, she wondered if it was a “sacrifice zone.” She knows polluting industries often locate near poor or minority communities, assuming there will be little opposition. The Kalispel Tribe, however, forced HiTest to relocate from a first site proposed near their reservation.

In December 2017, she and eight others formed Responsible Growth Northeast Washington (RGNEW), acknowledging the need for jobs, but challenging if smelter jobs were best.

“Beyond stopping the smelter, we seek ways to revitalize Newport,” Phyllis said.

Another group, Citizens Against the Newport Silicon Smelter (CANSS) formed in Idaho, because the “air-shed” crosses the border.

Concerned about the airshed and watershed, the Kalispel Tribe continues to challenge having it in the county. They recently opened a casino with an events center, restaurant, fresh food market and gas station, and plan to develop an RV park and cabins to draw tourists, she said.

Phyllis said county commissioners support the smelter for jobs and taxes. She has met with the City of Newport and Washington Senator Patty Murray.

Because of division, she said, most local churches have not taken a stand or held educational events.

Buddhist monks at Sravasti Abby, Carmelite Sisters at the Hermitage and Sr. Pat Millen of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia have written letters opposing the smelter.

As a member of St. Anthony’s parish and inspired by Pope Francis’ “Laudate Si” encyclical calling people to “be good stewards of the land,” Phyllis would like churches to build dialogue and be informed. She has done much research and has given more than 25 presentations in Sandpoint, Metaline Falls, Elk, Blanchard, Newport, Pend Oreille, Spokane and other communities.

Responsible Growth Northeast Washington believes a smelter is contrary to the open spaces, forests and agriculture promoted in the 2005 Pend Oreille County Comprehensive and Growth Management Plan’s goal of preventing urban sprawl.

“Economic growth should stay within the plan,” said Phyllis. “RGNEW respects those who want 400 construction jobs and 150 long-term jobs, but we are rural, not urban. We need sustainable economic growth that protects the environment and people’s health. We can do that through tourism, art, education and training centers. Industry, such as a smelter, would make it hard to build on tourism,” she said.

RGNEW’s members have researched the proposal and found: Crystalline silica would be trucked from a mine in Golden, B.C. Blue coal (anthracite, said to be cleaner burning) would come by train from Kentucky or South America. Charcoal would be shipped from the South China Sea. Wood chips would be burned in two furnaces at 300,000° Fahrenheit.

While 70 percent of the silicon produced may go into solar panels, she finds nothing green about the process or train and truck traffic bringing raw materials.

“The 150-foot stacks may be regulated, but would disperse pollutants higher and farther. They would emit sulfur dioxide, an ingredient in acid rain. Emissions would include carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and particulate matter, affecting people, fish, wildlife, plants and water,” Phyllis said. “After silica is melted, silicon is poured with huge ladles. Fugitive emissions from that will come out the windows.”

Roger Castle, a RGNEW member, went to Burnsville, Miss., which has a five-year-old smelter. He took pictures of the fugitive emissions. Workers told him of hard work in a very hot factory, high turnover and burn injuries.

Phyllis said there are eight silicon smelters in the U.S. and one in Canada. Most are east of the Mississippi and on rivers, because they require water.

The Newport site is two miles from schools, a hospital, senior apartments, homes, businesses and recreational facilities. They would be affected by noise and lights from 24/7 production.

The smelter would be on the Little Spokane River, above the City of Newport’s underground aquifer and near Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend Oreille River, Phyllis said.

Learning developers plan to cover 150 acres with an impervious concrete pad, she wonders where storm-water runoff will go and how it will affect the city water system and wells. Blue gem coal, silica, wood chips and charcoal would be stored in open pits.

The smelter is still in the proposal stage. It has no permit, construction has not begun, and it’s behind schedule, Phyllis said.

The Department of Ecology (DOE) gathered comments in public hearings for an environmental impact report.

There is litigation about the PUD land sale. Three of the four parcels were publicly owned. Pend Oreille District #1 declared them surplus two years ago and sold them to PacWest. For access, Pac West bought a 14-acre parcel owned by Pend Oreille County.

Rick Eichstaedt, director of Gonzaga’s School of Law Environmental Law and Land Use Clinic, supervises law students who took up a case to determine if that sale was legal.

In March, Judge Julie McKay agreed the sale was irregular, but said she was not authorized to overturn it. In April, Rick and the students filed an appeal to the Washington Court of Appeals.

Rick said PacWest has not paid the DOE to write the environmental impact statement, nor has it paid the PUD for a design to hook into the electric grid. In addition, the solar panel producer in Moses Lake is closing because of losing its market with China, he said.

Based on the State Environmental Policy Act, he recently requested an environmental analysis before Pend Oreille County Commissioners rezone county land, including the smelter site.

“There are so many pieces. It’s like a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. It’s exhausting,” Phyllis said of the need to educate people so they can write letters and raise funds for legal actions.

She considers consumer demand for silicon for computers, airplanes and other products, as well as solar panels, part of overconsumption.

“All our lives, Ted and I have opposed exploiting natural resources and furthering global warming. Then we wake up one day, and the threat is in our back yard,” Phyllis said. “We could say we are too old, our knees hurt, or we have to focus on family, but we said we can act. We have to protect what we have and keep our area rural.

“My faith keeps me focused on protecting human health and God’s creation for our grand and great-grandchildren. We want them to know what is important in life. If I let people destroy my back yard, who am I as a Christian? My legacy is to stand up,” she said, “because I can act here.”

Phyllis’ family moved to Clark Fork, Idaho, in the 1940s. After she married Ted, he worked with the Forest Service in Newport, and they bought the farm.

In 1983, she earned a bachelor’s degree in education at Eastern Washington University. Then from 1985 to 2005, she taught in Grayling and McGrath, Alaska. She and her family returned summers to the farm.

For information, call 509-447-7958 or 671-1763 or email pkardos\_jean@yahoo.com, rgnew.org.

Natural resources head offers science for Kalispel Tribe’s opposition to silicon smelter

I: Natural resources head offers science for Kalispel Tribe’s opposition to silicon smelter

P: Deane Osterman

Soon after the Kalispel Tribe of Indians learned in August 2016 about plans to locate a silicon smelter half a mile from its reservation, members challenged it. The Canadian company HiTest—now PacWest—then proposed a site in Newport 15 miles away but still in the reservation’s airshed.

Deane Osterman, executive director of the Kalispel’s Natural Resources Department, continues the challenge. He has worked 25 years with the tribe’s offices in Usk and at the Saranac Building in Spokane.

In Spokane, he collaborates with the Upper Columbia United Tribes and with Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, especially on fish and wildlife.

“The smelter was originally pitched to state leaders as a green project with all the silicon made to be used in solar panels,” he said. “PacWest has walked that amount back, presently asserting that just 5 percent would be used for the solar industry.”

Deane is concerned Governor Jay Inslee streamlined permits because of his focus on climate change, but he added that “pollution from the smelter would be large and as currently proposed would go unmitigated.”

Given emissions from smelting silicon, he wonders if solar energy will reduce emissions and is concerned the silicon may go to other products.

Deane said silicon is smelted from ultrapure quartz (silicon dioxide), mined near Golden, B.C. The chemical process is energy intensive, requiring high heat to split the two oxygen atoms from the silicon atom. The smelter would use metallurgical coal, wood chips and charcoal to capture the oxygen atoms in the furnace. He said it would produce 766,000 tons of carbon dioxide, 307 tons of carbon monoxide, 649 tons of sulfur dioxide and 935 tons of nitrogen oxides annually.

“Waste would go up the stack, creating haze, and human and environmental health problems. Regulations are important for public health,” he said.

PacWest needed a special permit to fast track it, so there have been public hearings for comments. The environmental community has expressed concern, he said.

“Seeking to be a steward of the air, water and land, the tribe has gathered information on impacts on communities, nature and the world,” he said. “We are sharing information and stories on our website.”

Deane, whose degrees from Eastern Washington University are in biological anthropology and zoology, said the smelter would compromise the air, and with it community, cultural and environmental health.

In 2017, the Kalispel Tribe began the process of re-designating its air-shed from Class 2 to Class 1 under the Clean Air Act, increasing protection for the air above and inside the reservation to reduce health problems, enhance the health of fish, wildlife and plants, and increase worker productivity, property values, quality of life and economic wellbeing.

Even if the smelter were sited 15 miles away in Newport, he said, there is potential threat to the air quality from emissions. To predict how emissions would dissipate, he said there is still time to collect meteorological information—wind conditions and barometric pressure—at the site for a year.

“It’s an environmental justice issue when big companies site plants near vulnerable, economically challenged communities needing jobs,” he said. “The Kalispel Tribe supports smart economic development. We need to figure out what makes sense for economic development for our community, not dance with the first proposal.The tribe wants economic development to be community based and protect the environment.

“The proposal to build in a desperate area has divided Pend Oreille and Bonner counties,” he said. “There are no educational meetings for dialogue to inform people.”

In contrast, the process for relicensing dams was contentious, but professionals on many sides engaged in dialogue and became partners, he said.

“We are not binary, just for or against something. We are complex. We need dialogue. We need to find the sweet spot.”

Deane said Franciscan values from his upbringing in Spokane’s St. Francis of Assisi Parish influence his belief that “we need to take care of people.”

As a tribal employee, he also shares tribal values and admires the tribe’s perseverance through their history.

He urges citizens to pressure state and federal agencies, politicians and the corporation. The Kalispel and other tribes in the Northwest and Alaska have written letters of opposition.

For information, call 993-0879 or email dosterman@knrd.org.

The Lands Council director believes a silicon smelter could be clean

I: The Lands Council director believes a silicon smelter could be clean, but says Newport smelter is not

P: Mike Peterson

Mike Peterson, executive director of the Lands Council, recently studied the proposed Newport silicon smelter and submitted comment to the Department of Ecology (DOE) as it develops an environmental impact statement.

The Lands Council finds the proposed configuration unacceptable, he said, but the DOE can explore options and “do the right thing so the smelter does not pollute the air, water, land, wildlife and humans.”

As it’s configured, it would emit two tons of sulfur dioxide and two tons of nitrous dioxide a day, he said.

While community discussion may be hard, Mike urges people to examine the science and issues.

“If we are to switch to a renewable energy economy, solar may be a big part, so there may be need to dig quartz and refine it to make silicon,” he said. “Making steel and aluminum for wind turbines also consumes energy and raw materials, and may pollute.

“We need to be concerned about every step of making silicon—mining, smelting, delivering and installing solar panels. If we do that, we can compare the impact of solar with wind, coal, dams and nuclear.

“The best way to reduce carbon is with more efficient lights, heat and transportation,” he said. “Considering that more people use and want to use energy to improve their standard of living, we want to produce more energy with less carbon,” he said. “In producing any energy, the process must be as clean as possible.

“Whether the smelter is at Newport or elsewhere, the question is how much sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide it produces,” Mike said. “Emissions need to be reduced to the point it’s acceptable to the community and complies with state and federal environmental laws. If that’s not possible, we may need to rethink solar.”

One way to reduce sulfur in converting quartz to silicon is to use biochar or charcoal—from crop, wood or field residue—rather than coal, which is high in sulfur, he said.

Mike said that PacWest recently decided to save transportation costs and use coal from the Powder River Basin in Montana rather than Kentucky. He hopes they save costs by using biochar produced near the site.

“Scrubbing may cost more, but 99 percent of nitrous oxides, a second pollutant, can be scrubbed out as steel and aluminum plants do,” said Mike.

Another concern is the amount of water used. Mike said it may use more than the Little Spokane River flow. The proposed site is at the headwaters of the Little Spokane River, and on the nexus of water flowing into the Pend Oreille River and Lake Pend Oreille.

He thinks water flow could be solved and water quality depends on whether the company releases pollutants or recycles water as they propose.

“Every silicon smelter should reduce air pollutants and track emissions, so producing solar panels does not pollute,” he said.

“A third question is the siting. Often, polluting industries locate in low-income communities—a form of environmental injustice,” Mike said. “Originally, the plan was for an old industrial site upwind of the Kalispel Reservation. Then PacWest moved to Newport, a rural town where people don’t want smokestacks at the edge of their property. Pend Oreille County has cheap electricity.

“Wherever a silicon smelter is located, pollution issues must be solved,” said Mike. “As it’s currently configured, it pollutes.”

Another concern is that the state gave the company $300,000 to move the project along to make silicon for solar panels and create jobs in the county, which has high unemployment.

Mike said labor unions want jobs, but it’s not a matter of jobs or no jobs, it’s to have jobs as clean as possible. He believes silicon plants can be clean.

He said the DOE will take a year to do an environmental impact report, which will analyze impacts and ways to mitigate them.

For information, call 838-4912, email mpetersen@landscouncil.org or visit landscouncil.org.

Carmelite and Franciscan sisters, Buddhist community express concerns, opposition

I: Carmelite and Franciscan sisters, Buddhist community express concerns, opposition

Thubten Tarpa of Sravasti Abbey near Newport, said Buddhist community members have gone to meetings with the County Commissioners and Department of Ecology, asked questions and done research to understand the issues, written letters to the editor and to officials, and emailed people to learn and write letters.

She listed some concerns: “I believe it will be harmful to area residents. It is near schools and downtown. The pollution will blow farther and impact forests and waterways, compromising the health of people. In case of accidents or fires, we do not have the safety infrastructure for hazardous waste services to handle it.”

Tarpa believes some people from around the world may be discouraged from coming to the abbey.

She knows the county needs economic growth, but doesn’t think the smelter is the way to do it.

Carmelite Sisters of Mary, who live on 80 acres in mountain wilderness at their retreat center near Newport, have written letters opposing the smelter.

Sister Leslie Lund OCDH said they have been concerned because it “was dropped on us as fait accompli; because of the irregular land sales; because of the governor subsidizing a Canadian company; because it would be harmful for the area that draws people to all season recreation to hunt, bird watch, fish, boat and ski; because workers would work in 120-to-150 degree heat, and because for so few jobs the smelter would ruin the quality of life for thousands in this recreational area of scenic beauty.

“Part of our charism is the care for the earth,” she said. “In 2003, we were wildlife farm of the year in Pend Oreille County.”

In March, Sr. Pat Millen, OSF, wrote Governor Jay Inslee to express her concerns about the smelter and her disappointment that his administration is considering supporting it. She finds it inconsistent with his intentions to make Washington” a leader in clean air and energy.

How do the statistics about the economy play out in people’s lives?

How do the statistics about the economy play out in people’s lives?

Are media asking necessary questions or just repeating glowing government statistics? Are we being lulled into ever new conflicts and despair that will keep up divisions for media to cover? There certainly is a lot of weather disaster news to cover every day.

Is the economy doing great for everyone?

Is the unemployment rate really low, or hidden by low-paid, part-time for under-employed people, not eligible to receive unemployment? The labor force participation rate is falling. How many are discouraged workers, believing there are no jobs available for them?

Why are so many people working two or three “jobs” and not making it? How many work with no benefits, no retirement, no health care coverage—with no future?

Why are there still so many people living on the streets, displaced from homes, even when we are building new housing units for them?

Where are the jobs that have been added? Are they in teaching K-12 or at universities among the uncertain adjunct class? Are they in health care? In care giving? In nonprofits? In industry? What industry? In tech? In the Inland Northwest? How many local retail jobs have been lost to online shopping?

Are the stocks going up or going down? It depends on the time and day. Who benefits and who can take advantage of those fluctuation to win the investment game?

Who is paying for the tariffs to make China comply with trade policies? American consumers? American industry? American farmers? How long will it take for the tariffs to hit our pocketbooks?

Who paid less in taxes this year? Who paid more? How do tax policies affect charitable giving? Who is audited most?

What will the proposal to lower the “poverty level” mean for people? How many will lose benefits that keep them housed and fed? Will poverty statistics look better? How will that benefit the economy?

If block grants go, what happens to programs that house people, feed them and guide them into stable futures?

Perhaps in some families the next generation is doing better, but not everyone who accumulates debt to earn master’s or doctoral degrees reaps benefits in better jobs. Some find that because higher degrees require higher pay, they are not hired.

By the most basic measure, 2017 was a good year for job creation with the U.S. economy, adding more than 2 million jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but it is in fact the lowest level of annual job creation since 2010. Hmmm...

The economy provides fodder for pastoral care, justice action and community conversations. May we keep alert and not be lulled by numbing statistics and daily crises.

Mary Stamp - editor

Pastor shares history of, insights on Unitarian Universalist Church

I: Spokane pastor shares history of and insights about the Unitarian Universalist Church

P: Todd Eklof stands beside the Unitarian Universalist symbol.

On the occasion of Spokane hosting the National Unitarian Universalist Association’s annual General Assembly Wednesday to Sunday, June 19 to 23, at the Spokane Convention Center, Todd Eklof, pastor of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, offered background on the denomination and local congregation, along with information on the event.

The 3,000 delegates are gathering for worship, witness, workshops, connecting and business that includes bylaws changes, electing board members and voting on a statement of conscience, “Our Democracy Uncorrupted,” suggesting ways to preserve U.S. democracy.

After a public closing service at 10 a.m. Sunday, there will also be a witness action on racism downtown.

Workshops will cover anti-racism, white supremacy and inclusion issues, plus topics like lay ministry, stewardship, treasurers and music. The Spokane Alliance will lead a workshop on involving impacted communities and communities of color in organizing work. Another workshop is on Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams, who grew up in Spokane.

Keynoters are Richard Blanco, a gay immigrant from Cuba and the fifth poet to read at an inauguration (President Obama’s second), and Robin DiAngelo, author of White Fragility.

Todd explained that the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Church has a congregational polity, a bottom-up organization of autonomous individual churches that select and call their ministers. There are organized districts and regions that have gatherings, too.

Unitarians and Universalists each began in the 1700s in the U.S. Unitarians, a liberal branch of Christians, founded Harvard University. Universalists believed in universal salvation. They merged in 1961, he said.

The UU symbol is a chalice surrounded by two circles, one representing Unitarians and one for Universalists. The chalice symbol came from World War II when the Unitarian Service Committee used a chalice as a sign for friends who would help Jews escape Eastern Europe.

“The chalice represents the value of the individual and the necessity of community,” he said.

Todd told of early Spokane pastors.

The local UU church was founded in 1887. Its first minister, Edwin Wheelock, arrived in Spokane with a bounty on his head, wanted in Virginia for preaching a sermon supporting abolitionist John Brown. Edwin had started schools for freed slaves in Louisiana and Texas.

From 1911 to 1916, John Dietrich, who founded Religious Humanism, gave lectures at 10 a.m. Sundays in what is now the Bing Theater. He came to Spokane a few months after being convicted of preaching heresy by the Dutch Reform Church.

The next pastor, M.M. Mangasarian, was born in Turkey and founded the Rationalist Society. He believed Jesus was a myth, not a historical person

These speakers drew crowds to what was more a lecture series than a church, said Todd.

In 1921, the church became a smaller community, meeting in different places, including sharing space with Temple Emanu-El, beginning in the 1930s. In 1943, they bought what is now the Glover Mansion, and later built a church on the property.

Led in the 1950s and 1960s by Rudy Gilbert, the church organized public discussions on Communism, the United Nations, Medicare and the Vietnam War.

The pastor in the 1970s and 1980s was Bill Houff, a scientist and activist who informed people of radiation leaking into the ground, air and water on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, which made the plutonium for bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He helped establish the Hanford Education Action League that created public pressure to release information that led to shutting down the nuclear reactor that made those bombs.

In the 1990s, Linda Whittenberg led the church in re-establishing relations with Unitarians in Felsorákos, Romania, beginning cultural exchanges, visits and friendships.

Outgrowing the space beside the Glover House, in 1995, the UU Spokane moved to its present building at 4340 W. Ft. Wright Dr.

Since coming in 2011, Todd has helped church members and others support Washington’s referendum supporting marriage equality for gays and lesbians, turning 25 percent in Eastern Washington favoring it into 47 percent in the county and 55 percent in the city, he said.

“Washington was the first of two states to legalize same sex marriage by popular vote,” said Todd. “From there, it spread over the U.S. and the world.”

Also in 2012, the church supported the state’s initiative to decriminalize marijuana, which he said cut the number of stops and searches by police in the state in half, reducing contacts with police and jail populations.

The UU Church of Spokane has been active in environmental stewardship within the congregation, among its members, and in challenging the safety of coal and oil trains coming through Spokane. Eventually Governor Jay Inslee turned down the last coal and oil export facility proposal.

Members partner with organizations like the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, the Spokane Alliance, and other groups involved with activism and giving voice to concerns on contraceptive freedom, the environment, immigration and Palestinians, Todd said.

“In our weekly Meaningful Movies, we look at what issues are calling us right now,” he said.

Members are in a local coalition of people who go to the Intermodal Transportation Center where immigration officers pick up immigrants. They raise money for bail and legal assistance, as well as informing people on their rights.

Todd, who grew up and was ordained in the Southern Baptist Church, graduated from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, before going to South Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He earned a master’s degree at Spalding University, a Catholic school in St. Louis, and a doctor of ministry degree at Meadville-Lombard, a UU school in Chicago. He became a Unitarian minister in 1999.

“Unitarians, who are less than one percent of the U.S. population, have about 1,000 congregations and about 200,000 members,” he said. “Our church has about 400 members, with 300 attending the two Sunday services.”

“Most UU congregations seek to create the open, inclusive, supportive community that people need for their lives and seek to have impact on the world to make it a better, more just place for everyone,” he said.

“Our mission is to create community, find meaning and work for justice. We champion justice, diversity and environmental stewardship in the wider world,” Todd said.

He described Unitarian Universalist “theology” as non-theistic, not defined by one doctrine or theology, but sharing principles in community.

“We are different individuals with different beliefs. Some have no beliefs. Some gravitate to Buddhist theology or philosophy. Some have theistic leanings. Differences do not separate us or cause contention,” he said.

Todd finds Spokane more progressive than its reputation as the conservative part of the state.

“I engage in more issues here than I would in a larger city,” he said. “There is political diversity here, and many in Spokane have progressive values.

“Spokane’s UU Church was part of Spokane before it was Spokane,” Todd said. “We have a rich, colorful history here with many movers and shakers among our compassionate, intellectual, caring, active members.”

For information, call 325-6383 or visit uuspokane.org.