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CHECK FAITHS & NONPROFITS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS



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

Camps find creative ways to do camp

By Mary Stamp

Just as faiths vary in their perspectives about opening their buildings for worship, so do camps of the faith communities.

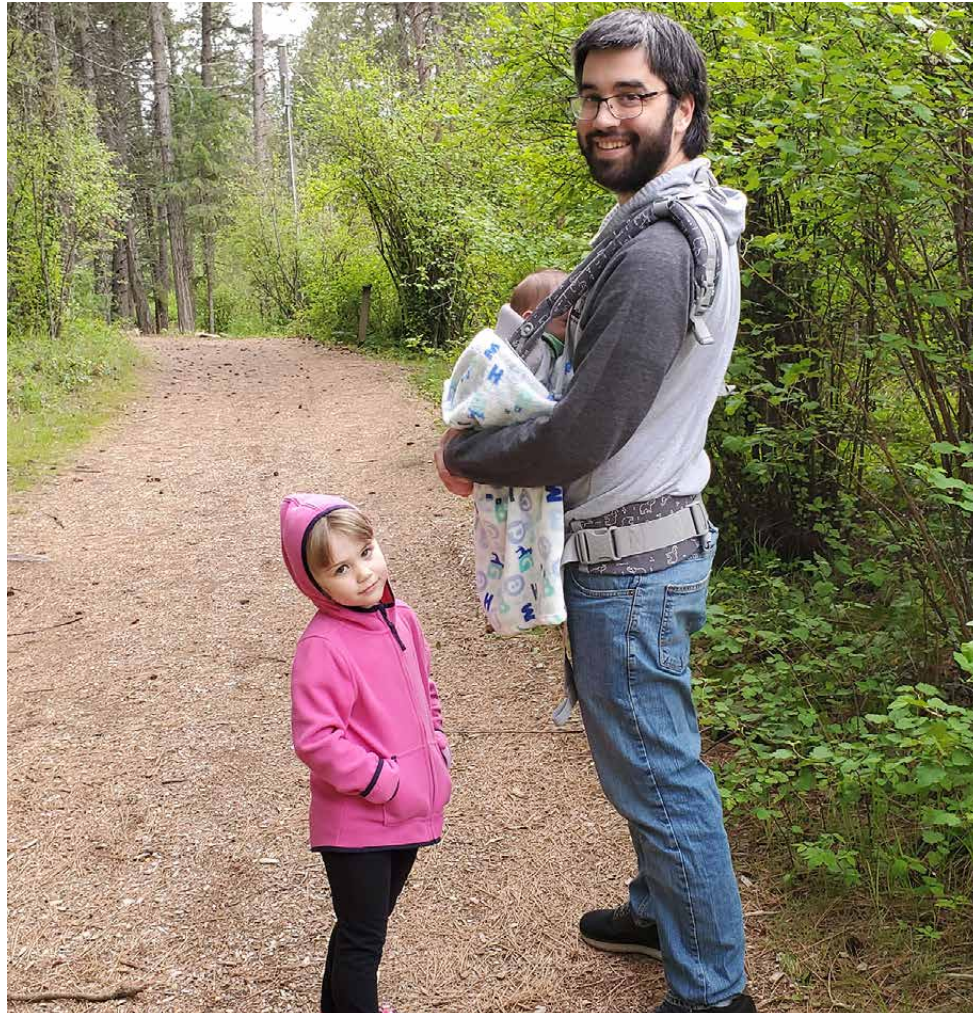
The camps are making decisions about opening based on their facilities and the feasibility of keeping spaces sanitized so campers are physically distanced and safe.

Some camps are closing. Some camps are offering alternative programs for families, individuals and congregations because they have spaces that allow people to be separated. Some camps are opening but expect fewer campers. Some camps were still deciding by press time.

The Fig Tree contacted the area camps and includes stories of those who responded to share their discernment process and plans.

N-Sid-Sen Camp and Retreat Center for the Pacific Northwest United Church of Christ (UCC) lost its spring guest groups, allowing it to do a more thorough spring cleaning than usual.

Mark Boyd, managing director, said N-Sid-Sen offered its space, as did its sister UCC camp, Pilgrim Firs in Kitsap County, to be a site for isolation and quarantine for first responders, but N-Sid-Sen's



Nick CastroLang goes for a walk at camp with his five-year-old daughter and infant son.

location on the east shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene did not lend to that.

So conference and camp leaders developed an alternative, "Families at Camp." While it will not replace the usual summer income, it will be "a ministry to give people an opportunity to come to camp in a different way," Mark said. "We hope some will donate beyond the cost of coming for several days."

Because summer camps were suspended and the space is available, families who are isolating together may come Thursdays to Mondays. They may stay in one of four lodge-type spaces with a kitchen, or one of four cabins so they can stay to themselves. There is space for 24 people total.

"We don't know when we will open again for group rentals or what will be possible in summer of 2021," he said. "We know that churches are looking at different ways to do ministry now. Can we sing at camp fires or play community games? Will we need to limit numbers in cabins? Will we be able to load campers into a bus to go up the river for a float trip?"

There are many questions about camp traditions, activities, housing and meals.

Continued on page 5

Kroc Center diverts focus from fitness to help with food, services in pandemic

By Kaye Hult

As Wade Isley, corps ministry specialist with the Salvation Army Kroc Center in Coeur d'Alene, looked back at the recent months with COVID-19 at the center stage, he realized that the public view of the Kroc Center has transitioned.

The center opened in May 2009. People have perceived it as a state-of-the-art fitness facility from the beginning. Now that it has stepped up to help with the pandemic, people understand it to be the Salvation Army.

Until Idaho's shelter-in-place

orders began to relax in mid-May, the Kroc Center was closed as a fitness facility.

The ministry staff, of which Wade is a member, the emergency management team, the advisory board and about 90 staff have participated in the effort to help the Coeur d'Alene community. In the emergency management team, he operates as the spiritual care officer.

The catalysts for the outreach efforts are Majors Don and Ronda Gilger, he said. The Gilgers are the senior pastors of the Kroc Church and executive directors

of the Kroc Center.

As soon as the community began to set emergency operations in place, the Kroc team reached out to other local agencies and coalitions.

They forged partnerships with Coeur d'Alene Backpack, Community Action Partnership and the Post Falls Food Bank. They loaned staff to the Panhandle Health District Emergency Call Center, both the Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls Food Banks and the Emergency Operations Command (EOC) of the Sheriff's office. They joined the Homeless Coalition.

The Kroc Center building warehoused EOC supplies. Staff made cloth masks.

The center participated in the Kootenai United Food Drive at the Silver Lake Mall, providing 500 100-pound or smaller boxes of food. They provided personal protective equipment (PPEs) and hand sanitizer, made dinners for volunteers, and provided hygiene kits for homeless people.

Staff volunteered to make food

Continued on page 3

Agencies partner in COVID to serve women and children

Serving the community in a pandemic has brought creativity and partnership among Vanessa Behan, YWCA Spokane, and Women & Children's Free Restaurant (WCFR).

The nonprofits teamed up to support women, children and families experiencing poverty, food insecurity, family violence and trauma.

They are providing food, care and outreach with a grant from the COVID-19 Community Response and Recovery Fund of the Innovia Foundation and with other donations from the community.

The Women & Children's Free Restaurant provides meals to Vanessa Behan and YWCA Spokane Safe Shelter residents. Vanessa Behan and YWCA refer clients to food services at WCFR, which provides information on resources available to families in crisis through YWCA and Vanessa Behan through pocket guides with lunches and other food distribution.

"Women, children and families in our community are facing stresses compounded in a health emergency that isolates them from their usual support systems," said Regina Malveaux, YWCA Spokane CEO. "Working together, we are multiplying our effectiveness."

"For us, the gift of food brings comfort and support," said Lisa Diffley, WCFR executive director. "Always we use food to feed and lift up those in need, but through this partnership we also provide them clear pathways to seek other help."

"Children in family violence situations are often the silent victims," said Amy Knapton Vega, executive director of Vanessa Behan. "WCFR and YWCA Spokane help us touch families we ordinarily wouldn't have reached."

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Fairmount Memorial director is concerned that limits delay grief process

David Ittner, CEO of Fairmount Memorial Association, oversees 330 acres of cemeteries including Fairmount, Greenwood, Woodlawn, Riverside, Pines, Pines South and Spokane Memorial Gardens, plus the Heritage Funeral Home. The association also owns Pacific Northwest Cremation.



David Ittner

The cemeteries are also sites of events. Greenwood's Easter Sunrise Service was cancelled but they recorded the message for social media. Fairmount, Greenwood and Riverside hold Memorial Day activities that have included a car show, concerts and a walk through flag-lined roads. This year, those events were cancelled and American Legion Riders led a caravan of cars through the flag-lined roads.

David said Fairmount Memorial Association has handled the majority of the more than 30 COVID-19 deaths in Spokane County, with both cremations and burials.

"We learned early that the risk of staff getting infected by working with people who died of COVID-19 was low, but our

staff use PPE, such as face masks and gloves," he said. "Aware of the danger of the virus, they have been cautious."

When a family loses a loved one, it is often the worst day of their lives, but now there is added stress with the pandemic meaning services are limited to immediate family, limiting their ability to celebrate the loved one's life and

say goodbye, he said.

"People are unable to begin the grieving process the way they want or need to," he said. "Our task within restrictions is to provide the family a meaningful experience, learning about them by meeting on Zoom, a video conference or phone.

David has learned two things: 1) It is important to have a service to celebrate a person's life, and not doing that short changes families and impedes their grieving process. 2) The number of deaths because of COVID-19 has brought to mind the need for people to discuss their mortality, so Fairmount has had more people call or come to do pre-planning to save family members from making decisions after a death.

David said that over the last 30 years, more people choose cremation. While nationally 50 to 55 percent choose it, in Washington, more than 75 percent choose it.

"There seems to be a correlation between choosing cremation and the decline in religious affiliation. Some choose it because they want simplicity and want to save costs," he said.

"People shy away from conversing about mortality, and discussing burial or cremation, so more choose cremation because they perceive it as easy and quick. Many of them are less likely to have a service," he said.

Cremation still involves choices of how to memorialize a person. Some keep an urn of ashes, some bury the urn or put it in a niche at the cemetery.

David's path to the funeral industry was through landscaping. After earning a degree at Washington State University in crop science and turf management, he was assistant grounds superintendent at the Spokane Country Club. Then he was offered the opportunity to be grounds superintendent at Fairmount in 2003 and transitioned through different roles to become CEO, learning in the process what it takes to run a nonprofit cemetery that is like "a little city" with roads, grounds, monuments and buildings

to maintain.

With COVID-19, most services are at the gravesides, so David said it is particularly important to provide a nicely landscaped setting.

Fairmount is also using a service called One Room that allows it to livestream services for those who cannot come.

Because of his faith as a Christian, David said he believes it is important to create a good working environment for his staff.

"If our employees are thriving, their natural empathy and abilities will shine through, and they will take better care of the people we serve," he said.

"From diving into God's Word, I believe our role is to serve others, love others and put others' interests before our own, along with loving God with all our heart," he said.

For information, call 326-6813 or email dittner@fairmountmemorial.com.

Hennessey supports families after services

Melissa Johnson, managing partner of Hennessey Funeral Home and Crematory at 2203 N. Division, said the funeral home has a chapel, viewing room and reception hall. Each could potentially hold 10 people, six feet apart, but most services have just used one room for family.

The extra space helped when the mother of 10 children, with numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren died recently. The family decided that just the children and her 93-year-old husband—who drove with a son from Minnesota—would be at the service. They just used two rooms.

For those who cannot attend, they are livestreaming services. In phase three, she said, 50 would be allowed to gather for services.

Melissa said Hennessey has served families of three confirmed COVID-19 cases and some suspected ones.

The bodies of COVID-19 patients are double bagged in plastic and come with guidance not to open the bags. Two cases were direct cremation with no viewing and one was a direct burial.

"We can prepare someone who has died of COVID-19 if family wants to view the body because they could not visit in the hospital and they want to say goodbye," said Melissa. "Though embalming is not required by law, Center for



Melissa Johnson

Disease Control (CDC) guidelines indicate embalming is highly suggested for COVID-19 cases."

Using a photograph, she has embalmed bodies of people who died traumatically or in accidents if the family wants the comfort of seeing the body restored.

Melissa earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and forensics at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minn. She worked for coroners there and in Phoenix, going to death and accident scenes, taking the decedent to the morgue and determining what took place.

In 2010, she earned an associ-

ate degree at Mesa Community College in mortuary science. She started with Dignity Memorial there and moved to Seattle for seven years, earning a master's degree in forensic science.

She learned that Hennessey, a full-service funeral home with the legacy of four generations of the Hennessey family, was seeking a partner, so she sought to fulfill that position a year ago.

Melissa said Hennessey's serves families beyond the funeral services.

"We connect with and support families after the phone calls end and neighbors stop bringing meals. We also help families understand the jargon on a death certificate," said Melissa.

"The best part of the job is serving families," she said. "I learn through the families I serve."

Melissa, who grew up as a Missouri Synod Lutheran and attended a Methodist college, appreciates how families find comfort in their faith—be they Catholic, Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness or Baha'i.

For information, call 328-2600 or email melissa.johnson@hennesseyfuneralhomes.com.

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Despite numbing quantity of tragedies, may we still be outraged and act

Even the addition of a “cares” emoji, the options of like, love, surprise, sad and anger emojis in response to Facebook postings are inadequate. I would prefer a thumbs down option, along with outrage, along with let’s act. I found a thumbs down emoji and a letter writing one, but they still seem inadequate.

Outrage is more than anger that goes nowhere or breaks into violence. It calls for speaking out and doing something in the tradition of nonviolent persistence, not just be a bystander expressing opinions with emojis.

The reports of George Floyd’s suffocation as a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into George’s neck stir outrage a social media response cannot contain. People went to the streets protesting in that city.

Someone juxtaposed the photo of the officer’s knee on the African American’s neck beside the image of football quarterback Colin Kaepernick dropping to a knee during the national anthem to challenge the country to recognize that Black Lives Mat-

ter. It poignantly answered why he did that.

On top of that is the disproportionately high incidence of and deaths from COVID-19 among the Navajo nation, other native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic farm and food workers in Yakima. Through Refugee Connections, we learned that 74 or 2.7 percent of Spokane’s 3,000 Marshall Islanders tested positive, in contrast to about 500 of 500,000 in the region.

Nationally, we passed 100,000 deaths. To move beyond the numbness from mounting statistics, media at least are telling stories of individuals who have died.

Behind the scenes of pandemic news, the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, other environmental regulations and nuclear treaties are falling by the wayside. More national lands are being gobbled up by fossil fuel interests and billions more dollars subsidize them. It’s heartening that faith communities are not deterred from their witness and are divesting their portfolios

from fossil fuel industries and investing in sustainable energy.

As media chase, lap up and analyze every presidential tweet, it’s important to offer a reminder of equal time as the campaign season begins and to identify how media play into propaganda as they repeat the photo, name and words of one person, rarely noting any other candidates, for *any* other office.

The reality, as many are saying, is that we do not need to return to what was normal before COVID-19 or three years ago. We need a new normal.

COVID-19 exacerbates the racial, gender and economic divides. With losing jobs, people are losing their health insurance, revealing the folly of the employer-based health insurance system. When one loses a job, one loses health insurance coverage.

So many issues are cycling around in the midst of the loss of so many lives from the disease and from racial discrimination.

What are you doing? What is your faith

community doing beyond being caught up in whether to worship in person, when and how? How are our faiths dismantling racism?

We must join efforts of the NAACP Spokane, Spokane County Human Rights Task Force, Kootenai County Task Force on Human Rights, Spokane Coalition of Color, Spokane Coalition Against Racism, Carl Maxey Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, and other groups educating and advocating to end racism. It’s time to join, support and act.

Let’s not let the number of 100,000 deaths, which will continue to mount, numb us from caring and acting, or blind us to the obvious inequities.

Let this be a summer of action—even if by virtual meetings and protests, letter writing, emails and phone calls. Our faith calls us to care for people’s lives and social justice. May we persevere through numbing clouds of disaster and death to connect, care and act.

Mary Stamp - Editor

Faith Leaders group hears health perspectives of effects of COVID-19

In late March, the Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience of Eastern Washington and North Idaho (FLLC) saw a need to speak truthfully about the pandemic with facts and a commitment to “love our neighbors as ourselves.”

In April, Bob Lutz, M.D., Spokane Regional Health District Health Officer, spoke at the FLLC Truthful Tuesday Vigil on these challenging times, lifting up how the pandemic is impacting everyone but doing it disproportionately.

“The full extent of the impact on our marginalized communities is still being revealed,” he said.

He urged people to come together with wisdom and compassion.

“We are more the same than different,” he said, pointing to the need to recognize people’s common humanity.

In April, Mayor Ben Wick from the City of Spokane Valley reported on the daily connections between city and county elected officials as they work together to create solutions they can offer in one voice. At 10 a.m. each day, they have virtual con-

ferences open to the public. He said the city is helping its hungry and small businesses.

At the May Truthful Tuesday Vigil, participants learned about COVID-19 from Luis Manriquez, M.D., of Washington State University Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine and the new street medicine team working with Spokane’s homeless population. He said the pandemic spread in Washington has been less destructive than it could have been because of the Stay Home, Stay Healthy directives.

Because there is no medical intervention to stop this disease, when people are ill, health care can only support them as they go through the experience, he commented.

“While it looks like people are exhausted with things happening, or not happening,” he said, “we need to remember that the lack of cases is because we took action.

“The virus is active in Washington State even when no one sees it happening,” he said, reporting that in Wenatchee, 72 orchard workers were tested and half had coronavirus despite showing no symptoms.

Luis encouraged two actions: 1) Ev-

eryone must help each other stay safe by using good hygiene practices to slow the spread. 2) People need to be prepared for the increase of homelessness and hunger.

“Much of the fallout will not be medical, but social,” he said.

He challenged people to consider what kind of world they want to live in after this experience and to work for the world they would like to see come from this.

“We are all in the same storm but not all in the same boat,” he added.

While not a sailor, he said the maritime duty for any sailor is to come to the aid to others in need. Those at sea recognize that people need each other to get through.

“Whatever resources and privileges we have, it is incumbent upon us to help others,” he said.

On testing and antibodies, Luis said that more testing will be needed, as case identification will be the main tool to slow the spread of infection. Antibody testing continues to develop. Many tests are not reliable. It is not yet proven that antibodies give immunity and to what level that

immunity will protect people.

Members of the Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience shared words of encouragement at recent Truthful Tuesday Vigils.

In a message from the Jewish community and from her experience as a physician, Pam Silverstein called on everyone to act for the good of all.

Naghmana Ahmed-Sherazi spoke of the Muslim teachings to care for each person’s wellbeing.

Joan Berkowitz shared a poem from the Jewish community, and Lani Delong brought encouragement from the atheist point of view, including that the wearing of a mask is an act of compassion for others.

The next Truthful Tuesday at 5 p.m., June 9, is on gun safety, because June is the second annual observance of National Gun Violence Awareness Month. It will be on the Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience Facebook page. Speakers are Rosie Zhou of Students Demand Action and Laurie Dwyer of Moms Demand Action.

**Gen Heywood
Guest Editorial**

Faith Leaders

Sounding Board

Discuss Options

Faith communities and their leaders have spent much time in recent months first deciding not to gather for worship in their buildings, “not out of fear, but out of our deepest respect for life and health,” as the Catholic bishops of Washington said in a recent statement.

Leaders and pastors also spent time developing alternative means of gathering through live streaming and Zoom. They have not only used those tools to gather for worship, but also to gather for meetings, workshops, Bible study, prayer groups, social gatherings and even, in the case of the Pacific Northwest United Church of Christ, to gather for its Annual Meeting worship and each week to share reports of leaders and ministries.

The Inland Northwest Presbytery announced that its office will now be a virtual office, something that was projected for the future but became reality in recent months.

“As COVID-19 emerged and ‘stay at home’ orders were announced in March 2020, the presbytery office closed and staff members began working remotely. This pandemic time has given us a test run at working as a virtual office. With this unplanned launch into working virtually, we’ve expedited our plan to make the office a virtual office,” said the Rev. Sheryl Kinder-Pyle, Presbytery executive minister. “Committee meetings will continue on Zoom for the time being, but eventually will be at church buildings.”

The Catholic bishops also wrote: “As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be instruments of God’s protection for the vulnerable and the public common good. Our love of God and neighbor is always personal. While we share the desire to bring people back to Mass as quickly as possible, we will wait to schedule our public worship when it is safe and we are prepared to do so,” they said, also reporting that they were engaging with the Governor’s office on a plan and schedule for safe gathering.”

They were consulting with Governor Jay Inslee along with leaders of other denominations and faiths.

On May 27, the Governor announced plans to revise limits on the size of gatherings for religious services indoors. For Phase 2, which includes Spokane and most of Eastern Washington, faith groups may hold indoor services with 50 or fewer people or 25 percent of the building’s capacity, whichever is less, and as many as five people for in-home services. Rules apply to study groups, weddings and funerals. There is no limit to the number of services that can be held in a day.

Staff must have personal protective equipment. Employees must be trained to self-screen for symptoms. Facilities must be cleaned and disinfected. Participants must follow social distancing and wear masks, even when singing. There is to be no sharing of food, beverages or hymnals. Congregations are to log attendance for

contact tracing if needed.

In parts of the state in Phase 1, there can be outdoor services for up to 100 on the faith’s property.

The guidelines encourage remote services to continue for people in high risk groups and preferring not to go out.

With the Governor’s announcement, Bishop Thomas Daly of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane said Spokane parishes could offer Mass beginning Pentecost weekend May 30.

He said: Face masks will be worn. There will be no singing. Homilies will be short. There will be no exchanging of a “sign of peace.” Parishes will keep a log of those who attend. There is a suspension of the obligation to attend Mass for anyone who is ill or anxious about attending.

In the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, several congregations in Washington and Idaho had submitted plans for moving toward coming together for public worship and Bishop Gretchen Rehberg had emphasized several points in her notices to the congregations.

The Governor’s announcement came earlier than she expected. In communications with congregations she said that for her to approve plans, they must follow state and local restrictions about the number who can gather, and approval of a plan does not mean a congregation should “immediately start together.”

In late May, Bishop Elaine Stanovsky

of the Greater Northwest Area of the United Methodist Church—including, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Alaska and parts of Montana and Canada—had issued a notice extending in-person worship suspension and building closures to all but essential services through June 15.

“This early in the phased reopening process, data on the spread of the virus is inconsistent and inconclusive. This date allows two more 14-day periods during which to assess whether COVID-19 cases are declining or increasing. Our churches will be on the leading edge of protecting public health, but not be on the leading edge of reopening at the risk of increasing exposures, infections and deaths,” she said.

The Rev. Mike Denton, conference minister of the Pacific Northwest United Church of Christ, suggested not gathering until a congregation has a plan to follow the mandates and guidelines, until staff is ready, until they have a plan for those who cannot attend and until they are ready to accept potential risks of gathering in the midst of a pandemic.

Bishop Kristen Kuempel of the Northwest Intermountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America posted recently on Facebook: “Gathering for in-person worship is still high-risk. We never closed. We’re still here. Let’s make good choices to stay that way.”

The decisions are still in flux for each faith community and congregation.

PJALS plans youth art show and more

The Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane's Young Activist Leaders Program (YALP) participants had planned Arts in Action for the spring.

With the COVID-19, the vision for a large in-person exhibition of video, performance, visual art and writing was displaced by plans to have a Virtual Gallery. It will open with a reception that is part of First Friday on June 5.

The event includes a show that grew out of a series of Wednesday workshops in May to inspire youth to create and express their

ideas in new ways.

Every week through the summer, YALP will meet virtually from 4 to 5:30 p.m., Tuesdays, to build activist skills through workshops, projects and speakers. For information, visit pjals.org/yalp.

The Peace & Justice Action Committee plans to meet from 5:30 to 7 p.m., Thursdays, June 4, July 2, Aug. 6 and Sept. 3 through videoconferencing.

Showing up for Racial Justice will meet for a book study at 5:30 p.m., Thursdays, June 11 and 25, July 9 and 23, Aug. 13 and 27, on

videoconferencing.

PJALS is also holding Webinar Wednesdays to accomplish some goals of its cancelled spring Peace and Justice Action Conference. Sessions will help participants deepen analysis, share skills, sharpen skills, improve strategies and strengthen relationships, said co-director Liz Moore.

They have included sessions on bystander training on anti-Asian racism and white supremacist efforts to influence youth online.

For information, call 838-7870 or visit pjals.org.

Unity in the Community will be Aug. 15

Unity in the Community is planning to hold the 26th annual multi-cultural celebration from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 15, at Riverfront Park.

Co-organizers April Anderson and Mareesa Henderson say it's a time to celebrate the joy of similarities and differences that make people stronger and build community.

The event includes a Career,

Education and Health Fair, a Cultural Village, a Senior Resource area, live entertainment, free K-8 school supplies, free bike helmets and other activities.

Unity in the Community began in 1994 as an event of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to break down racial and cultural barriers. In 2004, AHANA (African American, Hispanic and Native American Association)

continued it. In 2007, it was to Riverfront Park, where vendors included nonprofit organizations and others sharing information on their programs and services.

Believing that racial or cultural bigotry is about ignorance, April and Mareesa work to educate people about the diverse cultures in Spokane.

For information, email nwunity@icloud.com

Three nonprofits collaborate to serve

Continued from page 1

These leaders decided to partner when Innovia announced funding to increase service for those impacted by the COVID-19 emergency and by needs in the community.

WCFR provides free meals and groceries to nearly 400 families a week, and meals to 19 homeless shelters and care centers. Its weekly meal count exceeds 23,000, an increase of 20,000 meals since mid-March.

The YWCA shelter for domestic violence victims is full with some in overflow space at local hotels.

Vanessa Behan adapted their new space to serve more school-aged children and increased capacity, acknowledging that stressful times create increased family violence.

Because of the pandemic, more victims of domestic violence and their children are isolated at home with their abusers. The stress of the pandemic, with financial challenges, job losses and school closures, adds to an already dangerous environment, said Amy.

Local law enforcement officials report they have not seen an increase in domestic violence, but they worry that the "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order has increased incidents and suppressed victims from reporting them, she said.

For children, Vanessa Behan provides unconditional love and attention from adults who hope to create lifetime memories of security. For parents overwhelmed and lacking support, it eliminates burdens, she said.

For information, call at 535-3155 or visit at www.vanessabehan.org.

For 117 years, YWCA Spokane has helped women and children overcome social, economic and personal barriers to accomplish goals and achieve healthier, more fulfilling lives. Today it supports victims of intimate partner domestic violence (DV), builds economic empowerment, promotes early childhood education, and confronts racial and social justice issues that negatively impact clients and the community, said Regina.

"We envision a community in which DV is no longer tolerated. We embrace this vision through our wrap-around services: our

24-hour Helpline, safe shelter, counseling center, mental health services, housing advocacy, child advocacy, civil legal assistance, legal advocacy, economic empowerment advocacy and free drop-in childcare," she said. "In 2018, we impacted more than 16,000 survivors and their children. By working at the intersections of inequality, poverty and DV, we help disrupt longstanding societal patterns of trauma.

For information, call 789-9303 or visit ywcaspokane.org.

"Women & Children's Free Restaurant & Community Kitchen has been a vital safety net for women and children since 1988, said Lisa.

It fills nutritional gaps while fostering dignity and respect, both in its restaurant and through partnerships with women and children focused nonprofits throughout Spokane, she said.

For information, call 340-0477 or visit www.wcferspokane.org.

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Virtual conversation explores impact of pandemic on people of color

Roberta and James Wilburn hosted a virtual “Courageous Conversation” Memorial Day weekend, drawing more than 30 to a conversation on “The Impact of COVID-19 on Black and Hispanic Communities.”



Vivianne Griffiths, Vicki Martin, Walter Kendricks and the Wilburns.

Vivianne Griffiths, an adult nurse practitioner from Louisville, Ky., and Vicki Hines Martin, a psychiatric nursing professor and assistant dean at the University of Louisville, joined Walter Kendricks, a member of the Washington Commission on African American Affairs and pastor of Morning Star Baptist Church in Spokane, along with Roberta and James, co-founders of Wilburn and Associates.

Panelists told of the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on communities of color, and looked at health and safety issues that mean more risk in their communities.

Vivianne quoted journalist Zeeshan Aleem, who said “Coronavirus isn’t an equalizer but a magnifier of inequality.” Vivianne also quoted Center for Disease Control (CDC) data: Blacks are 30 percent of COVID-19 patients, but 14 percent of the U.S. population. They are six percent of Wisconsin’s population but are 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths there. They are 33 percent of Los Angeles’ population but 57 percent of deaths.

The reason for racial disparities in health care for minority populations is that African Americans with co-morbidities have an increased risk for death from coronavirus. For example, those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, vitamin D

deficiency and other diseases are more at risk, as are older people, she said.

Vicki said that “the history of health disparities among ethnic groups has more influence on the risk than individual behaviors.”

She spoke about “social determinants of health,” or conditions in which “people are born, grow, live, work and age.”

Those factors include economic stability in terms of employment, income and debt; the neighborhood and physical environment in terms of housing, transportation, safety, parks and zip code; education in terms of literacy, early childhood education, vocational training and higher education; food in terms of hunger and access; community and social context in terms of social integration, community engagement and discrimination, and the health system and care in terms of quality, insurance coverage, provider availability and provider linguistic and cultural awareness.

In the pandemic, more minorities are in essential services but earn lower income and cannot work from home, putting them more at risk, Vicki said, so they struggle to meet household needs,

rely on public transportation and lack access to quality health care.

Those factors make them more vulnerable, according to the CDC vulnerability index which identifies stresses and resilience that have impact on health outcomes.

Sheltering in place does not help for people living on the streets, in prisons or in long-term care facilities, she said.

Vivianne then suggested that African-American and Hispanic people can help to mitigate the rate of infections by reporting symptoms early to ensure access to care, by using protocols for cleanliness like 20-second hand-washing, by testing those without symptoms, by contact tracing for those testing positive and by social distancing.

Walter said the Spokane Ministers Fellowship received a \$15,000 Innovia grant, which he, as its president, has shared for African American pastors to give to members in need, because they know the needs.

“The crisis and virus show the inequities of the systems and systemic racism,” he said.

“From the time we were in slavery through after we were freed, the country has been built

on our sweat and labor, but since slaves were freed in 1863, we had no health care or social safety net.

“I don’t want to return to what was normal in January. The capitalistic economic system does not support us. We need something better,” he said.

“Because of the high rates of poverty and incarceration, there are more cases, and many are not even counted,” Walter said, urging efforts to awaken people to deal with systemic inequities.

Walter added that many people of color are on the front lines, working in grocery stores and as essential workers tending to the needs of other people.

He mentioned recent articles that have stirred his thinking about being in a “slaveholders’ republic,” about how much a human life is worth, about how many will die to reopen the economy and about living in a failed state.

“With COVID-19, we need to ask who and what we are. I do not want to go back to the normal we had, because everyone should have health care and enough food. As the richest country, we can do better,” he said.

Walter urges the state commissions on African-American and on Hispanic affairs to work together.

“There is strength in numbers. We are better together than when we stand alone,” he said. “We need to be in love with justice.”

He knows finding funding may be hard with the state losing funds, but people of color need to work together so their voices are heard.

“We have bailed out corporations to the tune of billions of

dollars. It’s time to assist American citizens,” Walter said. “There should be funds to help people.”

He called for “sticking together, calling an elder neighbor, sharing what we have and caring for one another.”

James considered the statistics, citing that more than 20,000 of the nearly 100,000 deaths from the pandemic are African Americans.

“How much is a life worth? When we open the country, some will die. That’s the price of the economy,” he said. “We need to inform our community that this is killing us. Going back to work for many is a death sentence, and people of color are often the ones on the front line.”

James reviewed history of how “our ancestors died to make change.” He spoke of the high mortality on the Navajo reservation, one of the highest mortality rates in the world. He spoke of the dilemma of African Americans who are unemployed and must go back to work.

Vivianne suggested that people have their doctors write letters to employers about their medical conditions that put them at risk, so they can continue to receive unemployment.

Roberta added that “it’s time to come together and think of the bigger picture.”

She hoped the conversation makes participants more informed so they are better able speak to the issues.

For information, call 542-7636, email wilburnassociatesllc@gmail.com or visit wilburnassociates.org.

Latino Civic Alliance calls for faith and other organizations to protect strikers

The Latino Civic Alliance (LCA) calls faith, nonprofit and justice organizations and tribes to support agricultural workers on strike in Yakima fruit warehouses.

The Faith Action Network (FAN) and Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) are among the organizations joining together to urge the Governor and State Legislature to protect workers by enforcing compliance with workplace standards and establishing protocols.

“As the pandemic spread in the ag industry, workers became sick or died, putting the food supply in danger,” said Nina Martinez of the LCA board. “In Washington, where 90 percent of the agricultural workforce is Latino, data shows COVID-19 spreading at an alarming rate among them.

“The food industry has a responsibility to produce safe food in a safe workplace, and the government is responsible for setting safety standards, conduct-

ing inspections and ensuring that standards are met,” Nina said.

“Food and ag workers are deemed essential, critical to the U.S. infrastructure, but have been excluded from benefits,” she said. “Washington has one of the largest agriculture economies in the nation and ag workers contribute to local economies, but live below poverty levels, lack health benefits, sick leave and decent wages.”

Agricultural workers have an average life expectancy of 49 years because of the working conditions in diverse jobs in fields, warehouses, orchards, farms, and meat processing plants.

On May 21, the alliance appealed for people and organizations to stand with agriculture workers so they have protections needed during the pandemic and beyond. Before COVID-19, farmworkers were vulnerable to illness from pesticides and poor working conditions, she said. The risk to the workers will continue into

November. The LCA has a toolkit for congregations.

On May 29, the Rev. Connie Yost of the Farm Worker Ministry Northwest announced that four of the fruit packing companies in the

Yakima strike have settled with their workers. Three others were still in talks.

Connie said the ministry has sought to “give these essential workers essential pay, essential

safety, and essential dignity and justice.”

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