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**The Fig Tree**  
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 thefigtree@qwest.net(509) 535-1813  
*Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest  
 online in color at [www.thefigtree.org](http://www.thefigtree.org)*

# Human rights integrate into lives

**By Mary Stamp**

In a historic brick building beside Coeur d'Alene's city park, exhibits, programs and people energize area children, students, businesses, residents and visitors to integrate awareness of human rights into their lives.

Commitment to human rights education and action has taken root in the region through the Human Rights Education Institute (HREI) as the area experiences incidents from a few white supremacists.

While some HREI founders envisioned expanding facilities, emphasis is on changing hearts and minds through education.

As Rachel Dolezal, curator and director of education, develops education programs, writes curricula, creates artistic exhibits and networks with the community, Donna Cork serves as director of operations.

When former director Bob Bennett left in 2008, HREI's board of directors decided to divide the management between Rachel and Donna, combining Donna's administration and business skills with Rachel's experience in leadership, activism and education.

Despite media "sensationalizing the negative," Donna finds North



Rachel Dolezal stands beside portrait she painted of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Idahoans more interested in listening and learning than in hating.

"What we have done and are doing is a model for communities facing and challenging bigotry," she said. "It is a model of what can happen when a community comes together and says 'no' to hate."

While some people focus on negative aspects of struggles, she calls for celebrating the area's growing diversity and commitment to human rights.

The HREI's education mission takes place through programs held throughout the region and exhibits in a large hall, a small exhibit area and a media/classroom.

For the current exhibit, "Water, Sex, China," three films present the impact of droughts, floods, global warming, erosion, deforestation and limited resources.

The exhibit's installations—"100 cans of Coca Cola," "Green Grass," "The Closet," "Dry Penny Pool" and "Fountain"—examine different aspects of human rights related to water usage and limited resources; population increase and gender issues, and Chinese culture and policies.

This is the second of four exhibits of "Fast Forward: Globalization

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*Food and Faith Forum - More at [www.thefigtree.org](http://www.thefigtree.org)*

## Family and church model sustainable options

The Rev. Craig Goodwin of Millwood Community Presbyterian Church readily describes his family's 2008 commitment to "eat local" and his church's commitment to host a farmers' market in their parking lot.

Speaking at the Food and Faith Forum offered in November by the Faith and Environment Network of the Inland Northwest, he shared what he has learned about consumption and farmers' markets as his family and church began connecting faith and food.

Reports on decisions he and his wife Nancy, who is also a pastor at Millwood, and their children Lily, 7, and Noel, 10, made are included in his blog, "Year of Plenty."

Five years ago, they moved to Spokane from Houston and bought a house with a vegetable garden, harvesting pumpkins, beans and tomatoes the first year.

"I had never planted a seed before, but we enjoyed the garden. We have expanded it each year and built a greenhouse," he said.

Their children's friends like to congregate at their house, going into the garden to feast on fresh carrots, beans and tomatoes.

Craig said a men's Bible study on James 5 about hoarding wealth, living in luxury and being self indulgent stirred him to ask who, in the web of consumption, the are rich ones who "oppress the harvesters and fatten themselves?"

"It weighed on me," he said.

Three years ago, the Millwood church and community started a farmers' market after the North Spokane Farmers' Market temporarily relocated in Millwood Park. Some in the neighborhood became interested in having a Wednesday farmers' market, so Craig suggested the church offer its parking lot.

"Something prophetic happened the first day. David McCullough of Suzie's and Dave's Beef told someone that he could do something Costco couldn't do. He could name the grandmother of the cow whose meat he was selling," Craig said.

Seeing a farmers' market as an alternative to the disconnection

*Continued on page 3*

## NAACP banquet looked like founders intended

Celebrating that the racial diversity of people at Spokane's recent 2009 Freedom Fund Banquet reflected the vision of the multi-racial founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Hon. John Charles Thomas said in his speech that he felt he was looking at "the ideal of the NAACP: black and white together."

Thomas, who was the first African American and the youngest person to serve on Virginia's Supreme Court, said that "in 1909, the founders understood it would take efforts of everyone, black and white, for Americans to live the idea of equality and justice for all."

Realizing how easy it is "for those who live in 21st century America to forget how hard it was to create the America we live in today," he asked the audience to travel with him on a journey through history. He then recounted the legacy of slavery, hate, lynching, killings, injustices and indignities that gave rise to the organization 100 years ago.

He told of the first boat load of Africans who arrived in chains in Virginia in 1619 and how nearly 12 million Africans died during the "middle passage," crossing the ocean as part of the slave trade. That trade broke "up family ties, severed cultural connections, and mutilated the bodies and spirits of slaves," he said.

"In the midst of this suffering arose the slaves' desire to be free," he said. "In their quest to be free, they understood the need for education. So they would go out and sit under burlap to learn to read by the dim light of a camp fire, almost choking on the smoke."

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**China Protestant group meets Taiwanese Evangelicals**

Hong Kong (ENI). National leaders of mainland China's officially-sanctioned Protestant church grouping have made their first visit to the National Council of Churches in Taiwan, while a delegation from the World Evangelical Alliance has travelled to Chinese cities to meet Protestant Christians.

**Student activists promote equality of women at UN**

Geneva (ENI). In the continuing quest for gender equality in the world, a group of young women has been working at the United Nations to expand the message that theology that emphasizes equality is essential to progress.

**Walter Altmann says liberation theology is alive and well**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, 20 years ago, critics have been quick to sign liberation theology's death certificate, connecting it to bygone Soviet-style socialism. This conclusion is false, said the Rev. Walter Altmann, president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil and moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee.

"The core of liberation theology has been the compassionate identification with the poor and their struggle for justice, inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus," he said. "From the outset, liberation theology emphasized the crucial role of God's people, of Christian communities' action inspired by faith and informed by theological reflection.

"If we look at our reality today, we are reminded that poverty has not been overcome in the world," he said. "The recent international financial crisis from unrestrained capitalist forces governed by greed, and private, corporate interests, has increased the number of the poor in the world by hundreds of millions."

**Berlin Wall influenced the ecumenical movement**

Former World Council of Churches General Secretary Konrad Raiser said the opening or fall of the Berlin Wall was unexpected for the people most directly affected and for the world at large.

For four decades after the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948, ecumenical efforts for justice and peace were conditioned by the antagonism of the two major power-blocks and had consequences for countries in the southern hemisphere.

The 1990 Paris Charter for a "new Europe" appeared to herald a new world order of peace and justice and a process of genuine disarmament. Konrad, a Lutheran theologian from Germany, said the transformations in Europe and other parts of the world came so suddenly that neither governments nor the churches were prepared. Liberated from reacting to ideological and political constraints, they had to find a new identity.

After the wall opened, the second Gulf war in 1991, conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the progression of globalization presented the ecumenical witness for justice and peace with new challenges, he said. The fragile order of "cold war" years was replaced by a new "world disorder," Konrad said.

Because churches contributed to the peaceful revolution in Central and Eastern Europe and to ending of the apartheid regime in Southern Africa, "the ecumenical movement accepted the challenge to overcome violence and launched the Decade to Overcome Violence in 2001 in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

**WCC general secretary speaks on lessons from the wall**

"Christian hope and perseverance contributed significantly to the fall of the Berlin Wall," said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary the Rev. Samuel Kobia, commenting on the 20th anniversary of the event ending the "cold war era." He said people who "gathered in churches became the nucleus for the movement of change, teaching us that Christian faith can inspire a resistance movement against fatalism and despair—a lesson which is as important today as it was 20 years ago."

**REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS**

**Agencies partner to educate on advocacy**

The Washington Association (WAC), the Lutheran Public Policy Office (LPPO), Catholic Charities Spokane and The Fig Tree are organizing the 2010 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference to educate on advocacy by the faith community.

For the 2010 conference on "Faith and the Public Forum" will be held from 12:30 to 5 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 30, at the Cathedral

of St. John, 127 E. 12th Ave.

Bishop Martin Wells of the Eastern Washington Idaho Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will discuss why people of faith are involved.

There will be a presentation on "How Advocacy Has Changed," and a panel of political leaders, government officials, religious advocates and nonprofit advocates discussing "How to Engage

Change at the Local Level?"

Paul Benz of the LPPO, Alice Woldt of the WAC and Donna Christensen of the Washington State Catholic Conference will present briefings issues before the 2010 State Legislature.

Additional presentations will look at the impact of policies on people related to prisons, police, health care and immigration.

For information, call 535-1813.

**One-Day Count of Homeless seeks volunteers**

The fifth annual One Day Count of Homeless Persons in Spokane will be held Thursday, Jan. 28.

From Jan. 24 to 30, volunteers are needed to help collect and compile information to guide decisions on services, said Dan Ruddell of the City of Spokane.

The 2010 count will help the region's agencies draw funds to respond to homelessness.

Count stations will be set up at sites around the city and county, such as the House of Charity, Women's Hearth, community centers, Department of Social and

Health Services offices and local libraries.

People who are "doubling up," staying with family and friends are considered homeless and are asked to participate to make the count more accurate, said Dan.

For information, call 625-6056.

**Gonzaga class seeks to end sex trafficking**

Gonzaga University political science students in associate professor Laura Brunell's "Women in Comparative Societies" class are selling bracelets and collecting donations for a service-learning project to help stop sex trafficking in Southeast Asia.

When the class recently showed the film, "Not for Sale," at the Gonzaga Law School, the students set up an interactive pass-

port installation in the foyer.

Participants received a passport with a woman's identity and then explored "the world," going table to table to learn about the woman's status in various countries.

Sales of a \$2 bracelet with the words, "Stop Trafficking" will help rehabilitate women and girls who escape the sex-trade in Cambodia. Donations will buy goods made by women entrepreneurs

and artists through GlobalGirlfriend.com to help them support themselves and their children.

Jewelry purchased was given to the women at Women's Hearth in Spokane, so they can have Christmas gifts for loved ones.

In 2010, students seek to form an anti-trafficking organization to draw more faculty into anti-trafficking teaching and service.

For information, call 313-6679.

**Group re-enacts IWW 1909 Free Speech Fight**

Closing a week marking the centennial of the Free Speech Fight of the International Workers of the World (IWW) in Spokane in 1909, the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) held a street theater re-enactment of the IWW speakers being arrested.

"It was one of the most significant actions of civil disobedience in American history," said Liz Moore, director of PJALS.

Dressed in a period costume to portray Lucy Parsons, an IWW organizer who was one of more than 500 speakers arrested, Liz told 80 who gathered at Stevens and Spokane Falls Blvd. that "free speech is still denied today."

She said, "free speech is a critical tool for workers or community members to organize and advocate for social change."

Twenty-one people held letters to: "Labor creates all wealth."

Local historian Malcolm Ha-

worth read from a 1909 speech before pretend cops, wearing period uniforms, took the megaphone from him in a mock arrest.

Speaking at the October Need to Know meeting at All Saints Lutheran Church, Malcolm, who has a master's degree in history, said this free speech movement counters an attitude of defeatism sometimes evident among progressives in an assumed-to-be conservative area.

He said that in 1908, 19 employment agencies on Stevens St. charged transient workers \$1 to connect them with jobs. Workers were fired after two days and forced to repeat the process. IWW organizer James Walsh came to Spokane to organize them.

The city council would not revoke the agencies' licenses and

banned the IWW from speaking in public. In response, IWW, known as the Wobblies, began a public-speaking campaign in 1909, drawing workers from around the nation for a Nov. 2 street-corner speak-out campaign.

Malcolm said "500 to 1,600 speakers were arrested. Many were beaten and injured. They overcrowded the jails and overburdened the city's infrastructure."

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), joined this fight, was arrested and reported nationally on police brutality. The publicity led Spokane to drop charges and revoke the employment agencies' licenses, Malcolm said.

For information, call 838-7870

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**Friday, Jan. 16**  
*Gospel Musical: 'How Sweet the Sound'*  
5-7 p.m. at Holy Temple Church of God in Christ - 806 W. Indiana

**Commemorative Celebration - Sunday, Jan. 17**  
*Speaker: Dr. Elson Floyd - President Washington State University*  
4-6 p.m., First Presbyterian Church - 318 S. Cedar St.

**Annual Unity March & Community Resource Fair**  
**Monday, Jan. 18**  
10 a.m., INB Performing Arts Center - 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.  
Resource Fair begins at noon, Riverpark Square - 2nd & 3rd Levels  
Children's Program at STA Plaza

**For information, call 455-8722**



## Local United Nations Association fetes human rights, mine clearing

The United Nations Association of Spokane is hosting a potluck dinner at 5 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 6, at St. Ann's Catholic Church, 2120 E. 1st Ave., combining the UNA's annual "Night of a Thousand Dinners" fund raiser for the elimination of land mines around the world and an early observance of Human Rights Day, established by the United Nations in 1948.

Participants will learn about and raise funds for Adopt-A-Minefield, an effort to engage people in clearing mine fields that maim and kill thousands of people every year. To date, the program has raised more than \$25 million to clear 1,000 mine fields and assist thousands of survivors. Globally, there are 6,000 new casualties a year, in contrast to 25,000 a

year in the 1990s before the efforts to ban land mines and clear mine fields began 10 years ago.

In addition, several middle-school students from Coeur d'Alene who participated in a Young Advocates for Human Rights last summer will come with Rachel Dolezal, curator and artistic director of the Human Rights Education Institute, to tell about their projects promoting human rights.

Kieran VonKrenner designed stainless steel water bottles to raise money to drill wells in India. Angel Gonzalez seeks to end discrimination in hiring practices in North Idaho. Holly Matz is mobilizing support for refugees in Darfur. Kyle Mason is putting books in the hands of

needy children in the region.

At their Nov. 1 meeting, United Nations Association Spokane members decided to continue their chapter after several members shared information on the work of the United Nations, founded 64 years ago.

Chuck Kirkering told on UN efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

Yvonne Lopez Morton reported on UN work for women's rights and microcredit loans that enable women to work and support their families.

Marion Moos talked on the local support for Adopt-A-Minefield since 2001.

Judy Gardner, who has promoted UNICEF, the UN's Children's Fund, said

that the card sales have been turned over to Hallmark Cards. UNICEF started in 1946 to meet emergency needs of children after World War II. It supports vaccines, education, mosquito nets and AIDS orphanages.

Sheri Barnard spoke on human rights and the importance of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Julian Powers told of UN recognition of global warming in the 1980s and creation of the UN environmental program drawing insights from 8,000 scientists.

At the November meeting, participants offered ideas for future meetings, issues and actions, said Jo Stowall, who is coordinating meetings.

For information, call 624-3608.

## Sustainable living choices become 'access point to God's kingdom'

*Continued from page 1*

of consumer life, he said, church members saw it as a ministry and a way to connect with neighbors.

"There were bumps along the road, such as recently with the Department of Revenue revoking the church's nonprofit exempt status for the property used for the market," he said. "As people have experienced the market, it has been embraced. Even the state legislature will take up a bill to allow nonprofits like churches host markets without losing their property tax exemption.

"Our congregation is a typical 80-year-old mainline church sorting out what it looks like to live into the future, engaging in issues of the environment and creation care," he said.

"We have increasingly been conversing about environment and food," he said, noting that for two years the congregation has donated funds to replant trees in rain forests in lieu of decorating the church with poinsettias at Christmas.

Visiting Seattle after Christmas in 2007, Craig's and Nancy's decision to buy one more present before driving home led them to realize most of the gifts were things their daughters would play with for a day and throw away.

After discussing how they could make a difference, they came up with four rules their family would follow for a year:

- Buy used.
- Buy local (Eastern Washington North Idaho)
- Make it.
- Grow it.

They would put their purchases through those filters, with a few exceptions. They would buy coffee and make other purchases from Thailand where Nancy had lived for a while.

They began learning where things they bought were from.



The Rev. Craig Goodwin

They found toilet paper made in Lewiston. They did field trips to find other locally produced products they used.

When one daughter wanted a piñata for her birthday, they made one.

"We loved the time we spent intentionally doing things together," Craig said.

"Our greatest conversations were about food," he said. "For example, we gave ourselves permission to take out our lawn to expand the garden and we decided to plant it as a labyrinth. While Nancy had wondered what the girls would do without a lawn, the girls spent time running around the labyrinth."

Their intentional consumption choices challenged their daily rhythms. They used one car until it was totaled.

"In six months, everything became normal," Craig said.

Reflecting on the theology of creation care, he noted that Colossians 1 speaks of Jesus being in "all things." In Greek, the passage contains no word for "things." It's just "the all"—the integrated whole world.

"The North American church needs to reweave our theology," Craig said, "so we realize that a

farmers' market is a ministry even if we do not hand out evangelical tracts.

"The farmers' market is the way half the people in the community know about the church. One woman, who told me she is an atheist, said she wanted to be in a church like this one," he said.

"Out of our experience, buying or not buying something becomes a sacred event, an access point to God's kingdom," he said.

When the Goodwins began the year, they wondered what they would eat. They went to Greenbluff and found Gary Siemer's barn full of winter squash. They learned that what they and others did not take and eat would rot.

Later at a grocery store, they found out that the winter squash came from Mexico, while 10 miles away squash was rotting in a barn and Gary finds it tough to make it as a farmer these days.

"We became advocates for local farmers," Craig said.

The Goodwins bought chickens and eggs from So Yi Deuk and Gary Angell's Rocky Ridge Farm and milk from Behm's Dairy.

"If we ate chickens, meat or eggs, we wanted them raised by sustainable practices," he said.

They bought five chickens to raise in their back yard. Craig built a chicken coop.

"We've discovered God's work

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### Fig Tree efforts draw support

The Fig Tree's Soirée Auction on Nov. 6 raised \$5,500 after expenses.

With a \$3,500 grant received in November from the Sisters of the Holy Names, \$2,000 from the Eastern Washington Idaho Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and \$1,000 from the United Church of Christ's Neighbors in Need Fund, The Fig Tree is able to take some steps to increase its coverage.

For information, call 535-1813.

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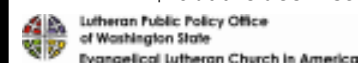
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# Children, peace, nature, water, books, health, jobs are human rights

*Continued from page 1*  
and Human Rights" in 2009 and 2010. The first, "Political Power: Who's in Control and Who Benefits?" ran January to June 2009 and featured historical propaganda posters with international flags. This one began in July and ends in December. The upcoming exhibit, "Making Change: Economic Rights in the 21st Century," runs January to June 2010. The fourth on "Solutions: Alternatives to Globalization" runs July to December 2010.

Photographs in limited-edition books preserve past exhibits:

- For the Rights of the Child in 2007, Rachel worked with elementary school children and at-risk teens from Anchor House, a local transitional home for boys, to develop images and texts for display in April, which is Child Abuse Month.

- For Peace Advocates in 2008, Rachel painted 12-foot high profile portraits of peacemakers on the walls of the exhibit hall.

- For "Living with Limits" also in 2008, Rachel and Dave Gove-dare, a Chewelah artist, designed temporary artistic creations with snow, water, twigs, moss and other elements in nature at the Cougar Bay Preserve.

K-12 education is a primary focus.

The 2009 Young Advocates for Human Rights Camps held at the institute involved 30 students in studying human rights through speakers, field trips, role play and multimedia activities. The camp has reached 70 students since 2008.

Guided by college-aged mentors, the teens developed year-long projects to implement rights they chose from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Rachel, who founded and directs this program each year, described several projects:

- Kyle Mason started a drive to collect 300 books by April 2010 to expand literacy for local children. By mid-November, he collected 517 books and distributed them through St. Vincent de Paul and women's centers.

- By selling dishtowels, Sara Kladar pays medical expenses for children in Mexico to have access to free life-saving heart surgery. To date, 13 children have had surgeries.

- Angel Gonzalez seeks to hold businesses accountable through an "Anti-Discrimination Pledge Campaign," with results at [www.idahopleadpath.yolasite.com](http://www.idahopleadpath.yolasite.com).

- Bekah Kastinig is distributing anti-racist educational materials with the slogan, "Not in my city, not in my generation, not anymore!"

Other projects include selling stainless-steel water bottles to raise funds to drill wells in India; raising money to provide goats for hungry families in Latin America; establishing more warming shelters for homeless people in Post Falls and doing a weekly classroom international briefing on human rights. Information on other projects is at [www.yahumanrights.blogspot.com](http://www.yahumanrights.blogspot.com).

"The camp is designed to have measurable results," said Rachel, who keeps in touch with the students through the year to ensure the success of their projects.

Other programs for children include receiving class field trips at the center and taking mobile pro-



Donna Cork displays three photographic books on past exhibits.

## The Human Rights Education Institute's current programs include:

### • "Fast Forward: Globalization and Human Rights"

is a two-year program with four quarters. The second-quarter exhibit now in the gallery is "Water, Sex and China: The Environment and Social Justice."

### • HREI's International Human Rights Day celebration,

"Touch of China," from 5 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 10, at its building, 414½ Mullan Ave., will offer tastes, touches, sights, sounds and feelings of China through entertainment, cuisine, art, media and interactive experiences.

### • Young Advocates for Human Rights Camps

in the summer extend year-round through projects middle-school students commit to do to further human rights.

### • On Martin Luther King Jr. Day,

fifth graders in Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls and Worley schools attend the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations' Children's Week Program at North Idaho College (NIC) to hear from individuals working in King's spirit of promoting civil rights—helping orphans in Peru, providing relief to Hurricane Katrina victims, drilling wells in Africa or helping with the Special Olympics. For the 2010 event at 9 a.m., Thursday, Jan. 14, at NIC, local people who were fifth graders when the program started 25 years ago will tell how they have carried King's legacy in their lives. A child advocate from Florida will be keynote speaker.

grams to the schools for classroom presentations and assemblies.

A recent program on the Masai of Kenya reached 3,500 students with cultural awareness workshops on batik, dance, storytelling, and social and cultural differences in Kenya.

Rachel was born in Montana. Her family moved to Colorado and then to Durbanville, South Africa. She earned a bachelor's degree in 2000 from Belhaven College in Jackson, Miss., and

a master's degree in 2002 from Howard University, an historically black university in Washington, D.C. She taught at Howard for two years before moving to Idaho.

As she experienced racial tensions in Mississippi, she became even more passionate about peacemaking and civil rights as she engaged in community development, volunteer organizing and educational programs in black history, math and art. She also

helped Belhaven, a Presbyterian school, recruit diverse students and develop a sister relationship with Tougaloo College, a private black college also in Jackson.

"I believe change is possible here," said Rachel, who moved to Coeur d'Alene with her son in 2004.

Seeking to promote civil rights and community action, she became involved with the HREI in 2004 as a contractor and volunteer, helping create exhibits on the Rights of the Child and a human rights fountain in 2005 to advertise the city's 2006 Fountains of Wishes Community Art Project.

Rachel also teaches part-time at North Idaho College and has taught African, African-American, Native American and world art and art for K-12 education at Eastern Washington University.

"I come from an eclectic household with African-American, Native American, German, Czech, Swedish, Jewish and Arabic heritages and culture," said Rachel, whose father hunted for meat with a bow and arrow and was a county commissioner who brought loggers, miners and environmentalists together.

Having friends of many faith traditions, she values the truth taught in all religions, balancing her spirituality with her passion for community action and human rights.

Rachel was familiar with North Idaho's white supremacist reputation, but hoped hate crimes wouldn't happen to her. Last spring, three Neo-Nazis came to

the HREI building and verbally harassed her about her biracial identity and school programs. Later her home was burglarized. One morning, she found a noose on her porch and recently a swastika sticker was stuck on the HREI's front door.

"Despite experiencing both subtle and overt hate, I believe in the potential for the human spirit to be good and charitable, for people to love their neighbors as they love themselves," she said.

"I choose to be shocked and appalled at this side of human nature, not set back by the incidents," she said. "If we do not speak out for truth, change will not happen. Education is my form of social advocacy."

Donna grew up in Wyoming. As a small child, she believed Martin Luther King's ideals that people should be judged by character and not skin color.



After attending Northwest Wyoming Community College in Powell, Wyo., she came to the Coeur d'Alene area in 1994, transferred to North Idaho College and decided to stay. She worked for a financial institution and a nonprofit private school before coming to HREI.

"Out-of-town visitors are surprised to see an institute like ours because of stereotypes about North Idaho," Donna said. "People are now aware we are here and energized to move forward."

For information, call 208-292-2359, email [rdolezal@hrei.org](mailto:rdolezal@hrei.org) or [dcork@hrei.org](mailto:dcork@hrei.org), or visit [www.hrei.org](http://www.hrei.org).

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## Church closing gives pause for reflecting on ministry, lives, service

Preaching for the closing service Oct. 18 at Grace Lutheran Church in East Central Spokane, Bishop Martin Wells of the Eastern Washington Idaho Synod spoke of grace, ministry and gratitude.

Asking what one says in closing a season, the season of the life and ministry of Grace Lutheran Church, he began by sharing some of its history and life.

Born in 1922 from the merger of Zion (Swedish) and Trinity (English), this is a ministry of 87 years.

Grace, he said, came to fill a void in God's ministry in the East Central Neighborhood of Spokane, and there was ministry.

"A people of God gathered. They made the coffee and brought in the first potluck meal. Children were taught the Small Catechism and the stories of the Bible," Martin recounted.

"Young men went off to war. The days waxed and waned with prosperity or famine. Young men and women returned from war and were married here," he said.

The bishop listed other influences on the ministry: The highway came. The trains came. The freeway came. The latest freeway has been coming for 30 years.

Again, young men and women went off to war, returned and were married and had their infant children baptized in Grace Lutheran.

"(A statue of) Jesus has looked down—from above the altar—on the generations and blessed them with his gaze, a gaze that issues a constant call—be my people, tell others what you have learned here and love one another," Martin said.

In closing a ministry and celebrating its life, he said smiles and tears would be close together as people tell stories and congratulate each other for faithfulness.

He invited people to let the tears flow and let them go.

"That this tiny band of pilgrims will no longer gather in this way is a grief," he said, noting that some had favorite pews, and some examined every inch of the



Closing worship at Grace Lutheran was a time for tears and joys.

triangles in the lattice behind the altar during bad sermons.

Some were thrilled here when the word came with power and conviction, and some may have bristled with self-righteousness and stayed silent in the midst of

gossip, he added.

"People have made promises here, deep and profound promises of life-long faithfulness in marriage. People have buried the dead and let them go, only with promises of eternal life. People

have buried children lost to disease and blessed children in life-giving baptismal water, pledging them for Christ's call," he said, offering an overview of ministry. "People have knelt to receive the undeserved bread and wine of life, the sign that God's covenant is not destroyed by a lack of faith or a poor power to understand."

Grace Lutheran, he said, has been a place where people have understood the mystery that God loves them no matter what.

"This has been the place of deepest community, even though you often couldn't stand one another," he said. "This has been the place where the scriptures were opened and read from at just the right moment when you needed a certain word."

Pastors and council presidents have come and gone. Children have been confirmed in their faith. People have been transformed.

Then speaking of the congregation's outreach, Martin said, "When this community of faith no longer produced its own children, the doors were flung open to welcome the neighborhood children, kids who knew where to find food

and a hug that meant they were cherished. You called it SPEAR: Summer Program for Enrichment and Recreation."

Once again this became a place where the stories of the Bible were told.

"In and under these stories—the sandwiches and soup and cookies, the joy of the swing-set and the pain of scraped knees—the ministry has continued and now becomes the living legacy of this ministry of Grace," he said.

Hymn choices spoke of gratitude and Scriptures spoke of the suffering servant, who gives up life for Life with a capital "L."

"This congregation says with the finality of ultimate trust that the people of Grace trusted God to the end and through the end," he said.

The 17 voting members of Grace Lutheran, who now disperse to other churches, sold the building to another church. With those funds they established a trust so Project SPEAR will continue to serve neighborhood children from the church's office building across the road.

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# Celtic Christianity delights in nature, believes in humanity's goodness

By Virginia de Leon

For the Rev. Elaine Breckenridge, the sacred can be found and experienced everywhere—in the goodness of people, the beauty of creation, even the most ordinary moments of life. Twice a month, she shares this faith expression that delights in nature, believes in humanity's goodness and seeks God in everyone and everything through the Celtic Creation Eucharist at St. David's Episcopal Church at 7315 N. Wall St. in Spokane.

Celtic Christianity is "a way of seeing the world," said Elaine, the rector at St. David's since 2004. "In a liturgy with theological and artistic integrity, the Celtic Creation Eucharist at St. David's celebrates the love of God and creation, the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus and the Spirit who is above, below, among and within us."

Instead of sitting in pews in the sanctuary, people who attend the Thursday night meditation and liturgy gather in the church's social hall—a space in the basement illuminated by candles and decorative lights strung around the room. Instead of being elevated on a platform, the altar is located at the center, surrounded by chairs arranged in a circle.

In this informal and communal setting, members of St. David's as well as people from other churches and denominations experience a worship service that engages all their senses. While some sit in silence during the entire liturgy, others sing along, chant or dance as musicians play flute, mandolin, violin, bells and other instruments. The gatherings also include prayers, discussions and communion. After each service, people stay for a potluck meal and fellowship.

For each service, Elaine focuses on topics such as the web of life, St. Francis of Assisi and silence. During a gathering in September, the theme was "thin places"—sacred places where the eternal world and the present appear to mix and an individual feels God's presence. After a meditation, which began with the ringing of a bell to create sacred space, the rest of the service included a reading from the Gospel of Mark followed by an excerpt from biblical scholar Marcus Borg's "The Heart of Christianity" and a few paragraphs on thin places by writer Mindie Burgoyne.

The worship service usually draws about 35 to 50 people from around the area. Many are Episcopalians but regulars also include Catholics, Presbyterians and people from other Christian denominations. While some



The Rev. Elaine Breckenridge leads Celtic worship.

consider the Celtic celebration as a supplement to their spiritual journey, others see it as central to their faith.

"The Celtic service feeds me in a way that Sunday morning doesn't," said Elaine. "It's my Sabbath."

The Thursday night service is simpler and feels more natural to her, she said. It also engages the community on a more visceral level. The worship style is "flexible and evolving" and is much more participatory compared to Sunday services, she said.

Celtic spirituality resonates with people who care about the planet's sustainability. It also appeals to individuals who seek equality instead of hierarchy in the structure of the church. Many are especially drawn to the prayers, the belief in creation's goodness, and the belief that image of God lies within each person.

"Liturgy becomes personal transformation," Elaine said. "It engages both head and heart as we experience the presence of God."

Celtic spirituality stems from the Christianity practiced by the peoples of the British Isles during the early Middle Ages. While the creation celebrations at St. David's don't mimic the prayers and liturgies of that time, it honors the tradition of these ancient, indigenous Christians and others who also valued their teachings.

"We believe that God's revelation is ongoing and not confined to Holy Scripture, and so other voices from the Christian tradition are heard with the proclamation of the Gospel," wrote Elaine, describing the readings during the Celtic creation celebration.

Those other voices have included theologian Matthew Fox, Chief Seattle and Murray Bodo, a Franciscan friar and author.

Elaine became interested in Celtic spirituality three years ago after reading the works of Esther De Waal and J. Phillip Newell, two authors who have devoted their studies and writing to Celtic spirituality. The books were recommended by her spiritual adviser, Sister Jane Comerford, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph who has taken people from the Inland Northwest on tours of the Celtic lands to deepen their understanding of the region's history and spirituality.

"It was a spirituality that spoke to my soul in new ways," said Elaine, who was ordained a priest in 1987 and whose father is also an Episcopal priest.

She was especially drawn to Celtic spirituality's reverence for nature, its emphasis on original blessing instead of original sin, and its rich tradition that includes prayers for daily chores and activities.

"It is a spirituality that connects with every day," she said. "The

prayers for everyday activities cultivate God's presence so everything we do becomes sacred."

"The mindfulness that's part of Celtic spirituality can be applied to our ordinary, everyday actions," Elaine said. "It changes the way we see mundane tasks and encourages people to live with intention."

Soon after reading more books on the topic, Elaine began to share her interest in Celtic spirituality by writing reflections in St. David's newsletters, through her preaching and by incorporating Celtic elements and teachings into the weekday services.

During a trip to Ireland in 2007, she realized how much Celtic traditions and teachings were a part of her spirituality and her own personal philosophy.

While listening to a guide on the Island of Inish Mor, she gained some insight on her leadership style and the need to take a more "Celtic missionary approach" to ministry.

Unlike the Roman method of evangelism, which focuses on preaching and teaching and then asks people to consider baptism followed by fellowship and Eucharist, the Celtic missionary would move into a community, live a Christian life and then invite people to participate, Elaine wrote in a reflection, "A Celtic Journey." By caring for people in the village—feeding the poor, providing education for children, inviting others to worship—the Celtic missionary's work "led not only to conversions based on believing, but wholesale transformation of life."

Through her journey, there were moments including the time she visited the ancient monastic village of Clonmacnoise where she

felt God's presence. "You can feel the presence of saints who lived there," Elaine said. "It was a place of pilgrimage, a thin place."

Since her trip to Ireland, Elaine has offered a Celtic-style Eucharist at St. David's. At first, the special service took place once a month. Earlier this year, she and others involved decided to increase the frequency to every other week.

"Theologically, Celtic Christianity was and is a 'way of seeing,' which teaches that God may be found, heard and experienced everywhere and in all things," Elaine wrote in another reflection. "Therefore, a true worship of God, can neither be contained within the four walls of a sacred building nor restricted to the boundaries of a religious tradition."

The next Celtic Creation Celebration will take place at 7 p.m., Friday, Dec. 18 and the service includes a celebration of the winter solstice.

For information, call 466-3100 or visit [www.stdavidspokane.org](http://www.stdavidspokane.org).

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# Calvary Soup Kitchen will serve meal to homeless each Saturday

**Pastor encourages members to bring their ideas to fruition.**

Calvary Baptist Church's parsonage at 207 E. Third Ave, has opened as Calvary's Soup Kitchen, serving its first meal on Dec. 1.

The church's Women's Ministry will cook meals in the church kitchen and serve them in the house next door from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., on Saturdays.

Peggie Troutt, president of the Women's Ministry, visited with Bernard Jones, who runs the Store House food, clothing and necessities bank and repairs bikes in the house.

Talking about the homeless and hungry people who slept outside the church and around the neighborhood, they realized the people had no way to cook the food they received.

So Peggie suggested opening a soup kitchen on the main floor of the house and continuing the Store House and bike ministry in the basement.

She called Doris Andrews, wife of the pastor and vice president of the Women's Ministry, to share her idea.

"I began explaining my idea, and she became quiet. Then she told me it was the pastor's vision, too," said Peggie, encouraged to learn the pastor had had the same vision a few years ago.

The Rev. C. W. (Chet) Andrews, who has served Calvary Baptist for 30 years, had that vision 16 years ago.

"I always tell people that what I want for Spokane is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked," Chet said. "When I heard Peggie wanted to start a soup kitchen, I said, 'Praise the Lord that it will come to fruition.' I believe it is what God wants us to do."

Then, he said, he began to "push" her, meaning, "pray until something happens." Chet said he encourages people to act to bring their ideas to fruition.

About 20 years ago, it became the Store House, first in the basement and then spilling upstairs 10 years ago, when Morningstar Baptist closed its clothing bank and gave them the clothes. Then



**Peggie Troutt and the Rev. C.W. Andrews check the food supply for Calvary Soup Kitchen.**

Bernard began fixing bikes to give away to people who needed transportation. The upstairs has also been used as a nursery, so there are colorful paintings of people and animals on the walls.

Peggie began calling churches in Western Washington and local churches, such as Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which has a breakfast program Sunday mornings. With guidance from them, she also plans to visit the House of Charity, Union Gospel Mission and the Women's and Children's Free Restaurant to gain ideas on how to run the soup kitchen smoothly.

She proposed the idea at a church meeting, presenting what the Women's Ministry thought was needed before continuing with the planning phase.

She applied a donation of \$180 from Washington State Order of the Eastern Star to applications for food handlers' permits for those who will cook the food in the church's licensed kitchen.

In two weeks, they were ready to begin renovating the house so it would be ready and inviting. Peggie and others made a list of what needed to be done, and members came by to do the tasks—painting, repairing cupboards, laying new vinyl in the kitchen, removing carpet in the living and dining rooms, varnishing and polishing the wood floors under it, doing minor repairs and filling the cupboards with food to cook.

With no budget, the organizers have walked in faith. After one TV interview, people came by the church and gave donations. The Curves exercise center at 164 S. Washington asked members to

donate non-perishable foods and to help serve.

"It blew my mind how generous people are," Chet said. "We have not had to tap the church budget. Food and money donations are coming in, supplying what we need."

Beginning in December, they will serve a midday meal so the cooks and servers can go home when it is still daylight.

Peggie is praying for there to be one or two cooks each time, and three servers. The cooked food will be transported from the church kitchen to the parsonage where it will be served. They expect to offer spaghetti, casseroles, sandwiches and salads, as well as soup.

With 45 to 50 people coming in at one time and sitting down to eat, they expect to serve more than 100 in the two hours, using paper plates to make cleanup easy.

Over the years, the church has fluctuated from 125 to 250 members as people come and go with at Fairchild Air Force Base.

Among those coming with the Air Force were Peggie and her husband, James. Peggie, who grew up in Washington, D.C., married after high school and moved around the country and overseas with Air Force assignments.

When they first came to Spokane in 1983, aside from working all day, she did community work and studied human resources at Gonzaga University. In 2005, she retired after 36 years of working as executive secretary for five commanders at Fairchild. A month after retirement, she started as a substitute instructional as-

can eat and visit.

"All I do, I do in faith. I pray, and things happen," said Peggie. "At Fairchild, I prayed for a multicultural fair. We started one and 300 people came. Over the years, it grew to draw 5,000.

"The Women's Ministry flourishes. We pray and God guides us," she said.

The Women's Ministry also does small projects like collecting toiletries to give to women's shelters.

"We pray and things happen," she repeated. "I know the Holy Spirit is guiding us, because everything falls into place after earnest prayer. I continually pray that God will send willing workers with a passion to serve the community. Without that passion, people's support would fizzle."

Calvary is announcing the program at other shelters and places serving homeless and hungry people. They expect word to spread quickly.

The Store House is still in operation and will respond when people come and knock on the door. On days the Soup Kitchen is not open, the Store House will continue to operate, with Bernard answering the door.

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# War bride and college graduate use power of their stories to reach women

By Janae Cepeda

One-to-one and in a blog, a war bride and a college student who practice Nichiren Buddhism reach out to women in the community, using the power of their stories of overcoming struggles to let other women know hope exists.

They have experienced the reality behind the Buddhist saying that "barley grows better after it has been trampled on."

For Jennifer Lasby, the student, summoning the inner courage to forge ahead despite difficulties ties her to Chieko Wilkin, the Japanese war bride.

Four years ago, they met at the Airway Heights SGI Center—Soka Gakkai International, Japanese for "value-creation society."

The SGI is one of the societies of Nichiren Buddhists in Eastern Washington.

Because the Young Women's Division and Women's Division often combine meetings, Chieko and Jennifer formally met in a study group for women. Jennifer said that Chieko's story has inspired her to connect with other students.

Although she had been introduced to Nichiren Buddhism as a child, Chieko did not practice it until she came to the United States in 1960 with her husband Bill Wilkin, whom she met in Japan.

"It is about chanting and never giving up. At the time, I thought it would be a vacation for me! My seventh year of practice was starting," she said. "My attitude was: everything has gone smoothly in my life so far. I wonder what great benefits I will receive this year."

The minute she landed in America, obstacles began. Speaking only Japanese for her first 24 years was her first challenge to learn to speak English.

"I met my parents-in-law, and they were cold to me. I spoke no English, and I soon became homesick. I was living in hell," Chieko said. "There were not many other people to chant with, and there were not many meetings."

"Victory can be attained," she always reminded herself.

In December 1960, before her second child was born, Chieko learned her husband, who was away serving in the military, was hospitalized with tuberculosis. She felt that some treated her like a criminal because he had TB.

Plus, he was not there when she was giving birth, and she was unable to speak English well enough to explain her pain. Although she felt lonesome and vulnerable, her son was born healthy.

Early in her marriage, oil in a frying pan caught fire. When she poured it into the sink, the fire blew back into her face and set

the curtains on fire.

Chieko said her reconstructive surgeries were painful, and her husband left her to find another woman.

She began attending SGI-USA's cultural center in California where she spent her days encouraging other women to benefit each other's lives.

"I went to meeting after meeting and attended kosen-rufu gongyo, the meeting for attaining world peace. Day after day, I studied all I could and tried not to be discouraged," Chieko said.

After a year, her husband returned, realizing she was the woman for him, and appreciating anew the strength that originally attracted him to her.

Chieko attributes her success to perseverance and hope.

"I went through many more obstacles, financial, physical and spiritual, but I never gave up," she said. "My practice of Buddhism is my treasure. I realize I needed the obstacles to force me to become strong and grow."

"The sufferings I went through are also my treasures because they are golden memories of my struggles and fighting to be a winner," she said.

Although not a member himself, Chieko's husband continues to support her in her practice of Nichiren Buddhism. He recognizes the good she evokes in others' lives and shares her happiness.

She believes that the bigger the problems people face and the more they pray to overcome them, "the higher the state of life" they can develop and the "more

profound the wisdom" they can tap and the greater inner wisdom they can gain.

Starting with helping other war brides, Chieko has shared these words with other women over the past 49 years in Spokane.

"I used to cry often, but now I see there is nothing to cry about. I am so happy and want others to be happy," she said. "My practice of Nichiren Buddhism has shown me how to be grateful no matter what happens. Through my experiences, I am determined to have a can-do attitude that can overcome any obstacle."

Today, Chieko continues to mentor young women through activities at the SGI center in Airway Heights and throughout the Inland Northwest. One of those women is Jennifer, who recently earned a bachelor's degree in psychology at Gonzaga University.

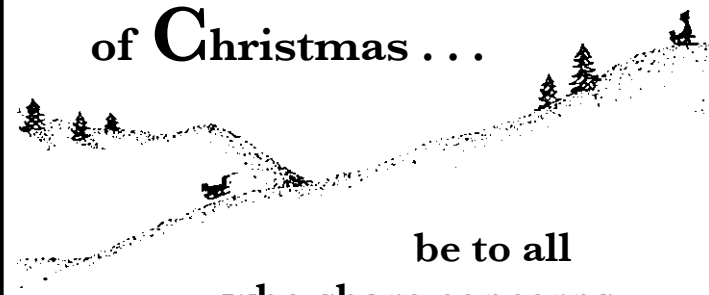
Jennifer said that Chieko's stories of hope have inspired her. Jennifer did not begin to practice Nichiren Buddhism until college. As a result of her practice, she has persevered through problems in academics and relationships.

Now she considers it her karma to attract other young women with chaotic lives. She has touched lives of women at Gonzaga just by talking with and listening to them. She helped one student whose alcoholism was impeding her studies and encouraged another until she was hired for a job.

Jennifer made a daily victory chart in which the word, "victory," was broken into little segments representing 15 minutes of

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chanting. The chart tallies more than 300 hours since February, time when she has prayed for the things she most needs and wants in life, including meeting Nichiren President Ikeda, her mentor.

That blessing, which she has chanted for over six months, came to reality. In October, she traveled to Japan to meet President Ikeda, to attend several prayer sessions and to study with her mentor and other young men and women from around the world.

Jennifer has also been involved in a blog called Bucket List Victories, which encourages women to set goals and not give up.

The Bucket List website shares personal stories of women from around the world who submit their stories from the minute to the extreme.

The stories give confidence to those who feel disheartened by life and need that boost, she said.

Like Chieko, Jennifer hopes to mentor young women in times of difficulty by using her past experiences for their benefit.

"Winter always turns to spring, it may take months but trials are excellent. Don't give up and resign to something you did not aim

for. You can achieve unlimited victory, so do not retreat even a single step," she said.

Jennifer finds inspiration in a Nichiren Buddhist saying, "The earth upon which we fall is the same ground that enables us to push ourselves up again."

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## Interfaith Hospitality doubles its capacity to serve homeless guests in churches

With housing tight, Interfaith Hospitality of Spokane has added three transitional housing units to double its capacity to serve homeless families and help stabilize life for their children.

Two units are rented through Spokane Housing Ventures, paid through a grant from the City of Spokane. The third unit was acquired through a partnership with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in July, made possible by donations from individuals and churches. This is a large home that can provide housing for a large family.

From July 2008 to June 2009, the program provided 3,171 bed nights, a count of each individual staying one night.

**New host churches** to the program are the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, Millwood Community Presbyterian and First Free Evangelical Church, bringing the number of host congregations to 12 and support churches to 18.

Host churches open rooms in their building to families from one Sunday evening to the following Sunday morning. Church members open their hearts to families, providing not only a place to eat but also meals, said Madelyn Bafus, executive director and case manager.

"Families sleep in roll-away beds, which have been used for seven years and need to be replaced," she said, adding that a recent grant will make that possible. "New beds should be delivered just before Christmas."

Support churches help by providing food, hospitality and overnight volunteers.

**Interfaith Hospitality partners** with Union Gospel Mission Women's and Children's Crisis Shelter to provide case management to families who are motivated and ready to move forward in finding housing, employment and services they need, she said.

Since July 2008, the office and day center have been housed at 608 S. Richard Allen Ct. Their new facility includes a full kitchen for families to use to cook a favorite meal. Next door is the Emmanuel Center, which houses a day-care facility, and many of the families have enrolled their children there. That means they can go to appointments without taking their children with them.

Many churches have been involved since the program opened its doors in 1997, said Madelyn, who started first as a volunteer through her church, Spokane Val-



Madelyn Bafus said the kitchen in their new location means families can cook some favorite meals.

ley United Methodist, and then as a board member. She still serves as an overnight volunteer when families are at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Spokane Valley. Her church is a support church for St. Mary's.

"Funding could be stressful, but I've found it always comes in. God does provide, but it is always in God's timing. One time when we were struggling a \$5,000 grant from Providence Health Services through Holy Family Hospital came in two months early," she said. "What a blessing it was."

Madelyn said the program has a "good success rate" and maintains rapport with other agencies and service providers.

**One outlet for families** is the Voiceless Homeless Choir, which rehearses Monday evenings. Families present and past participate in the choir.

The choir's 2009 HeartSongs from the Edge of the World Concert at 5:30 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 6, at the Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, will include a silent auction. Proceeds will benefit Interfaith Hospitality, Crosswalk and the choir. For information on the concert, call 448-1311.

**Madelyn said families need** supportive, affordable housing, GEDs, employment and medical services. Many live on \$453 a month from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

By housing families in their buildings or providing support services, churches become aware of families' needs, stories and struggles, she said.

Interfaith Hospitality of Spokane works with families who are proactive and focused, who

want help and are willing to work to move forward, Madelyn explained. In addition to being motivated, families must follow the guidelines set by Interfaith.

"Guests need to be 'clean and sober.' We do random drug tests," she said.

"To protect children, volunteers must pass a Washington State Patrol background check," she said.

A church may host up to three families, up to a total of 14 people.

**Given that the cost of housing** one person one night in a shelter ranges from \$16 to \$50, Madelyn said, the value of the service the churches provide is worth more than \$100,000 a year.

The 30 churches absorb any costs for housing the families.

"Beyond the financial value, members of congregations provide people who care and people to engage in conversations," said Madelyn, who still volunteers "because I feel it's important for me to know what the families are experiencing in the churches."

"For members of my church, it's a proactive mission, a way to be the hands and feet of Christ," she said. "It's the road Christ has led me down. I have a job I love, and I feel God put me here."

"God brings people in the door, as if saying, 'These are my children. Help them!'" she added.

Interfaith Hospitality provides shelter for an average of 45 days per family, but will not send them back to be homeless. A few have stayed longer until they have what they need to go on. Parents spend the day looking for housing, jobs and benefits to move them into

stable homes, jobs and incomes to support their families.

**The program has increased** the amount of its grant request from the City of Spokane, to provide classes on anger management, parenting, nutrition and health care on the first four Sundays of each month at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Classes repeat

every three months. The classes are for families in its shelter, in its transitional housing and women at Union Gospel Mission's Women's and Children's Crisis Shelter.

Madelyn said that the classes will help families reduce visits to emergency rooms, decrease their medical bills, help them understand how to use food stamps to have good nutrition and help them manage anger so they keep jobs.

"Many people wonder why low-income and homeless families struggle to find jobs and homes," she said, explaining: "They rely on the bus system to go to meetings at the Department of Social and Health Services, and to apply for jobs, look for housing and keep appointments. A family may spend most of the day traveling, depending on the bus schedule."

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# Women reach out locally and globally with quilts, kits and clothing

By Brenda Velasco

The resourcefulness of a local congregation providing resources for people in need locally and globally is exemplified by Central Lutheran Church in Spokane.

It offers ministry opportunities that reach out to both the local community and world relief programs. Two of these, the Christian Action Committee and the Clothes Closet have been active for years and are run by volunteers who dedicate time to make the ministries successful.

Responding to a call to serve, Mary Robinson, a member of Central Lutheran, became chair of the Christian Action Committee when she retired from teaching high school.

As part of the ministry, she works with other members to create quilts, health kits and school kits, which are sent to Lutheran World Relief and shipped to people in need around the world.

"I started thinking about children in other parts of the world who have nothing," said Mary, who has done this ministry for 12 years. "When they receive a school kit it may be the only possession they have. It's a big deal to them. It's hard to find school supplies in some countries."

This year, the church did 75 school kits, a church record.

School kits include supplies like pencils, notebooks, paper, and erasers. The health kits include items like hand towels, soap and toothbrushes, while the homemade quilts will have many uses. Many women at the church also make bright-colored quilted tote bags to hold the items. These



Mary Robinson

can then be used as school bags for the children.

The Christian Action Committee receives money for kit items from Thrivent Financial grants and members go to local stores to purchase what they need.

"I wanted to give to the community and this seemed like the perfect thing for me to do," she said. "I believe in education and all that it offers. This was a good way to help kids."

During a trip to Panama a few years ago, Mary was moved by the poverty she saw.

"It was eye opening to see people who had lost everything. I had the opportunity to talk to them, and it was powerful to hear their stories," she said.

Her passion to help people in other parts of the world inspired her to do something in Spokane.

"I wanted to find a place to volunteer, to take time to do something for another person,"

said Mary, adding that, although there is much need in Spokane, she wants to reach out wider.

"We are a part of this world and need to address issues in other parts of the world, especially when it involves children," she said.

"We have so much here, and it feels good to give back," she said. "A towel, wash cloth or soap may seem like nothing to us, but it means a lot for people who have nothing. It becomes something that is their own. We tend to take things for granted."

Since taking on this ministry, Mary said that response from the congregation has been positive.

"There are many ways we can be involved," Mary said. "When I post my list to collect items, we always fill the baskets. The church is reliable. Someone always makes it happen."

Once the items are collected from the congregation, a call is put out to help make the tote bags or create the quilts.

"If we need 500 blankets, we will do it, no matter of the time needed. We depend on each other and it's wonderful to see everyone so passionate about helping."

Lutheran World Relief sends yearly reports, letting the church know how the items are used.

"It's good to know the kits go directly to the people they are intended for," she said.

Mary said the other ministries at Central Lutheran support each other when there is a need: "If the Clothes Closet needs something, we help them. If we need help, they help us. We tell each other about our needs."



Kay Brandenburg

The Clothes Closet, which serves men and women, celebrated its 20th anniversary at the end of November and continues to be a place where people with needs can come to find clothing or personal hygiene products.

Kay Brandenburg, who has volunteered at the Clothes Closet for seven years, said three-fourths of the people who use it are men.

"Many are homeless or have limited income," she said. "We also give them resource guides to help them find things like furniture for their apartments."

Several years ago, Kay learned about the Clothes Closet and asked to visit. That led her to volunteer.

"Many men come from rehab centers. Women and families also come," she said.

"They each have a story, and I would never have been in contact with them if it hadn't been for this ministry," Kay pointed out.

The Clothes Closet receives donations from the church community. On occasion, they receive money to buy clothes and toiletries. It operates out of the basement of Central Lutheran and is open from 1 to 3 p.m. Wednesday afternoons.

"The people find out about us by word of mouth, agencies or media," Kay said. "Some people are simply looking for a decent outfit to wear, while others have nothing. We bring them down two people at a time and show them what we have."

Some people do come back on a consistent basis, but Kay said that most only come once or twice and then move on.

"I love working with the people," she said. "Listening to what they've been through is heart-breaking. So many are homeless and seek support."

On average about 35 people come during the two hours they are open. The most they have had has been 47.

Time is put into preparing the space. Clothing is sorted as it comes in and put on racks.

"The people who use our services wait in the foyer until we call them down to take a look," Kay said. "They can try the clothes on and then they leave with what they need."

Once in a while, they have small appliances to give out. "One family simply needed a baking pan. It can be that basic," Kay said. "We have the resources here at Clothes Closet to help them. It's about giving back in whatever way we can."

For information, call 624-9233.

# NAACP speaker recounts history of struggle and challenges today

Continued from page 1

Thomas described many legal impediments to freedom that stood in the way of American black people: Rulings like the Dred Scott decision in 1857 held that a black man had no rights a white man was bound to respect. From 1880 to 1920, on average, two black people were lynched each day in America—more than 4,000 murders in 40 years.

Thomas told of the 1896 decisions in Plessy v. Ferguson when the Supreme Court declared segregation the law of the land.

He explained that "the horrors of lynchings, the injustices of segregation, the weight of the court rulings came together to cause thoughtful Americans, black and white, to come together in the quest for freedom for all Americans."

Then he told of recent scientific studies of the human genome, which reveal that the least of differences among human beings is skin color: It takes more genetic coding to form the shape of the earlobe or a person's hairline than for the color of skin.

"In human history, it appears that the smallest difference between us has been the source of the most violence, hatred, injustice and unfairness," he said.

In 1909, the NAACP started its efforts to change America under the law, Thomas said. He described the 1954 decision in Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka Kans., which ended segregation in public schools.

However, violence continued with bombings of young girls

in a church in Birmingham, Ala., with the assassination of NAACP field worker Medgar Evers and with attacks on Freedom riders in the South. Then came changes with the Voting Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act and more.

Born in 1950 in a segregated Virginia, Thomas said that in his childhood every part of the black community was engaged in the struggle for freedom and justice—not just teachers and preachers, but also entertainers, sports legends and even children.

Along with songs like "We Shall Overcome" or "Lift Every Voice and Sing," he said the movement was also inspired by soul singers singing, "Change gon' come," and jazz singers singing "Move over sun and give me some sky, I got me some wings and I'm eager to fly."

While in the 1960s, he said, "you could feel the whole community pulling together in the fight for justice and equality," today he senses a cultural divide. He laments this difference.

"After all the bloodshed, litigation and marches, we have come to a place where the legal system that stood in the way of freedom has been knocked down," he said. "Today young people—black,



Judge John Charles Thomas

white, red, yellow or brown—have the freedom in large measure to be what they want to be.

"In this day of freedom, however, inner city schools that are largely black have dropout rates near 50 percent; homicides are the leading cause of death for black men 18 to 25, and too many black young men in prison or subject to the criminal justice system.

Now, Thomas said, the struggle has shifted.

"No longer do black people fight an external struggle against outside forces. Today they face an internal struggle with the choices they make," he said. "We cannot keep on blaming others. We must look to ourselves and ask how, after all we have been through and all the freedoms we have won, we are not putting them to full use."

In his life, his grandmother taught him that "the small things we do in life lead to bigger things." She would say, "Little drops of water, little grains of sand make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land."

Thomas urges that children be taught about consequences of their decisions and that what happens now can affect their whole lives. He was reared by his community because his father was in prison, drunk or away, and his mother, a civil rights worker was out of work and had to leave the area. Aunts, uncles, neighbors, teachers, preachers and others urged him to stay in school, do his best and work to end injustice.

"If I did something wrong, they knew before I came home," he said. "I was expected to be

responsible. Teachers taught us to be better than the best. No one would give us a break."

Sent to a white school in 1965 as part of integration, he finished with honors and went on to the University of Virginia where, in 1972, he was one of only three blacks in his graduating class.

"I was taught to stand up and be counted, speak clearly and write cogently," he said.

When he finished law school, every law firm in his state rejected him despite his honors and grades. He told a lawyer friend in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department in Washington. That lawyer offered to sue the law firms on his behalf.

"When word got out about that, I had an offer from the state's largest firm, where I work today."

Since going on the state Supreme Court at 32—other justices were more than 21 years older


—he has worked to help insure justice for all.

Thomas told the Spokane gathering that he believes "change is possible" and his message to them is a message of hope.

"I come with a message to embolden you, to give you hope and remind you we are all in this together. As King said, 'Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.'"

"Young people, you are in the struggle, too. Go out and be involved," he said, proceeding to quote Rudyard Kipling: "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you; if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too," he recited through to the poem's conclusion: That's what it takes for a young person to become a mature person.

For information, call 467-9793.



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## Blue Button employs teens to silk-screen shirts and teach job skills

By Anna Marie Martin

Blue Button Apparel, a print-shop on the second floor of Crosswalk Community Church in Hilliard, employs several at-risk teens to make silk-screened, organic, fair-trade, cotton-and-bamboo t-shirts and bags.

Founder Scott Ellis' goal is to teach the teens to produce a quality product using sustainable business practices, so they can learn job skills and make a living.

The business ties in with the church's Project Jerusalem mission of being engaged in the community and neighborhood where they are located.

Part of the church's mission is to speak the good news, said the pastor, Mike Brose, asking: "What is good news to the people of Hilliard? The good news is, 'Here's how to get a job. Here's how to feed your children.'"

"We want to be a church that loves its community," he said. "We want to be in the neighborhood physically. We want the antique market down the street to survive."

Scott was studying business management at Whitworth University when he met Mike, who started Crosswalk Church in 2001 near Whitworth.

The church began as a name, Scott said, noting that "crosswalks provide safety for people going from one place to another."

Scott, who moved to Spokane in 1994, graduated from Valley Christian School and attended several other churches. He became a worship leader as the church grew and merged with Terrace Heights Baptist. Then they purchased the current building in 2006 at 2723 E. Gordon.

Scott said the church takes the message of the prophet Jeremiah to heart.

"Jeremiah said the Israelites in exile were to seek the peace and prosperity of their new community. Crosswalk is committed to do that," Scott said. "Jeremiah tells the people to pray for their community, because 'if it prospers you will prosper, too.' So Crosswalk regularly prays for the people and businesses of Hilliard.

"We believe in meeting people where they are spiritually," he said.

The church's outreach to the community has included movie nights and dinners for teenagers, an outgrowth of one family's tradition of hosting weekly spaghetti dinners for teens at their house. Youth came to eat, leaving drugs, guns and paraphernalia at the door.

When the family moved, they suggested Crosswalk Church continue the practice.



Jacob Hettich gains tips from Scott Ellis on silk screening T-shirts.

Several teens who came to dinners and movie nights became active in the church and participated in teen groups one to three times a week.

"They are some of the strongest disciples in our church," Scott said. "Some come from homes where they are not particularly safe. We seek to provide a practical salvation."

On their own, the teens, who are paid to babysit during congregational meetings, decided they had too much money. So they used it to sponsor a child from Ecuador through Compassion International.

Seeking to connect to the community, Scott said that when the church learned students at Rogers High School needed gifts at Christmas, they decided to give socks, shirts and pants.

Scott wanted to know more of what was behind the request, which came from school counselor Barb Silvey, who works with students who have difficulty completing their education—dropped out and returned, become pregnant, went to jail or were kicked out of some classes.

After sitting in her classroom and hearing her tell the stories of students, Scott was "shocked and baffled" by the teens' experiences. Barb told him that few of her students had job-interview skills or clothes, and that the paychecks of some who had jobs might pay for family expenses or a parent's drug habit.

Scott had been reading a book about missionaries going to Africa only to preach the gospel to refugees. A refugee challenged a mis-

sionary, saying the good news for him would be being able to earn enough to buy his own food.

He realized the gifts the church gave the students would not help them in the long run.

"They needed to learn how to provide for themselves," he said.

Then he thought: "T-shirts must be easy to print. I'll learn how to do it. Then I'll teach some to screen shirts, and we'll go from there."

Having a "grace-based lens on," Scott thought it would be wonderful to work with students, in a safe environment, "teaching them job skills and vocabulary."

So he started Blue Button, hoping that after a year of working there learning responsible leadership and entrepreneurial skills, the teens would be employable.

Scott said the first students were selected from the congregation.

A typical evening at Blue Button includes work and conversation—about the day's Scripture lesson, last week's sermon, work habits or what's going on in their lives—followed by dinner.

As an example of the program's effect, Scott told of one girl, who at first said she was not smart enough to go to college, but later decided to go to college to study engineering.

In five years, Scott wants Blue Button to be a self-sustaining business, perhaps in its own building. He hopes it will bring in enough that he can draw a salary, rather than living frugally off his savings.

Recognizing Blue Button might stay in the Crosswalk Church building, Scott, who is committed

to protecting the environment, wants to help the church buy and install solar panels.

He believes success is not measured in numbers of dollars or teens working, but by the transformation of lives. He hopes the teens become different people, people with increased self-worth, with goals for college or continuing education and with life-skills that transform their futures.

Interested in investing in the lives of the people, Scott believes

"the people are more important than the product."

Blue Button is set up as an independent nonprofit that sells a product to raise funds to sustain its ministry. It rents the space from the church.

Although it is an ostensibly secular organization, its ministry comes from Scott's belief that "Jesus said the gospel is feeding and taking care of orphans and widows. Youth we work with are orphans in one way or another.

"Jesus spent his time with people on the margins, the fringes, not with the in-crowd," said Scott, who takes students who are at the margins and folds them into the center, letting them know they are valuable.

Mike, as pastor, views Blue Button as part of the church's outreach, because it is housed in the church, serves at-risk teens and is committed to environmental sustainability, fair trade and ethical business practices.

He does not consider Blue Button's "I (heart) Hilliard" t-shirts a way to manipulate conversations toward Jesus.

"The outreach has to be authentic," he said.

"Jesus befriended people, period," says Mike. "Jesus never had an agenda beyond 'I'm going to deal with this person in front of me as a human being whom I love.' The point is to show up and love people."

For information, call 720-8822, email [scott@bluebutton.org](mailto:scott@bluebutton.org) or visit [www.bluebutton.org](http://www.bluebutton.org).

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# Mobile food distributions help target pockets of poverty

By Deidre Jacobson

Likening hunger to a freight train, Rod Wieber, director of donor and community relations at Second Harvest Inland Northwest, said that for 18 months hunger has been moving along at a good clip and at times picking up more speed, more so as winter approaches.

The challenge is to keep meeting the need as it increases within the 21 Eastern Washington and five North Idaho counties.

To provide healthful food to greater numbers of people, Rod said Second Harvest is targeting "pockets of poverty," bringing more food to those in need through the food banks and meal centers we partner with.

"Poverty can happen to anyone," he said. "We are seeing an increase in the number of emergency food clients who have college degrees as families are affected by company layoffs and wage cuts."

One partner agencies, the Salvation Army, has reported an increase this past year of about 200 new clients each month. They also see more middle-income earners and expect the trend to continue through 2010.

Meeting the need head on, Second Harvest initiated its mobile food bank program, distributing food to 80 locations in Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

Because each truck holds 8,000 pounds of food products, Second Harvest needs the help of 12 to 20 volunteers to load, transport and hand out the food.

Often 150 to 200 families and individuals will be lined up to receive a bag or box, packaged by the volunteers. The bags or boxes are filled with fresh items like cherries, apples, potatoes and onions donated by the agricultural industry along with an assortment of other food items.

In 2008, Second Harvest Inland Northwest took truckloads of food to 65 different food distribution sites around the region and served thousands of families.

As of mid November, Second Harvest did 80 mobile food distributions in 2009, and they expect to do more than 100 in 2010.

In January, 800 families in Walla Walla, stood in line to receive food. Last month, more than 33,000 pounds of food were distributed to 550 families there.

In August, volunteers at Millwood helped distribute 11,651 pounds of food to 156 households for 532 household members. In November, 23 volunteers distributed 7,921 pounds of fresh food to 692 people in 189 households.

From 1 to 3 p.m., Nov. 13, parking lots of Millwood Presbyterian Church in Spokane Valley and Westminster Presbyterian Church in West Central Spokane became food distribution sites for the second time in 2009.

Millwood Presbyterian and lo-



Dawn Yarnell, director of operations at Second Harvest, helps volunteers at Westminster Presbyterian fill boxes with food.

cal West Valley community leaders have just agreed with Second Harvest to do a monthly food distribution on second Fridays.

Each mobile food bank distribution costs Second Harvest about \$2,000. To do a monthly distribution, organizers seek 12 businesses or organizations, one each month, to contribute \$600 to sponsor a distribution.

Child hunger remains an ongoing concern, said Rod.

Second Harvest's 23rd Annual

Client Survey revealed that 37 percent of the people helped by neighborhood food banks are children and 57 percent of parents reported skipping meals to feed their children. More than half of those parents say it happens on a daily or weekly basis. Children who lack enough to eat are at greater risk of illness and failure in school, Rod said.

This year, Second Harvest also launched two more Kids Café programs—one in West Cen-

tral Community Center and the other at Cheney Middle School with Communities in Schools of Spokane County. It targets child hunger by collaborating with non-profits that provide a safe place for children to gather for recreation, tutoring and other activities, he said. Second Harvest provides afternoon snacks for hundreds of children at these locations.

Second Harvest also works with Washington State University to provide education on healthful food choices. WSU instructors provide cooking classes and nutrition education at sites where food is distributed.

At the Salvation Army, a cooking show teaches clients how to prepare simple, nutritious meals, when it distributes ingredients.

Most of the food Second Harvest distributes is donated, but energy and resources are required to move the food from the donors to the hungry people.

The 32 employees and 15 vehicles keep the operation running. More than 2,000 volunteers sort, box and re-pack the bulk donations, providing a foundation of support for the operation.

"The community has been generous," said Rod. "We do not see anyone pulling back, especially at this time of year as we benefit from food and cash drives."

Employees at one business will forgo their annual holiday party and donate the funds to Second Harvest.

Another business group held a recent fund drive and collected more than \$7,000, standing on street corners collecting cash.

"I was inspired by the energy of this group," he said.

Each year Tom's Turkey Drive provides about 8,000 Thanksgiving meals.

There is now a critical need for such nonperishable food items as peanut butter, canned meats, hearty soups, chili, stews, macaroni and cheese, boxed dinners and beans. There is also need for canned fruits and vegetables, canned or boxed juices, boxed mashed potatoes, dried fruit, pasta, rice, healthy cereals, flour, baking mixes, stuffing mixes, oatmeal and cream of wheat.

"We operate through the generosity of the community. Our food donors and volunteers make it possible to feed 48,000 people each week," Rod said.

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# Developer considers housing the foundation of healthy communities

Chris Venne's focus on funding Community Frameworks' housing projects stems from his belief that housing is a foundation for healthy lives and communities.

Access to affordable housing helps determine the success of individuals and families. So the nonprofit housing developer based in Spokane and Bremerton helps low- and moderate-income people find affordable rental or owner-occupied housing in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana.

"Everyone needs a place to call home," he said.

"We develop everything from homeless and domestic-violence shelters to housing for farm workers, seniors, families and disabled people, said Chris, who graduated from a Jesuit high school in Portland before coming to Gonzaga University where he earned a bachelor's degree in economics in 1970.

"Such populations need more than housing. They need a package of supportive services to help them move into the mainstream," he explained.

**One of the first projects** he helped secure funds for was Hope House with 34 emergency shelter beds and 25 transitional apartments for homeless women and children, completed in 2004 with Volunteers of America and the Coalition for Women on the Street.

Chris recently found funding for Spokane Baptist Homes to build 50 low-income, independent-living subsidized senior housing units on the campus of Lilac Plaza Retirement Community.

Community Frameworks is also working on a 38-unit rental-assisted senior housing project with Rockwood Retirement Communities in Spokane Valley.

In Moses Lake, plans are underway for 23 units of independent-living apartments for domestic-violence victims and for adults with mental illness or developmental disabilities, plus 12 units for people with other disabilities.

With Blue Mountain Action Council in Walla Walla, they are developing a 25-unit "housing-first" project of permanent supportive housing for homeless families—taking them off the streets and creating support services so mental-health or alcohol-recovery treatment is more likely to succeed, Chris said.

In Roberts, Idaho, they are helping to build 24 units of farm-worker housing for seasonal workers to live year-round in this potato-growing community.

**Community Frameworks**, which now occupies much of the Lindaman Nonprofit Center at 315 W. Mission, partners with 42 organizations such as:

- The Salvation Army on 30 units of transitional housing and a 90-bed shelter;
- Cheney Care Center on 30



Chris Venne helps increase affordable housing options.

units of independent living, mixed-income housing for elderly people;

- Holman Gardens in Spokane Valley to renovate its 96-unit senior housing, and

- Richard Allen Apartments in East Central Spokane to renovate 56 units.

**While most of its work is** with other nonprofits, Community Frameworks recently decided to own and operate a 24-unit affordable apartment house in Spokane Valley.

They also offer HomeStarts, a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Self Help Opportunities Project (SHOP), with owners investing sweat-equity, like Habitat for Humanity, with no down payment and affordable payments.

Homeowners meet neighbors and create neighborhoods as they build, Chris said. To help people stay in the homes, they also offer homebuyer education on managing finances.

Community Frameworks has used \$20 million in HUD money over 10 years to build hundreds of houses, said Chris, describing the

staff as "mission driven."

From 2005 to 2009, it added more than 1,000 rental units and 300 single-family homes.

"It's hard to keep up with the need," he said. "I hear of people who can't afford to be in their house and put food on the table. Much remains to be done."

**Despite nation-wide efforts** in the last five years to encourage communities to develop 10-year plans to end homelessness, the problem continues, he said.

The information from the Homeless Coalition's annual statewide Point-in-Time Count of homeless people each January helps measure homelessness.

"We see increased numbers, but don't know if it's real increases or better counting," said Chris, citing inspiration by the late Robert Theobald, a consultant and member of the Unitarian Universalist Church who promotes resilience for communities, people and ecological systems.

Chris joined the Robert in an intentional community in Arizona in the 1970s. He said Robert helped found the Northwest Regional

Foundation after Expo 1974. Chris moved back to Spokane for the World's Fair and to start a film and video business to record environmental conferences. In 1992, he started a business promoting high-tech, energy-efficient manufactured housing, incorporating technology from Sweden.

After serving 15 years on the board for the Northwest Regional Foundation—which became Northwest Housing Facilitators and is now Community Frameworks—he was hired as a housing developer. Now he is the development finance manager.

Chris works with nonprofit groups that Community Frameworks brings together to advise on decisions and fund raising for affordable housing.

Some want to build single-family houses and have difficulty buying land or finding contractors.

**"Projects in rural communities**, such as Omak, Moses Lake, Cheney, Washtucna and Newport, are an important part of our work. Rural problems are as big as urban ones, but are often hidden and hard to address," Chris said.

Because funders often overlook rural areas, there are fewer bids on materials and outside contractors may cost more, he said, and rural projects require sensitivity.

"We need to be with people where they are and take them to the next step," he said. "It's hard to develop affordable housing in rural communities because we might fill 12 units, but not 50, and it costs more per unit to build fewer," he said.

Chris does marketing, financing, contacting architects and designers, managing the development process, and dealing with community and state regulatory

issues. Projects take thousands of hours over years to develop.

Community Frameworks begins with a development concept to define the need, market, funding sources and community acceptance.

**Once there is a concept**—such as HUD affordable senior housing—there is a feasibility study that asks: Is land available? What is the cost? Will the owner sell it? Is it zoned right?

Then the planner raises money from three to five sources.

"We expect the unexpected. It takes a long time to raise public money, up to 18 months," said Chris, who continually keeps his eye open for community, state and federal funding.

**"With nonprofits, we aim** for a double bottom line: 1) meeting the mission to provide housing for people who lack access, and 2) assuring the financing will work for construction and long-term viability," he said. "Some move 15 to 20 steps down the road of 100 steps and find out the project won't work. We need funds for these false starts."

Chris insists that the projects work financially.

About 75 percent of the work is done before "the shovel hits the ground," with the concept, feasibility study and negotiations to assure the deal is done and finances are in place before construction and operations begin.

For information, call 484-6733 ext. 210 or email [chrismv@communityframeworks.org](mailto:chrismv@communityframeworks.org).

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## Words can seem abstractions, until we act in the little ways we can

“Unemployment,” “health care,” “war” and “the deficit” are among the words bandied about in media and among politicians in these days.

These words, nouns, are abstractions as folks with opposing ideologies argue in Congress. They are words “made flesh” in our families and our lives, in our faith communities and among our friends.

While sounding like insoluble problems—states of being—they represent heartache, hopelessness, fear, frustration, struggles and suffering. They are about lines, applications and suspicions.

They mean some giving is down and other giving is overflowing as people care.

They mean waiting, often for someone else to make a decision. They mean waiting and giving voice. They mean waiting and praying. They mean waiting for God to break through like the sun forming a starburst through snowflakes.

Life seems topsy turvey. It's not about

Afghanistan or the deficit or health reform or jobs. They are interwoven, but those who talk about them act like we must choose one. That mentality comes out of a blindness to what is common sense to see: People are losing jobs because of rising health care costs. We are fighting a war that skyrockets our deficit—defeating most of us on the home front regardless of what happens on far-away battlefields. Unemployment creates more people willing to volunteer to go to war. The deficit is driven by the lack of health care reform.

Those who stake their ideological split between public and private often, like Congress, are on the taxpayer's payroll and benefit from government (public) health and retirement plans, plus private corporate contributions to sway their votes.

Empire traps people in power, inviting them to urge those out of power to blame themselves and expect to suffer. Jesus is not of empires that enslave. Jesus calls us

to wake up from our false arguments that keep us apart. Jesus calls us to love one another. Jesus came, comes and is coming to bring us truth and life. God cares. God hears our cries. God loves us.

Meanwhile, the message of Christmas may be lost in holiday-season worries about economic recovery. Actually, if we shop for lots of gifts, give generously and flow our money into the economy, we'll feed a recovery.

Into this mess of greed, empire, militarism, families out in the cold, God came, God comes, God is always coming and God is present. God is with us. We are not alone.

Are those just words? How are we putting flesh onto those words?

Some faithful folk are serving soup under the freeway or in a former parsonage. Some hand out thousands of pounds of food to thousands of people. Some host farmers' markets in church parking lots.

Some are teaching new and old generations to integrate human rights into their lives. Some keep alive hope, knowing that political and spiritual walls fall. Some inspire others through different styles of worship. Some share their stories to encourage each other. Some create educational opportunities here and abroad.

Some open their church doors to house homeless people. Some build low-cost homes with sweat equity. Some develop affordable housing.

Some knit and quilt. Some recycle clothing. Some employ teens silk screening T-shirts.

Some listen on the phone to an unemployed family members' worries about food, housing, children, flu and futures. Some question, trust, wait and pray.

In the midst of the hustle of the season, of time with family and friends, may we see God in our everyday stables.

Mary Stamp - Editor

## Death and loss may undermine confidence, but faith gives us eyes to see

I thought I knew what faith is. I thought I understood the true meaning of the classic definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Over the past 30 years, as my faith matured, I counseled others on faith, especially comforting friends and relatives who lost loved ones or to finding comfort when I lost my parents and younger brother at 51.

As a “born again” Catholic Christian, I confidently assured them and myself that, though we might not understand now, our loss wasn't permanent and “some day” we would be reunited with that loved one in God's presence. I thought that was faith. Now I know it wasn't.

When my wife Judy was suddenly taken from us after an excruciatingly brief illness, my confident assurance evaporated.

Everything happened so fast. In early June, she began feeling tired, short of breath and occasionally dizzy. A month or so earlier, she received a clean bill of health after her annual physical. She agreed to see a doctor again, but put it off, hoping to be with our daughter as she delivered her first child, our fifth grandchild. She finally made an appointment for June 15.

Our daughter went into labor early Sunday, June 14, and delivered Andre Steven just before 11 a.m. Judy drove her to the hospital and was in the delivery room.

As we were preparing to take our daughter and grandson out of the hospital, Judy and I went to her doctor's appointment. Blood tests indicated a major problem. Judy was immediately admitted.

That night, Monday, we learned the bad

news: leukemia. Two days later, on our 42nd wedding anniversary, we received worse news—not just leukemia, but acute lymphocytic leukemia, extremely rare in adults and so rare none of the doctors would discuss a prognosis.

We had faith, so we would beat it.

In the next 15 days, we never seriously discussed the possibility of death. The first round of chemo went well. We were in contact with the bone marrow transplant center to make initial intake arrangements.

Suddenly, Judy contracted a virulent infection. It blossomed into double pneumonia and in hours spread from her lungs to her blood. She became septic. Multiple organ failure followed. Between 8:30 p.m. July 2, when she was laughing, visiting with a friend and me, and 12:30 a.m., her blood pressure and blood oxygenation dropped. She was gasping for breath.

Despite heroic measures by nurses and doctors, she passed the next morning.

In the months since, there have been wonderfully gratifying events and evidence of how much Judy was loved.

More than 250 people participated in her Rosary. More than 450 attended her funeral mass. Hundreds of cards and expressions of sympathy. Thousands of dollars were contributed to funds in her name.

None of that has filled the void left by her loss, and I have no sense of her presence nor conviction she has passed on to a better place. Don't get me wrong, I believe she has. My head and all the teachings of my faith tell me she has, but I don't feel it. I don't have the same conviction or assurance for myself I so blithely passed on to

others regarding their losses.

All I have is faith and hope. Other than one powerful event, I have little of the “evidence of things not seen.”

Others have had more evidence of Judy's continued existence than I. A brother-in-law saw a presence standing beside me during Judy's funeral. A friend's daughter wrote that she dreamed of Judy, who said to tell us: “I am all right.” A grandson waved at my niece who was staying with us and when she waved back he said, “I'm not waving at you, I'm waving at grandma.” She asked, “Can you see her?” He said, “There's that white thing (beside you).”

What I have mostly had is a terrible aching loss at the core of my being, an actual physical pressure as if something was ripped out of me, and the only thing left is pain. It's not that I have lost my faith or my conviction of God's goodness. It's more like they have been buried beneath a load of loss and grief so heavy that nothing I can do can lift it.

I have been told by some who knew Judy well that I need to work on gratitude for having had the best of Judy for more than 40 years. They are right. We built a great marriage together and were more in love the day we parted than 42 years earlier when we naively walked up that aisle together.

Now all I have is the loss . . . and faith . . . and one powerful piece of “evidence of things hoped for.”

About 10 years ago, the class ring Judy bought for me when I graduated from college in 1969 went missing. I couldn't wear it constantly as it gave me eczema, so I only wore it on special occasions—weddings,

funerals, parties and graduations. After one event, I couldn't find it. I looked everywhere—in suit pockets, luggage, all our jewelry boxes. I was heartsick and told Judy about it. She was as usual gracious and just said it would turn up sometime.

A few weeks ago I was getting ready to attend a social event at Eastern, an event I would have worn my class ring to. I thought, why not look for it? Who knows what prompted me to make the effort.

A survey of my two jewelry boxes turned up only the usual cuff links, tie clasps, service pins and memorabilia.

In the third drawer of Judy's main jewelry box, there it was in plain sight—the ring.

If Judy had seen it, she would have triumphantly produced it. She knew how much it meant to me and how much its loss hurt. I can't believe she had not looked in that drawer many times.

I don't know where that ring had been hiding, but I have a theory about finding it. Maybe Judy led me to it to bolster my faith, to help me understand that things we think are lost forever may not be. We may find them again in God's time, not ours.

To help me realize that while right now I can't understand that we have not lost her, that she is still around, just not in any way I can at this time see and feel and know.

To help me keep the faith.

*Steve Blewett is journalism professor emeritus at Eastern Washington University and a lay minister in the Catholic Church. He and his wife shared many ministries in their life together. They served as lectors and hospitality ministers, hosting a Scripture study and prayer sharing group in their home for more than 20 years.*

Letter to the Editor

## Sounding Board

Worship Excerpts

**I was saddened to read** about the young man who traveled from Spokane to the West Bank with the Christian Peacemaker Team and came back with stories of stone throwing and harassment by extremist Israeli settlers. These extremists are not following the Judaism that calls for justice and righteousness; that admonishes all Jews to help repair this world.

I remain afraid that if power in Israel was switched, and Palestinians were in control, there would be a mass genocide of Jews, rather than stone throwing or harassment. That doesn't excuse what extremist settlers are doing, but I think we have to be careful not to jump to conclusions about Israel when we hear of acts by extremists.

This is not all of Israel behaving badly. Extremist settlers can be difficult to control. Just as in America, there are extremists that challenge the ability of a free society to control their behavior. The vast majority of Israeli people are as disgusted as we are.

Shirley Grossman - Spokane

## Interfaith Thanksgiving service focuses on compassion

**The Interfaith Council has been** going through rebirth. Birth is never easy. The council has developed a new mission statement, saying we celebrate the depth and wisdom of spiritual diversity, building community and supporting understanding among all ages and faiths.

**The Rev. Joe Niemiec**  
Center for Spiritual Living

**The best way to express** gratitude is through showing loving kindness.

Lazarina Topuzova - Baha'i

**The Charter for Compassion** written by Karen Armstrong says the principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. It calls all men and women to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion as “indispensible

to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.”

**The Rev. Clare Austen - Unity Church**

**What would it be like if everyone** focused on compassion. A prayer in our Buddhist tradition is: “How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and were free. May they have these. May I help cause them to be happy and free.” That expresses our potential to imagine that people can be free from suffering and that we have the capacity to help them.

For Buddhism, compassion is the mind imbued with the thought of freeing people from suffering. It's not just a wish, but a wish with an open human heart, recognizing we have the seeds and the capacity.

A monk, freed after being in prison 30 years after the Chinese takeover in Tibet, told of being beaten, tortured, losing his

family and seeing others die. Asked what his greatest fear had been, he said “that I would lose compassion for my captors.”

Compassion is the inability to close our eyes or turn away from involvement when we see a child hit or an elderly person fall. We have the capacity to help. The result will be our happiness and our freedom.

**Venerable Thubten Chonyi**  
Sravasti Abbey

**May our taut economic times** bring increase in spirituality....May we let laughter help us make peace as we savor a sense of humor.

**Ira Amstadter - Jewish community**

**Spiritual songs bring** the Spirit of God to help us commune and make places holy and renewed.

**Shane Ridley-Stevens**  
Native American community



# SNAP begins energy assistance program

Energy assistance funds are sufficient into January for clients of the Spokane Neighborhood Action Program, said Margaret Belote, energy program director.

"The need for energy assistance continues to be great," she said.

Margaret has learned that federal energy assistance has been raised to \$2,121,608. While Congress has not approved the Low Income

Home Energy Assistance Program appropriation, the additional dollars will keep the program going through the holidays.

SNAP accepts phone requests at 242-2376 for energy assistance from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Tuesdays and from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Thursdays, plus from 9 a.m. to 1

p.m., Saturday, Dec. 5. A few appointments are available at [www.snapwa.org](http://www.snapwa.org).

SNAP served nearly 3,700 households as of mid November. It has allocated more than \$847,000 to help Spokane County residents pay heating bills.

For information, call 456-7111.

## Shalom Minisries sets St. Lucy benefit

The second annual St. Lucy's Breakfast benefiting Shalom Minisries breakfasts and dinners for people living downtown will be held at 7:30 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 12, at the Cathedral of St. John, 127 E. 12th Ave.

"We celebrate St. Lucy for being the figurative 'light' and for references to how she gave to the poor," said Holly Chillinski, director of Shalom Ministries.

St. Lucy or St. Lucia, who lived from 283 to 304, was a wealthy young Christian martyr, venerated as a saint by both Catholic and Orthodox Christians, she said.

For information, call 838-1431.

## Christmas Fund goal is \$500,000

The 2009 Christmas Fund, a partnership of Volunteers of America, Catholic Charities Spokane and the Spokesman-Review seeks to raise \$500,000 to give toys, books and \$40 food vouchers to needy families.

Gifts to more than 30,000 will be given out Dec. 9 to 12 and Dec. 14 to 19 at the Christmas Bureau held in the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center.

For information, call 459-5453 or visit [spokesman.com/christmasfund](http://spokesman.com/christmasfund).

## Muslim sergeant speaks on Islam

Staff Sergeant Yusuf Webster, who is at Fort Lewis in Tacoma, will speak on "Understanding Islam and Muslims" at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 19, at the Spokane Islamic Center, 6411 E. Second Ave. The native of Virginia, he returned from his deployments to Iraq in August. He became Islam while in the military.

For information, call 482-2608.



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## Calendar of Events

- To Dec 12 • **Christmas Tree Elegance**, Spokane Symphony Associates, Davenport Hotel, 10 S. Post, daily 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., 458-8733
- To Dec 13 • **Tree of Sharing**, Valley, Northtown and Riverpark Square malls, Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ, 624-1366
- Dec 2 • **Fig Tree Distribution**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 9 a.m.
- Dec 3 • **Fig Tree Board**, Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 1 p.m.
- **Persian Music** by Mehran Madami, Washington State University Spokane Academic Center, Room 20, 600 N. Riverpoint, noon, 358-7978
- **Creches Display & Children's Choir Concert**, Corbin Senior Center, 827 W. Cleveland, 6 to 8:30 p.m., 327-1584
- **Journey to Bethlehem**, South Hill Seventh Day Adventist Church, 5607 S. Freya, 6 to 9 p.m., 448-6425
- **Cancer and Community Charities' Coeur d'Alers Christmas Concert**, Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 N. Ramsey, Coeur d'Alene, 7:30 p.m., 208-765-1002
- Dec 4-6 • **"No Room in the Inn,"** Spirit Center, Monastery of St. Gertrude, Cottonwood, Idaho, 208-962-2000
- Dec 5 • **Nativities from around the World** - A Celebration of Christ's Birth, Spokane Community Gospel Choir, Spokane Stake Center Latter-Day Saints Church, 1620 E. 29th, 7 p.m., 434-5042.
- **To All A Good Night Pajama Drive**, Little Garden Café, 2901 Northwest Blvd., 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 328-5500
- Dec 5-6 • **Sounds of Christmas Concert**, North Idaho College Boswell Hall Performing Arts Center, 1000 W. Garden, Coeur d'Alene, ID, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, 208-769-3424
- Dec 6 • **"The Bells: A Russian Holiday Story,"** Connoisseur Concerts, St. John's Cathedral, 127 E. 12th, 4 and 7 p.m., 326-4942
- **"Night of a Thousand Dinners,"** United Nations Association, St. Ann Catholic Church, 2120 E. 1st, 5 to 8:30 p.m., 624-3608
- **Heartsongs from the Edge of the World Concert** and Auction, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 5:30 p.m., 448-1311
- Dec 10-11 • **Singing Nuns Annual Christmas Concert**, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 2 and 7:30 p.m., 800-325-SEAT
- Dec 11-12 • **Whitworth Christmas Festival Concerts**, First Presbyterian, 318 S. Cedar, 8 p.m. Friday, 3 and 7 p.m. Saturday, 777-3280
- Dec 12 • **"God with Us in Our Humanity,"** Advent Retreat, The Ministry Institute, 405 E. Sinto, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. 313-5763
- **Winter Holiday Event** celebrating artist Ruben Trejo, Hispanic Business Professional Association, McCarthey Athletic Center Lobby, Gonzaga University, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., 370-4844
- Dec 13 • **Gonzaga Christmas Candlelight Concert**, St. Aloysius Church, 330 E. Boone, 8 p.m., 313-5896
- **Messiah Community Sing Along Concert**, First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar, 4 p.m., 747-1058
- **"Ave!: Celebrate & Rejoice,"** Convent of the Holy Names, 2911 W. Fort George Wright, 2 p.m., 326-9516 or [suzanne@hmc.org](mailto:suzanne@hmc.org)
- Dec 17 • **Serenity Retreat**, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 448-1224
- Dec 18 • **Posada**, Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral, 1115 W. Riverside, 7 p.m., 358-4290
- **"Blue Christmas,"** Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 7 p.m.
- Dec 18-19 • **"Commissioned: A Christmas Story,"** Paradosi Christian Ballet Company, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 7 to 8:30 p.m., 299-3054 or [mawewu@juno.com](mailto:mawewu@juno.com)
- Dec 18-20 • **The Nutcracker**, Ballet Memphis & Spokane Symphony, INB Performing Arts Center, 7:30 p.m. Friday, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, 800-325-SEAT
- Dec 19 • **"Traditions of Jewish Music,"** KPBX Kid's Concert, Bing Crosby Theater, 909 W. Sprague, 1 - 2 p.m., 328-5729
- **"Understanding Islam and Muslims,"** Sergeant Yusuf Webster, Spokane Islamic Center, 6411 E. Second, 1:30 p.m., 482-2608
- **Annual German Christmas Service**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 3 p.m., 747-6677
- Dec 20 • **"Celtic Yuletide,"** with An Dochas & Haran Dancers, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 3 p.m., 800-325-SEAT
- Dec 31 • **First Night Spokane**, visual and performing arts, downtown Spokane, 4 p.m. - midnight, 252-5027

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# Downtown church serves hot soup under freeway to homeless people

After cooking soup while an after-church meeting discussed and voted on its budget, several members put the kettles on a rolling cart and took it across the street to serve soup to homeless people in the parking lot under the freeway at Fourth and Washington in Spokane.

Even though they were protected from the rain, they could feel how cold and damp it is in that gathering place for homeless people.

As part of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week in November, the outreach board of Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ served about 25 people and then delivered the rest of the soup to the Volunteers of America Crosswalk program for street kids at Second and Howard, two blocks away.

"It's easy to walk by people who are homeless, but eight of us chose to intentionally stand in the parking lot under the freeway to serve soup," said the Rev. Marj Johnston, assistant pastor.

"We want to find ways to feed people physically and spiritually," she said.

Under the freeway and a few blocks to the East, another church was serving food for homeless people the same day, she said.

"There are many opportunities to help. It's not just churches. Sometimes groups of friends decide to make sandwiches and



The Rev. Marj Johnston, Gayle Schilling and Leroy Ashby take hot soup to people under freeway.

hand them out. People are clamoring for ways to do something," Marj said.

In early October, Westminster UCC held their annual "Manna" Concert, gathering in music groups to perform and raffling themed baskets to raise \$3,313 for Meals on Wheels Spokane.

Every time people come to church, they bring extra food

they buy when they shop and put it in one of two Second Harvest barrels in the foyer. Each month, Marj said they usually fill both barrels with food, which Second Harvest distributes to food banks in the region.

The church also serves a free lunch to 50 to 100 neighbors from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., on last Saturdays eight months of the

year. About 40 volunteers help with that program.

Committed to partnering with

other community efforts to address hunger and homelessness, Marj recently joined the board of Shalom Ministries which offers dining with dignity breakfasts and meals each week at Central United Methodist Church about four blocks away.

"We need to network people and organizations more so we can do more," she said, "because we struggle to act on the same issues to further our common ministries and the Gospel. Groups need to meet and do something more than just give money."

Marj, who worked with the Homeless Program of the Spokane Neighborhood Action Programs for three years before becoming assistant minister at Westminster, said: "We can never assume we know all we need to know about homelessness.

"We always have more to learn, because homeless people are real people with real lives who have real dreams and hopes for themselves," she said. "Our role is to accompany them to find the tools and resources they need to have the life they want to have."

For information, call 624-1366.

## Tree of Sharing trees give gift of gift giving

Now in its 28th year, the Tree of Sharing program has set up Christmas trees at River Park Square, Northtown and Spokane Valley Malls as opportunities for people to shop for Christmas gifts for needy people until Dec. 13.

Jon Louis, Tree of Sharing coordinator, said members of Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ cut labels describing gifts and stapled them to

the appropriate colored tags for 5,980 gift requests, down about 150 from last year.

"For me it was a moving experience seeing the humble requests and realizing that there was a story behind each one," he said. "It has also been moving to see the volunteers appearing, calling or emailing looking for opportunities to serve our community."

About 10 percent of the tags

were distributed to churches and organizations that have adopted the program as a mission.

"Over the past 10 years more than 60,000 gifts have been provided in the community through efforts of Tree of Sharing volunteers," Jon reported. "The value of these gifts approaches \$250,000."

For information, call 624-1366, 924-7073 or 328-7041.



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