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FEATURES 40+ EVENTS



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

# Pastor sees opportunities in chaos

By Mary Stamp

The Fig Tree is focusing a section on stories about how vaccinations are having impact on rural, urban and ethnic congregations, and on creative ways congregations have been responding in their settings. Full stories of each will be published at [thefigtree.org](http://thefigtree.org).

Benjamin Watson arrived as the new pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Spokane in September 2020 in the midst of the pandemic.

The building was shut down but open a few Sundays for him to meet some of the congregation, and then gatherings were on Zoom.

Recently he preached on “Cannot Be Business as Usual,” making the point that “God did not take us out of the church for 15 months to have us come back and do church as usual.”

“With God, some things change. In Methodism, we can be very methodical, so we need to continue to seek God as we come back. Ministry will never be ‘normal,’ as we have known normal. We are entering a new norm in this new season where God is doing a new thing as we emerge,



Pastor Benjamin Watson educates Bethel AME on ministry in and after COVID.

walking with God,” he said.

Benjamin reminded his congregation that after Jesus’ resurrection, he met the disciples in a room and then disappeared. Peter said, “Let’s go fishing.” The other disciples followed and went back to what they knew. They labored all night but caught nothing.

“Jesus came to them and said, ‘Hey fellas, got any fish?’ Then he told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat,” he said. “We must not become distracted by the old ways. We must trust God will guide us and expect an authentic move of God.”

So when vaccinations were being offered twice a month at the Martin Luther King Jr Center in East Central Spokane, Benjamin used worship, meetings and emails to educate people to help them overcome apprehensions they may have had about health care. Emmanuel Family Life Center and Bethel AME received a grant to do COVID vaccination education and testing.

He acknowledged that hesitations arise among Blacks leading to reluctance to take vaccinations, both because of history, such as syphilis “tests” that spread the

*Continued on page 4*

## Region’s camps, conference centers report on opening fully or partially

COVID has had an impact on the plans of various faith communities in the region on their summer camp programs and usage. Several articles in this issue cover the ever-changing dynamics around those plans, especially the decision to approve Pfizer vaccinations for 12 to 15 year olds.

Camp Lutherhaven is pivoting back to traditional summer youth camp this year with new opportunities for families and groups to enjoy all the faith-formative fun of summer camp.

“We’re especially thrilled to be back to some semblance of ‘normal,’” said Bob Baker, Lutherhaven’s executive director of 28 years, “because 2021 marks Lutherhaven’s 75th anniversary—three-quarters of a century welcoming kids, youth, families and churches from around the country,” he said.

Plans are in the works for an 75th anniversary family and friends celebration on Saturday, Sept. 25, with details to come.

“It’s incredible to think of the faith of six families who, in 1945, put up \$50 each to make

the down payment for this remarkable piece of Lake Coeur d’Alene property that has been ‘camp’ to thousands of kids from around the world,” said Bob. “There’s no way a Christian camp could even dream of walking in and buying property like this today.”

Lutherhaven has taken a regional and national lead in developing and communicating ever-changing COVID guidelines to fellow Christian camps.

“Camp directors have followed our lead,” he said, “because we draw campers from so many states and internationally. It means we can’t simply follow Idaho protocols, because what’s everyday practice in Idaho might seem foreign to a camper, family or group from another state.”

Lutherhaven Ministries is fully open this summer at all three of its North Idaho sites—Camp Lutherhaven, Shoshone Mountain Retreat and Ranch, and its new McPherson Meadows.

“We’re paying close attention to safety protocols for camps  
*Continued on page 10*

## Summer issue reports impact of COVID on faith communities, camps

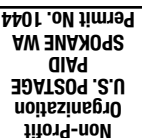
During April and May, The Fig Tree, with a grant from the Department of Health, interviewed rural, urban and ethnic congregations, nonprofit agencies and the region’s faith-based camp directors to discern what difference vaccinations are making in communities, ministries and camps. Many are back to in-person programs and report higher percentages of vaccinations among members than their overall communities.

Stories, which are what we do rather than just report generalities or statistics, are included not only in most pages of the summer issue but also will be online at [thefigtree.org](http://thefigtree.org), honoring that each of those interviewed shared unique insights from their settings. Many also sent photos.

“We recognize that the interviews were at a point in time and were reviewed and updated just before publication, but we also found pastors, lay people, camp staff and directors ready to adjust as changing dynamics of the pandemic emerge,” said Mary Stamp, editor. “That flexibility, adaptability and readiness to respond to emerging needs is a witness to how faith communities operate in general, contrary to the assumption that faith communities are set in their ways.”

Interviews, which were done by Marijke Fakasiieiki, development associate, Malcolm Haworth, directory editor, and Mary, gathered information not only on impacts within congregations but also on the outreach of congregations in their communities related to basic needs, services and advocacy.

For information, read articles in this issue and online at [www.thefigtree.org](http://www.thefigtree.org).



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## Religion News Briefs

### Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100  
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111  
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#### WCC leaders urge vaccinations and equity

Four World Council of Churches (WCC) leaders this spring called for churches to play a vital role guiding people to better health by informing them on vaccine hesitancy and advocating for equity in immunization. Their vaccination message is "Do to others, what you want them to do to you."

"It is good for the WCC to engage and for churches to commit to this," said Archbishop emeritus Anders Wejryd, president for Europe. "I don't want to be infected by COVID-19, and I don't want to bring it on to someone else. That is basic solidarity."

Isabel Apawo Phiri, deputy general secretary, said part of the WCC mission is to promote health and healing, because Jesus' mission included healing. The WCC helped establish national Christian health associations in several countries, especially in Africa, to promote ecumenical cooperation in health service delivery among different churches.

Mwai Makoka, program executive for Health and Healing, listed four interventions for churches: health education, practical actions, creation care and public advocacy.

WCC acting general secretary Ioan Sauca encourages all religious leaders to support vaccination programs: "We must do all we can to protect people from COVID-19 and other fatal diseases. It is our duty to exercise the influence trusted upon us, beyond the pulpits in our local churches."

#### Executive Committee prays for Holy Land

In its May 17 to 20 video-conference meeting, the WCC executive committee live-streamed a prayer for the Holy Land on May 20. Its members were appalled by the suffering inflicted by hostilities there: "We convey to churches and people of the region our close accompaniment in prayer and in solidarity with all who have lost loved ones, been injured, suffered harm and fear because of the violence and destruction. We renew our prayer that God will bring compassion and wisdom into the hearts and minds of those responsible for the violence, and healing and consolation to the victims of their confrontation."

#### WCC letter urges UN role in ceasefire

In a letter to the United Nations Security Council, the WCC welcomed the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, and urged the UN to take an assertive role to monitor and maintain it. The WCC laments the "toll in civilian lives, especially children and women," and the destruction of schools, hospitals and a media building. The WCC has long sought peace between the people of the region, recognizing the equal human dignity and rights of all people regardless of national, ethnic or religious identity.

#### WCC committee sets tone of hope for future

The WCC executive committee, meeting May 17 to 20, set a tone of hope for the future while addressing multiple global crises with statements, pastoral messages and calls for prayer. While the transition to online programming and prayers during COVID-19 has been a challenge, Agnes Abuom, moderator of the central committee, said the WCC's prayers and assistance continue uninterrupted.

In a public statement, they urged the world to come together to "Overcome Global Injustice and Inequity, to Defeat the Global COVID-19 Pandemic." They call all with the power to address the injustice and inequity revealed by the pandemic, to exercise leadership and act together to ensure broad, rapid, equitable and affordable distribution of therapeutics and vaccines: "Since the supply of vaccines is insufficient to meet the global need, and is concentrated in countries able to pay a premium, we call for a temporary waiver of patents and intellectual property rights, to remove an obstacle to increased manufacturing and supply, especially in marginalized countries excluded from adequate supply of vaccines."

The WCC also received updates on Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Myanmar. It joined other faith-based and humanitarian groups signing a Global Civil Society Statement on Myanmar urging the UN Security Council to impose a comprehensive global arms embargo to prevent further violations of human rights.

## REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

### Resource Directory to be published in July

The annual Resource Directory will be printed and ready for distribution by June 30.

The guide includes 208 pages listing faith communities, ministries, human services, family programs, health care, senior

programs, justice action, environmental groups, arts and culture, and civic organizations.

Faith communities, nonprofits, service organizations, government programs and others may request copies so they

receive them by mail or bulk delivery. Copies will also be distributed at various grocery stores throughout the region and at other locations.

For information, call 535-1813 or email mary@thefigtree.org.

### Faith Action Network summit is June 6

A Faith Action Network (FAN) 2021 Spring Summit will be held from 2 to 4 p.m., Sunday, June 6, for people across the state to gather to celebrate wins in this year's legislative session and plan for next year. There will be break-

out groups by region and issues.

"Through this legislative session, faith communities in our region and across the state took their beliefs and values beyond words to make lasting policy change through our legislature,"

said Lauren Schubring, FAN's Eastern Washington organizer.

To participate June 6, visit bit.ly/2021SummitJune.

For information, call 313-719-8150 or email schubring@FANWA.org.

### AAPI celebration is planned on June 12

Spokane's Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) residents will celebrate AAPI Heritage Month, sharing information on history, culture and arts from

11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, June 12, at the Centerplace West Lawn Plaza, 2426 N Discovery Pl. There will be an art show, performances, more than 50

vendors, free children's activities and an island-style food truck.

For information, call 928-9664 or email charitydoyl@yahoo.com.

### Unity in the Community will be in person

Unity in the Community organizers plan an in-person event from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 21, at Riverfront Park.

There may be fewer vendors but community support is strong, said April Anderson, co-chair with Mareesa Henderson.

The 27th annual Unity in the Community includes a Career, Education and Health Fair, a Cultural Village, a Senior Resource Area, General Vendors, live en-

tertainment, activities for all ages.

As the region's largest multicultural celebration, it seeks to expand cultural awareness in the Inland Northwest, said April.

"We are excited to celebrate our diverse community, connecting resources and sharing a common goal of diversity, inclusion and equity," said April, who said the event relies on volunteers.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church started it in

1984 at Liberty Park to bring people together to break down racial and cultural barriers. AH-ANA planned it from 2004 until 2014, when April and Mareesa became chairs of NW Unity as an independent nonprofit.

New sponsors are Spokane NAACP, Washington Health Plan Finder and Premera.

For information, email nwunity@icloud.com or visit nwunity.org.

### Fall Folk Festival invites performers

Organizers of the 26th Annual Fall Folk Festival Nov. 13 and 14 said applications for musicians, dancers and storytellers are available online and due July 1.

The 2021 festival of the Spokane Folklore Society, held at The Lair at Spokane Community

College, promotes the preservation and appreciation of folk music and cultural traditions in the Inland Northwest.

It draws more than 6,000 people a year with 300 performers.

"We do not know what guidelines will be for gatherings in the

fall. We hope to host a live festival," said festival chair Sylvia Gobel, "but if necessary, will do a virtual festival.

For information, call 828-3683 or email director@spokanefolkfestival.org or visit spokanefolkfestival.org.

### Faith Leaders plan short story contest

Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience of Eastern Washington and North Idaho (FLLC) invites sixth grade to adult short story writers to enter its first Short Story Contest, "Brilliant Blunders that Left a Mark."

Stories are to express the struggle humans have with admitting blunders, mistakes and snafus, and the transformation when

people reveal their imperfections, said Gen Heywood, FLLC convenor. Stories, which may be fiction or nonfiction, are due Sept. 3.

Gen said FLLC's next Vigil for the Healing of the Earth will be from 3 to 5 p.m., Sunday,

Oct. 3, at Cataldo's Old Mission in Idaho. Participants will hear from affected people and learn how they can effect change.

For information, email FLL-Conscience@gmail.com.

### Retreat center will reopen

Immaculate Heart Retreat Center reopens in August 2021 after being a temporary COVID-19 Isolation Center operated with the Spokane Regional Health District and Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington,

said Michael Pallardy, develop. The center, at 6910 S. Ben Burr Rd., offers people opportunities for spiritual growth.

For information, call 448-1224 ext. 105 or email development@ihrc.net.

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# Habitat panel delves into home ownership as key to housing people

Betsy Wilkerson of the Spokane City Council, Vange Ocasio Hochheimer of the Whitworth economics department and Ezra Eckhardt, CEO of STCU, emphasized the power of home ownership as key to ending homelessness in a panel discussion for the April 29 Habitat for Humanity-Spokane Hope Builders Virtual Lunch-in.

**Habitat-Spokane CEO Michelle Girardot** moderated their discussion on affordable housing and homelessness in the context of the solution Habitat offers by stabilizing families through affordable home ownership.

Habitat raised about \$100,000 of its goal of \$150,000 and continues to receive donations.

Vange, an associate professor of economics, said “housing is a social determinant of health. A lack of affordable housing brings a host of other issues. Housing is a human right, essential to human dignity.”

Now at STCU three years, Ezra grew up in Spokane and has seen the community evolve.

“**Housing is critical** infrastructure in society,” he said. “I’m glad to be part of the solution and open doors to home ownership.”

Michelle said housing instability exacerbates exposure to deadly viruses and results in disparities among neighborhoods.

For Betsy, zoning has not kept pace with growth. She suggested the city work with developers so everyone has a home.

“**We can’t operate in a silo** mentality. No one entity will solve the housing crisis. Developers, financiers and government need to work together,” she said. “The city passing initiative 1590 is a start on the path. Zoning can be a barrier and add costs



**Michelle Girardot and Vange Ocasio Hochheimer, top, and Ezra Eckhardt and Betsy, bottom, discuss housing issues.**  
Screenshot courtesy of Habitat-Spokane

that limit housing. Habitat built more than 50 homes in East Central Spokane. In the hot housing market, we need to do things in a different way or we will not have the outcome we seek.”

**Affordability for home buyers** has gone down, bouncing with the lack of rental units, said Vange.

“In the pandemic, infections spread more in extended families living together, and among homeless youth and racial minorities. Spokane has seen an increase in homeless youth,” she said. “In school, homeless students perform poorly. Housing determines health. We tend to blame homeless people for their housing problem. We need the homeless to be at the table to tell their stories.”

**Ezra said home should be** a safe place for children. Family isolation has been a problem in the pandemic. Families need the security of a home. Habitat is part of the solution.”

Over 35 years in Spokane, Habitat built 350 homes, helping people move out of homelessness, said Michelle, inviting panelists to share their concerns.

**Betsy knows how important** a home is. She and her two chil-

dren were homeless for a while, until she became a home owner through a government HUD program that allowed her to put down just \$1,000.

“That changed the trajectory of my life and my children’s lives,” she said, citing the Sheridan Elementary School principal, saying his students need homes. “Affordability is the issue. Low down payments help. Government has a role. We should not leave it to the private sector. Home ownership requires capital, education and additional support.”

**Vange experienced** homelessness when she was 14 after being evicted with her mother and seven siblings. She moved in with a neighbor, and then found a job so she could rent a room in Queens in New York City.

“Now I have a doctoral degree in economics. Some see someone who is homeless and think it’s from drug use or risky behavior,” she said. “It’s the other way. Poverty and homelessness happen first. As a result, people lack food and self-medicate.

“Some wonder why they should help an addicted person get into a house, but homelessness happens

land bank with empty spaces and vacant lots.

Along with putting faces on the housing crisis to build solutions, she said there is need for new forms of home financing.

**Ezra said solutions require** predictability that comes from coordination of government and private entities. As part of a unified, sustainable process to tackle problems, he includes support of homeowner and offering new options, such as structuring payments for 40 year loans.

“Habitat is creative in finding ways to assure that lower payments play into access and knowledge for first time home owners. Interest needs to start low and be locked in,” he said.

**Michelle said access** to housing means access to affordable home ownership.

Habitat fills a space, helping families buy homes with sweat equity, learning about home ownership to dispel their fears of home ownership, Betsy said.

Vange said housing is a public good, a necessity like food. Everyone has the right to a safe place to live. It’s a right, not a privilege. Housing has a positive impact. It increases graduation rates, and reduces emergency room visits and mental health struggles.

Ezra said people want to improve their lives. If a family has a safe place, he believes parents create a nurturing environment.

“When they have a stable foundation, the community roots out poverty and tackles underlying problems so the community can be strong,” he said.

“Home is where the heart is,” said Michelle, “and the heart needs a roof over it.”

For information, call 534-2552 or visit habitat-spokane.org.

## Meals on Wheels will upgrade its kitchen

Meals on Wheels Spokane will enhance services for seniors by having its meals produced internally in its own kitchen.

This change will improve menus and efficiency, increase partnering and save costs.

They are joining GiveBigWA to raise funds to acquire equip-

ment to produce and freeze up to 1,000 meals a day. The equipment will allow MOW Spokane to continually add seniors and eliminate having clients on a waiting list.

The equipment includes a convection oven, sealer and chill blast freezer.

Partnership with local non-

profits will make it available as a resource for other organizations fighting food insecurity.

The plan will reduce the average cost per client, allowing for expanding services.

For information, call 456-6597 or email info@mowspokane.org.

## Habitat Blitz Build will be June 7 to 18

Habitat for Humanity Spokane has been “Blitz Building” for 20 years, drawing more than 1,000 volunteers each year. The 2021 Blitz Build is June 7 to 18.

Lydia Duffy, chief development officer, invites Women of Habitat to put on hard hats and

join in three shifts for women. Those shifts are afternoon on Wednesday, June 9, morning on Monday June 14 and afternoon on Thursday, June 17

At all the shifts, 20 volunteers will help frame two homes.

“At a Blitz Build, professional

builders, sponsor groups and volunteers work side-by-side with families to build safe, healthy and affordable homes and communities,” Lydia said. “It is time to safely swing hammers again.”

For information, call 999-7141 or visit habitat-spokane.org.

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# Pastor educates people to trust God, love neighbors, vaccinate to gather

*Continued from page 1*  
 disease among men at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and because of the ongoing disparities many experience in health care.

“We encouraged everyone to take a vaccination shot, especially our seniors. We don’t ask who has been vaccinated, but I know a large number have been vaccinated,” Benjamin said.

**Here’s what he tells people:**

- “First, I share that we trust God in everything. People with high blood pressure and diabetes are helped by taking medicine. They trust that will happen, so they take it.

- “Second, we are to love God with all our hearts, minds and souls, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Being vaccinated is a way to protect our neighbors and ourselves from getting COVID.

- “Third, we cannot open up the community yet. If we want to come to a new norm, we need to do our part and get vaccinated,” he said.

**Benjamin is pleased** that young people waited for their time and when appointments opened up for them, they went to be vaccinated.

“I’ve also been pleased by the spirit of everyone doing their part when vaccinations came available, including taking seniors to the clinics,” he said.

For Easter—Resurrection Sunday—on the first Sunday of April, the congregation was back in the building to worship—with masking and social distancing.

In mid-May, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) said for those who are fully vaccinated mask wearing is optional.

“I took the shot, because I didn’t want to wear a mask all my life,” Benjamin said. “The CDC said it’s safe for fully vaccinated people. Some who are vaccinated may continue wearing masks, but I share with the congregation that if they are not vaccinated please continue to wear a mask, and we will continue to encourage them to get vaccinated.”

Benjamin pointed out that Bethel AME is part of a campus that includes the Richard Allen Apartments and Emmanuel

Family Life Center.

It also works hand in hand with other churches of color and the Martin Luther King Jr Center, which together have reached the wider African American community with education.

**When Bethel AME’s building** was closed, it held its worship service on Zoom. Now that it offers worship at the church, it no longer offers Zoom. Instead services are being offered livestream as they were before COVID.

“My children who live on the East Coast and in Texas could log on to our service after their services. Local people who would not step into a church can come,” he said.

Some meetings are still on Zoom for convenience, Benjamin said. Church Conferences are for all members. We meet at 5:30 p.m. just after many are off work, so those people can attend from home on Zoom. Men’s and women’s meetings that are smaller groups are meeting at the church.

He also found that Zoom church meant anyone working out of town or staying home sick could participate.

“It’s also a convenience with gas prices going up,” he said.

**Benjamin grew up** in Big Springs, Texas, the seventh member of his family to be an African Methodist Episcopal pastor. His grandfather was the first.

After school, he served in the Navy until 1991 and then worked with the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Big Springs. He began ministry nearly 29 years ago, driving three hours one way to serve his first church in Crowell, Texas.

Working with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, he was “bi-vocational.” When he transferred with that work to Denver, he was assistant pastor at the AME church there. Then he served the AME Church in Casper, beginning in 1996, commuting from Denver.

One day in 1996 when he was commuting to work, there were 36 inches of snow in Denver. Snow was piled on the sidewalk.

Seeing a blind man with a cane, he wondered how the man would get over the mound of

snow. The man came to the embankment and walked over it, his stick hitting a light pole on the other side. He walked around it.

Benjamin said he audibly heard a voice say, “If I can take him who can’t see over and around obstacles, what can I do with someone who can see?”

Tears streamed down his face as he drove to his job. He gave two-weeks’ notice to focus on ministry.

“**The church in Casper** was thriving and growing, but I had only been in the community Saturday evening and Sunday morning. I moved there and went from earning \$60,000 a year to \$12,000 a year full time at the church, but we were never hungry and never hurt.”

In 2000, Benjamin moved to Cheyenne to serve a church and came back then to Denver as pastor of the church he previously served. He then returned to Cheyenne, where he served until coming to Spokane.

At Bethel AME in Spokane, his wife Debbie ministers with him as an evangelist, which he said is important, because she

can better address issues women in the church face than he can.

Benjamin appreciates the generosity he sees in Spokane with the abundance of food banks and groups donating food. Working in maintenance with Richard Allen Apartments, he sees people bring boxes of food to give to people there and in the neighborhood.

**He also sees the struggles** of people who live there, so he applied for and received grant funds to provide rental assistance.

“When businesses shut down, people lost jobs and lacked income to buy food,” he said. “They also lacked income to pay rent.”

**As part of a sermon** on “Opportunities in the Chaos,” Benjamin shared three points: “shed unnecessary excess, shape the place you call home and rediscover intimacy with God.

“The opportunities we have had in the chaos have helped us

learn that we can live on less, share with others and reengage with our families,” he said.

“Often in our hustle and bustle of rushing in and out of the house, we did not know who our family was. It’s a time to rediscover our relationship with our families, our church, our community and our God.”

For information, call 307-253-8436 or email [bethelpastor645@gmail.com](mailto:bethelpastor645@gmail.com).

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## Talk to your teen about the COVID-19 vaccine.



### Why vaccinate?

Even if teens are asymptomatic, they can spread the virus to others. Vaccination keeps everyone safe.



### What to expect

Side effects like arm soreness and fatigue tend to be mild. Teens under 18 must be accompanied by an adult, and it’s vital to receive both doses.

### When to schedule

Schedule the COVID vaccine at least 14 days after any other vaccinations (wellness, sports, etc.).



### What’s next?


Teens should still plan to wear masks when in groups but can see vaccinated friends and family members without a mask or social distancing. Hugs all around!



[coronavirus.wa.gov](http://coronavirus.wa.gov)

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# As more people are vaccinated more faith communities open up

COVID vaccinations make a difference in rural, urban and ethnic congregations and faith communities.

In mid-May, nearly 50 pastors across the region answered questions about the percent of their congregations and communities who are vaccinated, attitudes about vaccinations and what difference it makes for members to be vaccinated.

The pastors interviewed said that a higher percentage of their members—which they estimated to be 50 to 100 percent—were vaccinated than were people in their communities.

Those with many older members gave a higher percentage because they were able to have vaccinations earlier.

**Wesley Howell, pastor of Trinity Lutheran in Pullman,** estimated that 80 percent were vaccinated or are in the process, noting that most members are 60 and older and many are in health care on front lines or vaccinating people so more can be vaccinated.

**Patty Heath of St. Paul Lutheran in Colville** reported when interviewed in mid-May that at least 50 percent of the congregation were vaccinated, while Stevens County was at about 35 percent.

**Marilyn Wilder, pastor of Trinity Episcopal Church in Oroville,** said that “close to 100 percent in our church are participating in services. Most who have been vaccinated are happy and feel free, while others think they won’t get it no matter what. It’s a safety factor that goes along with the freedom factor.”

**Eric Peterson, pastor of Colbert Presbyterian Church,** sees a similar disparity: “I’d guess upwards of 90 percent of the congregation is vaccinated now and something around 50 to 60 percent of the general community. There are to my knowledge no anti-vaxxers in the congregation, but there certainly are some in the community.”

Colbert Presbyterian has some medical professionals—nurses and doctors—to consult with as the church developed protocols and as members have questions.

**Jeff Milsten, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran in Dayton** and of **Pomeroy Congregational,** reported: “In both churches most everyone attending is vaccinated, but I have not asked. We go on trust. I know that some people who are not attending said they are not getting vaccinated.”

While some pastors and congregations are hesitant to ask, others were in communication with their parishioners.

Those with few members knew 100 percent were vaccinated. Some took polls.

**Westminster Congregational**



Holy Temple Church of God in Christ members give praise.

**United Church of Christ** did an anonymous poll on Zoom and learned that 97 percent of those attending were fully vaccinated. On May 23, members began in person worship.

With almost all of the 45 members over 60, **Ed McBride, pastor at Colfax United Methodist Church (UMC)** figured 90 percent were vaccinated.

“I know a few people have chosen not to, but most have, as the older group was second in line after health care workers,” he said. “In Colfax, the vast majority are getting vaccinated.”

**Congregations are educating** members various ways—sending information from their regional denominations, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and their county health department.

“Many people know and understand. We have pretty well-educated and well-informed folks,” said **Michelle Mitchell, pastor of Harrington UMC,** where she guessed 50 percent are vaccinated in contrast to 29 percent in the county.

“They realize with vaccinations, a percentage of people may still get sick, but they feel they don’t have to be as concerned,” she said. “One woman who needed the vaccine to see her mother. It made a difference.”

With limited doses there, few under 18 were vaccinated.

**Ron Short, pastor of Pilgrim Lutheran Church,** said most people in **Othello** want to get vaccinated, but there are few anti-vaxxers.

“Two church members who are on the hospital board encourage people to get vaccinated,” he said.

**Father Michael Savelesky** who serves **Holy Rosary Parish in Rosalia** and **Our Lady of Perpetual Help in St. John,** said, “Attitudes vary. In a small community, it’s important not to raise divisive issues, but to have tolerance of people’s ideas.”

With few gatherings, there has been little public discussion.

“As pastor I have kept abreast of Catholic Church’s understanding on vaccination, and have sent parishioners home

with documentation, including Spokane Bishop Thomas Daly’s letter, Moral Guidance on COVID-19 Vaccines, which is at [dioceseofspokane.org](http://dioceseofspokane.org).

The bishop considers the distribution of vaccines “an occasion of hope for many people.” Because of concern spread that a cell line from a past abortion may have been involved in creating two vaccines, he made three points: “1) We may morally receive the currently available vaccines. 2) We are not morally obligated to take the vaccine. 3) We should take this opportunity to advocate for more ethical research and pharmaceutical development.”

The bishop also expressed concern that COVID has “engendered resentment and division in our society and even within the Body of Christ.” Given that “we are morally free to make choices, we ought not allow our differing responses to the demands of these times be occasions for division.”

**Julie Reinholz, pastor of Pioneer UMC in Walla Walla,** reported that the city and county vaccinated at the county fairgrounds near the church. They added two more sites. Pharmacies, doctors’ offices and mobile clinics began offering vaccinations.

“Nurses in the church have shown videos during worship, and spoken to the positive effects and goodness of getting vaccines,” she said. “We have had newsletter articles, links to those articles and weekly emails with CDC information and testimonies of doctors. Health folks in the congregation have shared the education.”

**One church set up a site** for vaccinations in their church.

**Katherine Tuttle, pastor of Wilbur Community Church,** said, “We have been a vaccine site. We partnered with Lincoln County Health twice to be a vaccine site for first responders. We felt proud to participate. Our fellowship hall was not being used. It is spacious, clean, sanitary, socially distanced, climate controlled and regularly cleaned by our sanitation team.”

The church offered education events when a nurse from the county hospital came to answer questions people had in a judgement-free way, Katherine said.

**Another pastor** said the church is across the street from the health clinic, and the community has access to a local hospital.

**Michelle at Harrington** said her church has three health professionals—a nurse practitioner, a pharmacist and physical therapist—who have helped members understand what is going on.

“They helped us stay safe, doing Zoom services. As things opened, the Greater Northwest UMC Conference gave us protocols to open up,” she said. “A few people asked us to do what the denomination and governor stated and posted when it was okay to open up with distancing and masks. One woman, in preparation for opening up, put tape every six feet. At first, there was some reluctance, but following health department guidance, members jumped in so we could be ready for people to come back.”

**For several pastors,** education was part of pastoral care.

**First Congregational United Church of Christ in Walla Walla** has a Reopening with Care Task Force to help guide decision-making, said the pastor, **Nathaniel Mahlberg.** “We have a doctor and a nurse to help us be objective in our assessments. We did not make assumptions and just have anecdotal evidence on whether members are vaccinated.”

Some members helped others with no computer or having difficulty navigating how to sign up.

“For the most part, our people trust data-driven medical science and were overjoyed when vaccines were deemed safe and

available,” he said. “Some volunteered at vaccination clinics, seeing it as a public service to promote community wellness.”

“Our education has been more one-on-one between pastor and member. Some were nervous, so we talked them through that. A few were reluctant, so we talked with them,” Nathaniel said. “Understanding the science behind the vaccinations is reassuring, so is knowing that medical professionals who developed the vaccines asked the right questions.”

**Pastors report** that people have told them they feel better to be vaccinated.

**Jeff Milsten, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran in Dayton** and **Pomeroy Congregation,** explained, “When I’ve been challenged, I’ve said vaccination is positive and a personal choice. I want it for myself and for my children, so I don’t have to worry.”

“For my congregations, if everyone is vaccinated, we won’t have to wear masks,” he said. “We can start doing things we previously enjoyed.”

**Stacey Friedlein,** pastor at **Zion Lutheran in Davenport** and **Christ Lutheran in Egypt,** said: “It makes a huge difference in feeling comfortable about safety. It is important to do to get back to some sense of normalcy.”

**Most in American Lutheran Church at Newport** “shed tears of gratitude and hope to be able to be together again,” said **Janine Goodrich,** pastor. “A few are afraid, but the overwhelming majority is grateful.”

“Because vaccines reduce fear, we can visit places and can visit each other. There is hope because we can be together without being afraid,” she said.



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# Rural church has rethought and restructured how it does ministry

COVID has led Wilbur Community Church not only to grow emotionally and spiritually but also to move from its food-based fellowship and outreach.

Katherine Tuttle, the pastor, said church leaders have been intentional about working on listening skills and staying calm during this anxious time.

**The church has been** rethinking and restructuring how it does ministry, since it shut down in person worship last spring.

“Now we are doing in-person worship, it’s not the same as before,” Katherine said. “We are now thinking of our mission and identity, which is different than before COVID. They used to be huggy and hands on.”

The church started a monthly online book club, even though everyone was vaccinated, because they like the online format.

**In the community,** the church is partnering with Lincoln County Help Rural Resource Victim Advocates to work with women who face domestic violence and abuse. They are also reaching out to the local school.

Previously, the church held large food-based group events that drew crowds. There were several potlucks a month, food and coffee after worship services.



Wilbur church replaced food-based fundraising with new ideas. Photo courtesy of Wilbur Community Church

“We stopped most of the food-based ministry, except for the food pantry,” Katherine said

The church celebrated Shrove Tuesday with pancakes, held salad luncheons to help people in need and hosted spaghetti feeds after fires to raise money for families.

“What could we do besides food? We decided to do an outdoor rummage sale, with people distanced,” she said.

When a young man in the congregation needed a kidney transplant, members ordered yard signs that said, “We Love Cole.” They set them up outside by a table, and people made donations to put a sign in their yard.

“Typically we would have done

a luncheon, but this was a hit,” she said, “The entire town could support his operation. We are continually rethinking how to raise funds respectful of people’s safety and limitations in the pandemic.”

**Wilbur Community Church** partnered with Lincoln County Health twice as a vaccination site for first responders. The church offered its large fellowship hall, which has space for people to be distanced. The room is climate controlled, and a sanitation team comes through regularly.

A nurse from the county hospital came to answer questions in a non-judgement way, she said.

Katherine said Lincoln County Health later set up a mass vaccination site in the school for

people 65 and older. Speakers told of risks and benefits.

Katherine has not asked members if they are vaccinated, but saw many church members there.

“We share information grounded in scientific understanding, informing people where to go, what the vaccine is and why it is important,” she said. “We have a good vaccine rate in the area.”

She checks Lincoln County stats regularly, and found 38 percent of those 18 and older are fully vaccinated, while 64 percent of those 65 and older are fully vaccinated.

**Katherine said the church is** handling the variety of attitudes in a loving and respectful way, while providing people with accurate information from trusted resources such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC), County Health and medical professionals in the community.

She knows there is no convincing vaccine deniers, but some on the fence have been persuaded. Meanwhile the majority feel it’s good for them and the community, she said.

Having more people vaccinated has reduced the anxiety level about in-person worship. The church requires face masks

and social distancing for vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Some will come back when they are vaccinated, she said.

**More people are coming** because they know they are vaccinated and others are, too, reducing anxiety about safety, Katherine said.

“In our reviewing, we learned we had a hole in outreach to homebound members, so we’ll fill that gap after the pandemic,” she said. “We have a stronger online presence and continue that because we have had feedback that people feel closer to the church because of the online choices. The pandemic took us out of our comfort zones to use technology.”

“We also pushed in-home spirituality,” said Katherine, who preaches and teaches about care for self, family and neighbor, and doing more than just Sunday morning worship as the center piece of faith life.

In Lent, the church offered six weeks of online contemplative prayer with an online video series.

“We have seen how spiritual practices in members’ homes reduce stress and connect to communal life,” Katherine said.

For information, call 647-5781 or email wilburuniting@gmail.com.

## Latinos En Spokane has started market, opened an office, offers tech and consulting

Latinos En Spokane started El Mercado Market, an outdoor market offering fresh cultural foods, household cleaning supplies, COVID resources and vendors from the Latino and immigrant community.

It also addresses health disparities to shape equitable, accessible distribution of COVID resources for Latino and immigrant people, and it offers relief for people in the Hispanic community who lost jobs in COVID.

At El Mercado Market people can “shop” for free fresh food from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., last Saturdays at Cannon Park, said Angie Zepeda, program manager of Latinos En Spokane.

Vendors wear masks and gloves, and distance as they place food in shopping bags and boxes. Tortillas, beans, rice, peppers, mushrooms and other fresh produce are available.

Melissa Stipekk, El Mercado’s manager, helped start the project. Market booths include Latino and immigrant cultural vendors, the YWCA, Stand for Children and a vaccination clinic.

At Latinos en Spokane’s first

free vaccination clinic with The Native Project, more than 400 people were vaccinated. With more than 700 now vaccinated at six clinics, Latinos en Spokane motivates people to get vaccinated, informing them how important it is, given that the Latino and immigrant community is heavily affected in the pandemic, said Angie.

Some hesitate thinking they have to pay or being concerned by rumors spread on social media, she noted. Despite that, many Latinos want to be vaccinated now, because they need it for jobs or for travel.

Latinos En Spokane, which opened its new office in May at 1502 N. Monroe, offers services from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesdays to Fridays and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturdays.

Jennyfer Mesa, director, said it supports Spokane County’s Latino population with community events, workshops, activism, and partnering with local organizations and service providers.

It seeks to strengthen Latino immigrant families, community members, leaders, businesses

and organizations.

It has a tech corner, where people can access computers and advice on insurance, tenant, legal and immigration matters.

Latinos En Spokane also has four CHW/Community Comadres working with families to provide wraparound social services and COVID support.

For information, call 558-9359 or email info@latinosenspokane.org.



Latinos En Spokane started El Mercado outdoor market.



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## Pastor is gratified to see how God is working through the pandemic

Don Short, pastor at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Othello, said one church group COVID had impact on was the women who met to make 300 quilts a year.

They would donate quilts to the local fire fighters for their annual Christmas basket program.

“We have done things differently,” he said. “Instead, the fire fighters asked for donations.”

“Members prepared personal care kits in response to a plea from Lutheran World Relief (LWR). They collected care kits in the past, but never to this scale. The congregation has been extremely generous,” he said. “We also collected a special offering for LWR’s work to mitigate effects of COVID-19 overseas.”

“God didn’t take time off for COVID. It has been gratifying to see how God has been working



**On April 25, Pilgrim Lutheran blessed 142 personal care kits they prepared during Lent for Lutheran World Relief.**

Photo courtesy of Pilgrim Lutheran Church

through the pandemic,” he said. “Our people and the whole community have coming together to provide what they need.”

The church took advantage of technology and put their services on YouTube and Facebook.

They just launched a new dinner at the church, “when COVID shut us down,” Don said. “The Holy Spirit said, ‘Not right now.’

He estimates 60 to 70 percent of the congregation is vaccinated, more than in the community.

“Generally, people in Othello are favorable about getting vaccinated,” he said.

Two church members on the Othello Community Hospital board have been strongly encouraging people to get vaccinated.

“We’ve been following state guidelines, keeping track of what it allows for service attendance and fellowship, reintroducing fellowship and in-person worship. Those attending worship are not getting COVID, but we have less worry. We are still wearing masks in worship,” Don said.

Food security issues have been important. The church ran a food drive in January to gather food for the local food pantry.

“It was successful because people knew staples were in short supply in the grocery store,” Don said. “Not everyone in Othello has

access to government assistance. There have been gaps so people need extra assistance.”

The ministerial group keeps track of who needs what and provides people what they need.

“We weren’t using electronic media before COVID. Now we’ve spent money to ensure technology is adequate, upgrading when necessary so live streaming is available every week,” he said.

In Northwest Intermountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mary Morrow, director of evangelical mission, asked “what resources we needed and shared resources with us.” Don said: “With God’s help, we have all we need.”

For information, call 488-9952 or email pilgrimlutheran@hotmail.com.

## Two rural Lutheran churches found that 150 to 200 joined by livestreaming

Once COVID hit, Lutheran churches in Davenport and Egypt were only unable to do in-person worship for six weeks and began livestreaming worship then, said Stacey Friedlein, pastor of Zion Lutheran in Davenport and Christ Lutheran in Egypt.

They discovered that 150 to 200 people joined by livestreaming. Even when the churches were back to in person worship, they continued to livestream, because they can reach more people than they could before COVID. “That is great for our rural churches,” he said.

Stacey estimates that 90 percent at Egypt are vaccinated, because the youngest members are in their 50s. At Zion, about 50 percent are. He finds few people resist vaccinations.

“People realize it is something we have to do to get back to a normal life. Most people think it’s good to be vaccinated,” he said.

A county health nurse, who is in the congregation, has been “a good guide for us to find a vaccination site and be informed about what is going on,” Stacey said, adding that the local hospital

keeps the community educated.

“Vaccinations make a difference in terms of people feeling comfortable about safety, needing to mask or distance,” he said.

COVID meant the churches were unable to do vacation Bible school, which is an outreach to children in the community. The youth did not gather. The church was unable to offer Bible studies at a retirement center. Funerals that were postponed have now been rescheduled, Stacey said.

“The online ministry is new for us,” he said. “Rather than in the sanctuary, sitting at table for the online ministry was difficult, but our ability to reach people through Facebook and Zoom enhanced our reach to people outside the community across the country, connecting so we can still feed people and involving people on Sunday mornings or for our weekly Bible studies.”

The churches organized a call team to contact members on a regular basis to keep in touch. Although they were unable to gather



to see people, they kept up ties.

As for food security, between the food bank and other efforts, folks get the food they need. The food bank was able to continue to make food available.

Through the local ministerial alliance, churches helped maintain funds for a Bite 2 Go program to continue to assure that children have meals on weekends.

Stacey sees that the dynamics for families changed.

“Families are doing more together, communicating better, worshipping together at home, at the dining table or in the living room,” he said. “We shared spirituality in a way that was not happening before COVID.”

For information, call 725-4911 or email pastor@ziondavenport.org.

## Sravasti Abbey posted photos of abess being vaccinated

Sravasti Abbey, a Buddhist community near Newport, was able to put its monthly Sharing the Dharma Day, residential courses and meditation retreats online, said Thubten Chonyl.

“Participants have had to practice at home, but we led meditations online, held facilitated discussions over Zoom, and streamed the scheduled teachings. More teachings were added throughout 2020 in response to student demand for our programs during the pandemic,” she said.

“We have let it be known that when we open—we are not yet—only fully vaccinated people will be able to visit,” Thubten Chonyl said.

To educate people on vaccinations, the abbey posted

photos of the abess receiving a vaccination, directed people to information about His Holiness the Dalai Lama taking the vaccination, and have frequently spoken in online talks about the benefits of vaccination as part of the basic Buddhist ethic of non-harming and thinking of others, she said.

In Pend Oreille County, when they opened a mass vax site at the rodeo grounds, they welcomed all comers.

“Everyone in our resident community, aged 31 to 70, is fully vaccinated,” Thubten Chonyl said. “We’re looking forward to having guests when we open again.”

For information, call 447-5549 or email office.sravasti@gmail.com.

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## Members respect others

Stan Hughes, pastor of Waitsburg Presbyterian Church, said the church learned the value of respecting others during COVID.

In response to COVID, they hunkered down and, following the governor's directives, didn't meet until the end of June 2020, when they began meeting with social distancing and masks.

"Attendance dropped to 60 percent of what it was," he said. "People understand the need to respect others and do our best to assure the health of our congregation of mostly older people."

They suspended live meetings of the children and youth ministry until two months ago.

Stan estimated that 75 to 90 per-

cent of members are vaccinated.

"There is a high degree of support in the congregation. In community, there's less," he guessed.

Now people feel more relaxed about interacting with each other. The fellowship hour was suspended, but reinstated a few months ago—meeting outside.

A common concern for families is figuring out child care.

"The community has been responsive and generous to donate to the resource center and food bank, so there has been adequate support when people in need make requests," Stan said.

For information, call 337-6589 or email [makingpeace-ww@gmail.com](mailto:makingpeace-ww@gmail.com).

## Pastor, church find new ways to minister

COVID has affected Holy Temple Church of God in Christ in Spokane, said the Rev. Ezra Kinlow, pastor.

"We have been back in our sanctuary for a month, but fewer than 50 percent are back, especially senior citizens. They are doing Facebook and YouTube while others come in person," he said. "Social media are a way to maintain participation. We have new systems, so we adjust."

"It's a different ballgame," said Ezra, who has no sense of how many members have had COVID. Only four reported having COVID and recovering.

HTCOGIC arranged on Saturday, May 15, for a company to do COVID testing.

Ezra estimated that about 50 percent of his congregation have had vaccinations, but knows some don't want to take it.

"We do not advocate for it. It's up to them,"

he said, adding that he and his wife, Eleise, have been vaccinated.

"I'm unsure what God has allowed. We just deal with it and protect ourselves as we can," he said.

With 50 percent attending in person, they are allowed to sing. Singers take their masks off when they sing, and people leading worship take their masks off to speak, but everyone else is keeping their masks on. Some feel it restricts the volume of praising and response to have something over their faces, he said.

"We are positive and keep going, hoping and trusting the Lord will give a breakthrough," Ezra said. "I do not expect we will go back to doing things completely as we did before. Our ministry is different as we reach out to people and find new ways to minister."

For information, call 624-0522.

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Regional Summer Camps for Faith Communities

# Camp Spalding expects another record year, following protocols

Camp Spalding, the camp and retreat center of the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest on Davis Lake near Newport, will open fully, and director Andy Sonneland reports a record pace in registrations similar to 2019, when there were a record of 1,707 campers.

“Some camps will sell out,” he said. “People are anxious to come back to camp. We can accommodate 180 people a week.”

Last year the camp operated at a limited capacity with five weeks of youth camps and two weeks of staff camps. This year Camp Spalding will offer nine weeks because Spokane and Mead School districts run to June 22.

“Christian camping is unequivocally well suited for children to get away from their routines and unplug. In a week that is a blast, they also hear, consider and respond to Jesus’ call to follow,” he said.



Campers enjoy the waterfront activities.

Photo courtesy of Camp Spalding

Andy said that in his 31 years, seeing campers respond never gets old. What fun looks like has changed, but the formulas are similar.

“In the 1970s, it was a dock and aluminum canoes,” he said. “Now we offer more recreation opportunities for campers to have fun in the midst of creation.”

The wrinkle this year as last is

that Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines will be in place, but Andy expects guidelines may loosen as more 12-year-olds and up are vaccinated.

“We encourage parents to have their children and youth vaccinated. Elementary children won’t yet be vaccinated, but seventh graders up will be,” he said.

Camp Spalding has a new

first-aid building to address health and safety issues.

“We will do what the state requires,” he said. “The CDC has been overly cautious about summer camps. Data shows that COVID transmission is rare outside. The CDC website acknowledges that the threat of serious health issues for children is greater from the flu than for COVID. We hope that whatever protocols are required are based on science, and with warm weather and vaccinations, cases will decline.”

Recently 150 members of the Washington State Camp Coalition met on Zoom and then two met with the Governor’s office to address protocols and plans.

“We are CDC compliant in terms of pre-assigning bunks head to foot and assuring cross ventilation in cabins with windows open all night,” Andy said. “Meals will follow CDC guidelines, which I hope by June

26 will loosen. Tables are six feet apart, and campers will eat with cabin groups.

Andy advises campers to check the website, because it’s also possible “we may have to revert to last year.”

Program offerings will be “normal” with campers swimming and participating in a variety of activities. There is a new archery pavilion. Staff sanitized equipment last year and will this year if it’s mandated, but the CDC has said that COVID is not picked up from surfaces, he noted.

There are two middle-high camps, two high-school camps, a family camp in August and two two-day fourth grade camps and two week-long fifth and sixth grade camps. Staffing them are 42 college-age leaders, most from Whitworth University.

For information, call 447-4388, email [andy@clearwaterlodge.org](mailto:andy@clearwaterlodge.org) or visit [campspalding.org](http://campspalding.org).

## With ever-changing guidelines, N-Sid-Sen updates information online

With the ever-changing guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), American Camping Association (ACA) and states of Idaho and Washington, letters sent to campers’ families will report ongoing “tweaks” in COVID protocols for campers coming to N-Sid-Sen Camp and Conference Center summer camps on the east shore of Lake Coeur d’Alene.

In a recent phone conversation with other camp directors in the region, Mark Boyd, managing director of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) camp, said that they discussed the CDC’s latest guidance on masks.

“It’s hard keeping up with the changes in protocols,” he said.

“We still need to do what we need to do to take care of our constituents. Counselors will be vaccinated, but we won’t know if all the youth will be vaccinated before they come,” he said.

Even though counselors are vaccinated they need to model mask wearing and other behavior, because there will be no way to know if campers are vaccinated.

Mark, who was relieved when he completed his two vaccinations in April, said the camp requires that people coming to partner camps be vaccinated and follow protocols. Traditionally, Lady of the Lake holds several dance camps. We require campers to go with two of three rules—masking, distancing and being outside.

Meals will be served outside.



Easy to remember, easy to do, we kindly ask that you



N-Sid-Sen is posting the above sign throughout the camp.

Graphic courtesy of N-Sid-Sen

Because of concern about weather early in the season, Mark said, the Pacific Northwest UCC Conference decided to hold youth and family camps later in the summer when the weather is better.

The UCC camps will be smaller, aiming at 50, which is 50 percent of normal capacity, so if the weather is not good, they can eat inside on staggered schedules. Usually dance camps draw 150, so they will be at one-third of the capacity, but many partner groups opted not to have events this summer, Mark said.

Camp sessions will also look different. They are four days, Thursday through Monday, not a week, so there is time between guests for buildings to air out and

staff to deep clean.

Summer staff come in June. There are usually six, but will be eight this summer because of need for more cleaning.

“We will have higher expense with lower income, but it’s exciting that we are having camp,” said Mark.

Three youth camps are junior high, senior high and the class of 2020, who missed their senior year at camp. Two of three family camps are already full.

In June, there are several four-day opportunities for “Families at Camp,” the model for use of the facilities that began last summer. Family groups “in a bubble together” came to stay in one of the cabins or lodges. Most brought their own food and did their own cooking. This year

there are also “Family Escapes” with meals.

Mark expects the six churches that usually do retreats together three weekends in September will come, based on anticipation that the pandemic will be declining. In the fall, he also expects a dance camp and other church retreats.

“Many are hoping, dreaming and planning that we will all be able to gather again in the fall,” he said.

“It has been surreal and is incredibly encouraging that we will have camp again, opportunities for people to gather onsite and step away from the world. Last year, it was too quiet for too long,” Mark said.

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## 'Woven As One' theme appropriate as campers come back together

John Palorine, who is director of Camp Cross and youth formation in the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, has been preparing for the 2021 camp season of eight weeks of youth and family sessions with no limits to campers, but expecting fewer to come.

In 2020, when there were no campers, 20 staff worked on the facilities, and offered virtual camp experiences and online worship services for the diocese.

Staff and contractors painted, rebuilt a deck and did other repairs at the camp on the western shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene.

"COVID protocols will be followed again this year to assure campers have a healthy, safe time.



In 2020, staff did renovations to Camp Cross facilities.

Photo courtesy of Camp Cross

We look forward to having campers this year," said John, who consulted with the American Camp Association on guidelines that

are posted on the camp website.

John listed six protocols: social distancing, wearing masks inside, sanitizing, washing hands, having smaller groups and limiting the coming and going from camp.

"Vaccines will make a huge difference. Staff will be vaccinated, and we ask everyone eligible to be vaccinated. We are not saying those not vaccinated cannot come, but they will have different protocols," he said.

Protocols begin at home with people keeping camp wellbeing in mind for activities 14 days before coming—avoiding large gatherings, washing hands, mask-

ing and monitoring temperatures.

Campers will come by car, not on a bus. At check-in, they will answer questions and have their temperatures taken.

Staff includes a camp nurse who is a senior in nursing school, and a physician and nurse practitioner as advisors.

"Woven As One," the theme for the capital campaign for Camp Cross and diocesan formation, is the camp theme. A resource team with a pastor and two lay leaders will lead the week's program.

"The theme is appropriate given we have been apart and are coming back together," John said. "It is about how God weaves us together as people.

"We will do most regular activities, complying with the CDC," he said. "We will be outside much of the time, swimming, canoeing, hiking and building friendships."

Working beginning June 1, 2021, with John, who came to the diocese in 2018, is Sara Gunther, who will succeed him as canon for youth ministry and executive director of Camp Cross when he retires the end of October. She has been program

director at St. Dorothy's Rest Camp in the Episcopal Diocese of California.

"Our camp and youth programming model is for youth to lead to raise their gifts in ministry and leadership," John said. "We have collaborative leadership, with all having a voice and sharing in decisions. The director is no more important than a fourth grade camper. All are equally important.

"Our focus is to be witnesses to Jesus and live our faith. Our vision is for the diocese to be a compelling, creative witness to Jesus Christ in the Inland Northwest," said John, who spent his year with family in Florida, working remotely using Zoom,

John said there will be a new session this year, a teen Wilderness Quest Camp June 20 to 25. Also there will be a Women's Weekend June 25 to 27, exploring relationships between generations and led by three generations of women in Bishop Gretchen Rehberg's family, women with different perspectives on life and the way of love.

For information, call 624-3191 or visit [campcross.org](http://campcross.org).

### Opens 'near normal'

## Lutherhaven marks 75 years

Continued from page 1  
advocated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), American Camp Association (ACA) and the Association of Camp Nursing.

"At defining times like these," Bob said, "camps have to pick a North Star to follow. Those organizations, and the excellent, science-based procedures they recommend, are the guides we've chosen to follow."

Lutherhaven campers will not wear masks in their cabin groups, to create a more normal camp experience.

"We are blessed to have a health care team made of medical and public health professionals," Bob said. "Following ACA best practices, they are requiring all campers to be tested prior to coming to camp, and all of our front line counselors to be vaccinated.

"Because we're a revolving door of kids and families, our #1 goal is the health and safety of all our kids, staff, families and the folks back home," he said.

"Camper testing is the kingpin to allowing our summer camp programs—from worship to games to Bible studies to campfires—to operate as normally as possible," he said.

Along with requiring staff who are in close contact with campers to be vaccinated, Lutherhaven urges everyone 12 and older to be vaccinated, as medically advisable.

The theme for Lutherhaven this year is "Always," based on Psalm 100: "The Lord is good. God's steadfast love endures forever, and God's faithfulness to all generations."

"It's a perfect theme for our 75 years," Bob said. "It's not too hard to imagine—after me being here 28 summers—to imagine our 100th summer."

In addition to traditional youth camps, Lutherhaven is offering family and church camp programs alongside kids programming.

Plus, Lutherhaven's Idaho Servant Adventures will bring in youth from around the nation for community service and outreach programs in the Silver Valley—



Servant camp draws nationally.

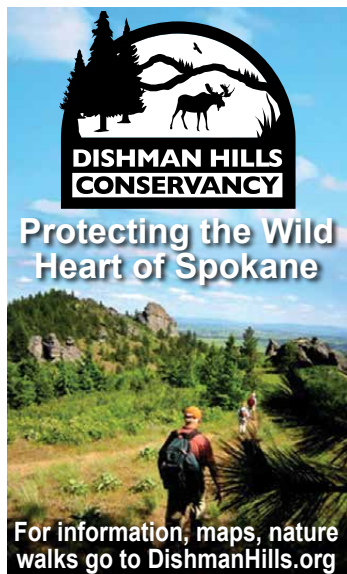
Photo courtesy of Lutherhaven

helping elderly homeowners with home repairs or leading camp programs for campers with special needs.

New this year, Lutherhaven will offer free Day Camp programs to Silver Valley children, including three weeks of busing kids from Kellogg, Wallace and Osborn to Shoshone Mountain Retreat for faith-based day camp programs and activities. The day camps are sponsored by a grant from the Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation and United Way of North Idaho.

"We are so thankful to God, so thankful to our faithful and generous donors and congregations, who have allowed Lutherhaven to not just survive this challenging COVID year, but to thrive," Bob said.

For information, call 208-667-3459 or email [registrar@lutherhaven.com](mailto:registrar@lutherhaven.com).



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# Holden program focus on Samaritan story uplifts value of relationships

Holden Village on Lake Chelan, which has been closed since the beginning of the pandemic last March with only staff and volunteers on site, will be open with a modified summer session from July 12 to Sept. 4, said Callie Mabry, communications and development lead.

To promote wellness, participants will come Mondays and leave Saturdays, creating weeklong cohorts rather than having people come and go.

COVID protocols will follow state guidelines, which include 50 percent of its lodging and dining capacity.

"I hope after September we can expand our capacity," she said.

Each week, four to five faculty from around the world will lead programs in visual and performing arts, sciences, theology, diversity, inclusion and racial justice.

While Holden's program is geared to adults, there are limited programs for four- to 17-year-olds while adults are in sessions.

Holden Village is on the site of a 1930s mining town with four guest lodges, where miners once



Coffee and tea breaks will be outdoors at Holden Village.

Photo courtesy of Holden Village

stayed. They have dorm rooms for two to four people with shared bathrooms. In 2021, guests will stay in every other room.

Meals will be served from self-service buffet lines with seating indoors at 50 percent capacity and overflow outdoors, Callie said.

Because Holden Village is remote, requiring travel by ferry up Lake Chelan far from medical care, all staff, volunteers and guests are required to be vaccinated before they arrive.

"We want to be thoughtful and intentional on health and well-

ness," Callie said. "We continue to follow CDC and Washington State guidelines regarding masking, distancing and other safety practices, and adapting as the science and regulations evolve.

Callie began at Holden Village in September 2019.

The village's new executive directors, Mark Bach, Kathie Caemmerer-Bach and Stacy Kitahata began in September 2020, bringing a commitment to nurturing community that engages diversity, interfaith dialogue, spiritual practice, environmental justice and "holy hilarity."

Kathie is the daughter of artist Richard Caemmerer, who painted the Village Center's ceiling mural. She and Mark have master's degrees in education, and have taught and held administrative roles in Taiwan, Japan, India and the Seattle area. He was recently vice-chair of the Grunewald Guild Board in Leavenworth.

Stacy, who has a master of divinity degree, has worked with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in ecumenical and interfaith organizations, in higher education and in organizational change for equity.

The program theme, "The Samaritan Traveler: Encounter-Embrace-Embark," involves wrestling with implications that the Samaritan story has for the need to be in relationship, recognizing that humanity is to be interwoven, interconnected and interdependent as people encounter each other as neighbors and work for change, Callie said.

"Our educational mission is central to our work as a remote wilderness retreat center rooted in faith," she said.

While Holden Village was

closed, staff and volunteers did building maintenance, cleaned, painted and renovated staff housing, classrooms and the art studio.

In 2016, remediation of mining contamination was completed with a water treatment plant and covering mine tailings.

Callie grew up in Colorado and graduated in environmental studies in 2014 from Luther College in Iowa. She went for a January term program at Holden, which inspired her to return after working five years with an environmental agency in Chicago.

Growing up in Lutheran and Methodist churches, she appreciates living in community and learning with people of other Christian churches and faiths.

"Because the village operates with short- and long-term volunteers and staff, the community has much turnover, keeping the energy fresh," Callie said. "Holden has volunteer and paid positions for this summer and beyond."

For information, email [communications@holdenvillage.org](mailto:communications@holdenvillage.org) or visit [holdenvillage.org](http://holdenvillage.org).

# Ross Point opens fully following protocols for health

Ross Point Camp and Conference Center on the Spokane River in Post Falls will open fully with protocols, particularly related to food services.

Staff who serve food will wear masks. Campers will not be required to wear masks. Staff will keep activity stations clean and sanitized. There will be hand sanitizer stations throughout the buildings and grounds, and sanitizing spray for campers to use in cabins, said Marta Walker, administrator.

"We will send campers a form to track their health and temperatures 14 days before they come. Campers will do activities with their cabin groups," she said.

"Ross Point has not spoken to the vaccination issue, leaving it to parents to choose," she said.

Along with offering its usual activities, Ross Point added three elements to its high ropes course.

The volunteer-led programs are using the theme, "Grace Upon Grace," from John 1:4-18.

"With our American Baptist camps, we do not usually reach capacity, so we should have space for as many campers who want to come," Marta said.

Cabins are set up to be conducive to physical distancing. Rather than being on top of each other, bunks are in an L set-up with campers distanced.



Camp adds three elements to its high ropes course.

Photo courtesy of Ross Point Camp

Windows will remain open with a fan running to allow good air circulation, she said.

With other groups renting the site, Marta expects a full summer. Rental groups set their own criteria related to masks and physical distancing. Those groups include youth camps from other churches, including

some from Western Washington. Groups coming include nonprofits and universities.

There are two weeks of Ross Point youth camps, one week of family camp and one week of Ross Point's Camp Journey Cancer Camp. Last year the youth camps and family camp were held with reduced numbers.

Camp Journey was canceled. Far fewer people came.

"This year we have groups from June through October, with just a few open days," she said.

For information, call 208-773-1655 or visit [rosspoint.org](http://rosspoint.org).



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## Methodists find enthusiasm to come to camps

Alan Rogstad, who is responsible for camps and retreat centers at four sites for the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC), said they gradually opened this spring and will be open in the summer in various ways.

Twinlow Camp and Retreat Center, which is on Spirit Lake near Rathdrum, Idaho, will have a standard summer program at 50 percent capacity for youth camps, water sports camps, age-level programs, Idaho mission camp and day camps.

When retreat groups are in the camp, there is less capacity, he said.

As of the time he was interviewed in mid-May, state guidelines and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) was allowing 50 percent of capacity with protocols following CDC, American Camping Association (ACA), state and county guidelines.

"We can't require vaccination, but we strongly encourage it, and all staff are vaccinated," Alan said.

Protocols include ventilated cabins, most activities outdoors—including meals—with sleeping in cabins and cabin time the only time indoors together. Campers are spaced with partitions and HEPA filters in each cabin. Mask wearing, distancing and hands washing are other protocols.

Some of the protocols are for all camps, but three sites are not doing overnight camp programs.

Lazy F Camp and Retreat Center near Ellensburg will offer family camps and day camps, as will Ocean Park Camp and Retreat Center on the Long Beach Peninsula. Camp Indianola,



Family at Lazy F recently enjoyed its zipline.

Photo courtesy of Pacific NW United Methodist Church

closest to Seattle, will have day camps and outdoor adventure camps. Family camps are two to three days with sanitizing in between.

Registration opened in January and some camps were half full by March.

"Some plans could change if Washington changes restrictions and further opens up in the coming days and weeks," he said.

At UMC camps, staff lead the programs.

"We hired fewer staff than in normal seasons at each site. It has been hard to find college-aged staff," Alan said.

"Water of Life" is the theme, focusing on biblical images of water.

"We ask campers to avoid risky behavior before coming and not to come if they have a temperature or are sick," he said. "When they arrive, campers will have their temperatures taken and fill out questionnaires. Orientation will be different."

Through spring, camps have gradually had permission of the PNW United Methodist Conference leaders to reopen. Following protocols, they have held retreats with success, said Alan.

"I'm not aware of any cases. We began with five then 10 and then 25 people gathering. Now we can have 50 onsite. We have had a good array of retreat groups signed up to use the camps in the spring and fall.

"It has been a challenge for everyone involved with camps and directors, not able to do what we normally do and have passion to do," Alan said. "It has taken a toll, but realizing we are opening has been a shot in the arm for our enthusiasm."

The pandemic has also been an opportunity to "effect changes we have wanted to do," he said.

For example, staff at Indianola redesigned the camp for more adventure programs.

"It has been difficult to be closed and has been a financial hit, losing about \$1 million in income in 2020—mitigated some by reduced costs in staffing, receipt of PPP grants to keep the core staff employed and camps in a state of readiness. However, there has been tremendous generosity in the form of gifts from our supporters to help see us through," Alan said.

For information, email [arogstad@pnwumc.org](mailto:arogstad@pnwumc.org).

## Camp Sanders is fully booked in July, August, more than usual

Camp Sanders, which has camp, retreat and conference facilities on 90 acres in southern Benewah County in Idaho, canceled camps and was closed last year, using reserve funds to keep three part-time staff employed mowing the grounds and maintaining the camp.

In 2021, its 86th year, it is open again with a schedule of camps for children, adult and families, offered by related church groups, and camps offered by groups from Washington State University, the University of Idaho and fraternal organizations, as well as family retreats and weddings, said Daniel Willms, executive director since 2016.

Camps, which are primarily Thursdays through Sundays, are fully booked in July and August with more reservations than other years.

Camp Sanders sponsors five camps and programs—a men's winter advance, a women's spring retreat, a family camp, kids camp and senior adult retreat.

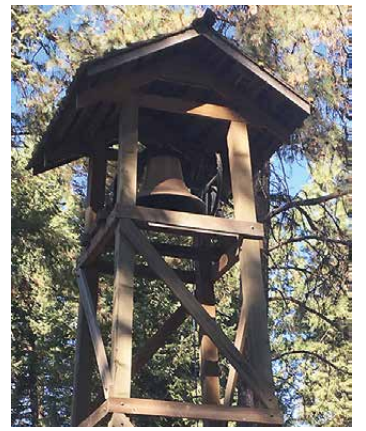
The camp began in 1935 as a Free Methodist camp and then it was sold to a group of investors from Free Methodist churches who formed Sanders Christian Camp, Inc., the nonprofit that manages the camp.

Drawing many Free Methodists from Montana, Washington, Idaho and Oregon, the camp has a capacity of 195.

Other groups rent the camp's dorms, cabins, dining hall, chapel, gym and RV spaces year round for meetings, seminars, trainings and retreats, with reduced capacity in the winter because not all facilities are heated.

In Idaho, Daniel, who said he had COVID, said most COVID protocols require mask wearing for food preparation and food services. Idaho recently ended mask mandates.

He is not asking for campers' vaccination status, and said that there has not been a big push for vaccinations in the area of



Bell tower at Camp Sanders.

Photo courtesy of Camp Sanders

the camp.

Daniel grew up a mile up the road from Camp Sanders, leaving after high school to earn a bachelor's degree in 1984 from Prairie College Bible School in Three Hills, Alberta northeast of Calgary.

He completed graduate studies at Portland Seminary in 1987 and worked at a Christian Supply bookstore until 1994. He then was executive director of emergency social services with the Walla Walla Helpline for six years before moving back to be close to family and work with his brother in construction.

Daniel, who is pastor of His Church at Sanders and the Community Church on the campground, as a child would swim in the camp's Little Gem Lake, which is created from April to October when a dam on Indian Creek is closed.

"We keep costs low so people can afford to leave the 'rat race' for a time of renewal and recreation," he said.

Daniel said the camp's COVID plans, online at [campsanders.net](http://campsanders.net), tell people who are sick to stay home. They ask people to wash hands, distance indoors and outdoors, and wear a mask. Staff sanitize dining hall surfaces and high-touch areas.

For information, call 208-892-4842 or email [campsanders@gmail.com](mailto:campsanders@gmail.com).

## Camp Gifford has overnight camps for children, wilderness camps for teens

From June 21 to July 30, The Salvation Army's Camp Gifford on Loon Lake will offer six weekly overnight camps for children, ages seven to 12, and adventure or wilderness camps for teens, ages 13 to 17.

The camp provides a Monday to Friday outdoor camp experience for children that is "exciting, educational and spiritual," said said Daniel Tollerud, who is the director for the Salvation Army's Spokane Youth Center and Camp Gifford.

Children will have the opportunity to play games, create fun arts and crafts, learn archery, swim, boat, sing and learn more



Teens climb climbing wall.

Photo courtesy of Camp Gifford

about God in a fun and uplifting environment, he said.

Teen Adventure Camps provide teen wilderness fun with activities such as hiking, sailing, high ropes elements and outdoor survival skills.

"Teens will explore nature, and will grow and develop their relationship with Christ while developing friendships with other teens from around the Pacific Northwest," he said.

Fees are on a sliding scale and there are scholarships available.

Bus transportation is available from Spokane.

For information, call 329-2759, email [daniel.tollerud@usw.salvationarmy.org](mailto:daniel.tollerud@usw.salvationarmy.org) or visit [www.campgifford.org](http://www.campgifford.org).

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# Ministry Institute closes, but continues legacy through endowment

Staff reminisced about empowering global and intercultural interactions that occurred over 40 years at the Mater Dei Ministry Institute at Gonzaga University, a center for spiritual renewal.

The 21-unit residential building at 405 E. Sinto, which housed the institute's offices until May 31, was sold to the Bishop White Seminary as a pre-seminary for candidates for the priesthood to discern their vocation. It will be renamed McGivney Hall.

Six other buildings, including single-family and duplex houses in the 400 blocks of E. Sinto and E. Mission, went to four other buyers.

The Ministry Institute's executive director Nate Greene, program director Shonna Bartlett and administrative director Diane Imes reflected on the ministry that had taken place there since Fr. Armand Nigro, SJ, founded the institute in 1981.

It was originally a canonical seminary approved by the Vatican to train men who entered the priesthood as a second career after turning 30 and some after being widowed or divorced.

"He saw it as a way to address the shortage of priests," said Shonna. "Over 15 years, bishops around the world sent seminarians," said Diane. "About 75 priests studied there and were ordained."

By the mid-1990s, the late-in-life vocation program's success led other seminaries to offer similar programs, attendance diminished and a papal team decided it would no longer be a canonical seminary, she said.

It then became The Ministry Institute (TMI) to support Gonzaga's Religious Studies students who planned to enter various types of ministry.

By the end of the 1990s, it incorporated Gonzaga's two sabbatical programs, CREDO and FOCUS.

Then The Ministry Institute began offering housing and services to priests and nuns on sabbatical from around the world, as well as to international students from Gonzaga, Whitworth and Eastern Washington universities, and Spokane Community College.

Until this past year, the buildings housed about 70 international students, including priests and nuns on sabbatical and working on advanced degrees.

With the decline and aging of the donor base in recent years, Gonzaga University closing the sabbatical programs in preference for degree programs, the difficulty of arranging visas and finally with COVID-19 cutting



**Diane Imes, Nate Greene and Shonna Bartlett retire as Ministry Institute at Gonzaga closes sabbatical programs.**

the number of students in fall 2020 to two, The Ministry Institute decided to close.

Funds from the sales will be used to establish a foundation to carry on Fr. Nigro's mission.

As a master's degree student in pastoral ministry, Shonna, who previously worked as a medical transcriptionist, began preparing liturgies with sabbatical students in the 1990s. She graduated in 2002 and began working at TMI in 2005.

Leaving her home in Wyoming, she earned a bachelor's degree at the Colorado College, where she met her husband, Bob. They moved to Pullman in 1984. After he completed graduate school in 1989, they moved to Spokane when he began working with Unity House at Gonzaga. They attend St. Ann's Catholic parish.

Diane grew up in Kendrick, Idaho, and moved to Spokane in 1981. With a certificate from Kinman College in accounting, she started as TMI's bookkeeper in 1983, learning the administrative role on the job, working with 39 different staff members—directors, program directors to maintenance staff—over the years. She and her husband Dale did women's and men's ministry in previous churches and now attend His Place Church in Post Falls.

Her intersection with the changing international village made her work more than just an administrative job.

"I've been like a second mother to the students," she said.

Scholars came from Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Cameroon and Congo in Africa, as well as from Turkey, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, China, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Belize, Italy, England, Ireland, Australia and Canada.

While they ate common meals in the early years, later each prepared their own meals.

Shonna liked hearing students in the hall speaking in different languages and smelling the

dishes they were cooking.

She and Diane often taught priests from other countries to cook and do laundry, which they didn't have to do at home.

Once a week they ate a meal together and had a prayer time. In free time, they joined in educational, social and spiritual outings Shonna arranged.

Diane said the students valued living in community in an environment of cross-racial and cross-culture respect, learning of each other's lives, countries and cultures.

Some students stayed for nine years, for graduate degree programs. Most sabbatical students came for two semesters.

"Many came from some of the poorest areas of the world. The first semester they settled in to adjust to life in the new culture. The second semester, they learned as much as they could, auditing classes to gain knowledge and renew skills before going back to their vocations," said Shonna, who recruited students.

Recruitment was not hard because former students referred people.

"I was impressed by their deep faith," she said. "One African sister unable to get Gon-

zaga's medical insurance said, 'God will take care of me. I will have no medical problems,' and she didn't.

"They came from places in the world where they placed their lives in God's hands, which is not a normal experience for Americans," she said.

"I learned more from their difficult experiences as they communicated their different opinions and dealt with their different personalities," she said. "For example, some of the Chinese students were in the state sanctioned church and some were in the underground churches. They learned to manage their political differences."

The endowment they are establishing will continue the ministry and vision of Fr. Nigro.

Nate, who was hired in 2009 as executive director because of his background in finance, will set up the endowment, which will also be used for scholarships for Gonzaga ministry students, sabbatical renewal programs and ministries around the globe—such as alums like a Nigerian sister who runs a women's center or a Kenyan who teaches servant leadership.

Nate grew up in Charleston, S.C., earned a bachelor's degree in economics in 1965 from Talladega College in Alabama, served four years in the Air Force, and earned a master's in economics in 1972 at St. Mary's College in San Antonio.

He worked with Ford Motor Co. in Buffalo and established a car leasing company at the Charlotte airport before coming to Spokane in 1986 to purchase Empire Ford. It closed in 2008.

Impressed by the students' faith commitment, Nate said he learned from them about different cultures and human interactions.

"I increased my faith and

service here, renewing my understanding of faith," said Nate, who grew up Catholic and attends St. Ann's, St. Aloysius and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal.

"The hearts of the African students were on fire for the Lord. They have a servant heart I don't see often in American people. They strengthened my faith, opening me to be more loving and less judgmental," said Diane.

Shonna enjoyed the multicultural liturgies students led in the chapel and at St. Ann's—singing in Chinese, dancing in with the gifts and carrying a Bible in on their heads.

"I now judge worship by whether it is joyful, rooted in faith and sends people out to do God's work," she said.

Diane said African celebrations were joyful, with tambourines, ululating and colorful garb.

"Their joy was overwhelming. They were filled with gratitude for the simplest things," she said.

Muslim students would go into the chapel and pray to the East. Rabbi Elizabeth Goldstein came to Taizé services and taught Hebrew chants.

Remembering the students, former staff and retreatants who shared "this sacred space," the three are grateful for supporters who made it possible.

I gained a broad understanding of faith," said Shonna, who will continue Taizé services on Zoom through July, take August off and look for a permanent meeting place near Gonzaga in the fall.

"We do Taizé on Zoom with 15 to 18 people joining locally and from Kansas, Korea, Minnesota and Georgia. This summer, we will meet in homes once a month," she said.

For information, email bartletts@gonzaga.edu.

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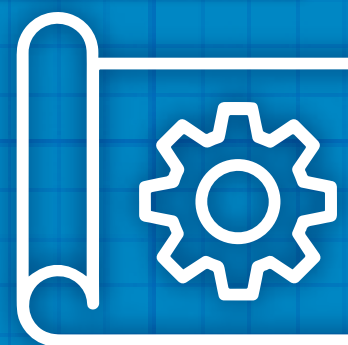
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## Pandemic permeates our lives, giving us new lenses for a new normal

COVID permeates all the articles, even those that were not on that topic. The annual articles on camps all addressed adjustments that they were making. COVID cut the number of students coming to The Ministry Institute. COVID meant that Mission Community Outreach Center began offering online or phone orders for curbside pickup.

Comments of faith leaders in the region offered insight into the impact of the pandemic, not just to moving online or following protocols, but also to what do the adaptations mean in the long lens of how communities gather and live out their faith.

Sermons, pastoral care, Bible studies, small groups, mission projects, community service, feeding programs, housing advocacy and related breakout groups all became tools of discerning what faith teachings and God had to say about the role, style, organization, ministry and mission of congregations and regional

faith bodies.

What is normal? How is it conducive for enhancing our relationship with God and with each other? What new normals have we discovered? How do they inform who we are as faith communities and what we are to be doing?

What are habits? What habits are good habits? What habits are unhealthy? We have learned to wash our hands often—20 seconds or to a song. The soap and water actually break down the germs and viruses. Masks may reduce other infections, too.

What about the flu and colds? What will faith communities consider doing for the health of their congregations related to those “normal” but annoying illnesses. Have we learned insights and practices from COVID that might apply to overall health.

Many miss the hugs and touches that have spread other illnesses, but didn’t grab as much attention. How will we

apply learnings from COVID to how we do community, conversations, fellowship and food for the future to protect our communities’ health and safety? Will we put blinders back on because we liked the way we did things?

These are not comfortable questions as we look in hope to return to in-person gatherings.

Will we carry on the incredible generosity that we have seen during the pandemic? There has been suffering, incredible suffering, and there have been needs, tremendous needs, all along. Will our generous spirits once tapped into overflow as our faiths would call us to do?

Will we still be attentive to search out and serve people in need, people we may have shunned, blamed or shied away from in “normal” circumstances? Have our hearts been opened in new ways, in lasting ways that may even mean we are more proactive with not only our generosity, but also with our advocacy to change

policies that have inhibited opportunities and rights for marginalized, vulnerable people? We have seen the health inequities for some racial and ethnic groups. Will we continue to address those when the pandemic dissipates? Will our new awareness stick and make a difference?

How are we moved to put new flesh on the old bones, on our habits, traditions, teaching and emphases as faith communities?

Perhaps the times ahead are really the more challenging times, the real times we will stretch out of our comfort zones and reach out to more people in new ways, ways that will have impact on their health, livelihoods, wellbeing, rights, politics, liberties and lives.

What is our calling for these new times, for what we hope will be the post-pandemic times—rather than the dragging the pandemic with us into the future times? How is God calling us to be different?

Mary Stamp - Editor



## Pastors reflect on the impact of COVID on faith lives of their communities

*In responding to a recent survey The Fig Tree did on COVID impacts, pastors around the region shared some of what they have learned in these times.*

**In COVID, we discovered** new tools and people we haven’t been reaching. It has made us open ourselves up. This congregation already had a wide-open heart. It was not a closed, cliquish group, but COVID pushed us further. We learned there were things that weren’t working.

This is an opportunity for the church to get beyond itself. Sometimes we have to be pushed. Some said, “this is a disaster.” God said, “I can use this, we can use this.” That is the way it often works. I will urge my people move out of a rut.

**Wesley Howell**  
Trinity Lutheran, Pullman

**God has always been active.** God didn’t take time off for COVID. It has been gratifying to see how God has been working through the pandemic. Our people and the whole community are coming together to have what they need.

**Ron Short**  
Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Othello

**It’s made us aware** of a sense of our responsibility for the health of the community. We don’t live in silos, in terms of COVID or vaccinations.

Our actions are not just about our own health, but about the health of others.

**Fr. Michael Savalesky**  
Holy Rosary Parish, Rosalia  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. John

**As far as spiritual growth,** one of the things our congregation has learned in COVID is that we are never alone. God never leaves us alone as a community.

There is always a way for us to grow together. Many folks couldn’t see how they could worship using live streaming. Now we know we don’t have to be in the building for spiritual growth.

Our outreach reminds us that the needs of the community are outside the building, and we don’t always need the building. Given the outreach needed, we need to figure out how to do that outside our building. We don’t need the building.

We need to remember that the church is going to change. We don’t know what it’s going to look like. We can pivot and learn new ways of doing things. It might

be strange to begin with, but we don’t do this alone. We do it with the Spirit.

We can pivot, change, and walk through storms together. We can do it and we will be ok.

**Julie Reinholz**  
Pioneer UMC, Walla Walla

**I’ve really appreciated** just how deep the roots of our faith are in experiences of upheaval, catastrophe and tremendous challenges. All the testimonies of the Bible come from people in challenging times relying ever more deeply on their experience of how God is there in that.

Our church community has weathered depressions, world wars and pandemics before. We have a history of resilience. Elder congregants who experienced World War II know we will get through this together. It’s just another thing to weather. We will be ok. They offer a sense of tried and true wisdom that I’ve appreciated. There’s a light at the end of the tunnel. We just keep moving.

People come together to care for each other when times are tough.

**Nathaniel Mahlberg**  
First Congregational United  
Church of Christ, Walla Walla

**The dynamics of families** have changed during COVID. Families are doing more together, communicating better, helping spiritually, worshipping together at home at the dining table or in the living room. We have shared spirituality in a way that was not happening before COVID.”

**Stacey Friedlein**  
Zion Lutheran, Davenport  
Christ Lutheran, Egypt

**Many have reflected** on how we’d like to go back to “the way things were.” It’s hard for a leader to remind people that we can’t do that. The world has changed. We need to be other focused, to love our neighbors as our very own selves.

It’s harder for some than others to think of putting other people in front of ourselves and putting ourselves into other’s shoes. We are our neighbors. We need to be there for each other. We wear masks because we love our neighbor. We do this because we want to help each other out.

**Patty Heath**  
St. Paul Lutheran, Colville

**Some of the silver linings** in COVID are the folks who have hung in there with

us. It shows them that God does provide, that their roots are deep and that they can withstand these challenges.

We did nothing online before this hit. Within four days we were online. We can reach some members who for one reason or another can’t come to church. For those who can come to church, we reached families of people who want to join online, reconnecting with many folks. Now we know there is a different way to do church.

We have talked about what it means to be a gathered community of Christ, to celebrate communion and how to do that in a theologically appropriate way when we can’t meet together.

Conversations are important about doing outreach. Being together in a meaningful way is important to who we are as a church and to do that when we can’t gather. We are pretty inventive when we have to be. God seems to provide a way.”

**Ariana Arends**  
Emmanuel Lutheran, Cheney  
ELM Campus Ministry

**There has been some good** to come out of this as we pare back and realize church doesn’t have to be about business and programs, but reflect the heart of who we are as people of faith. The care we have shown one another matters, and the community pulls us together. We are finding God’s grace. When hard times come, we pare back and remember what matters.

**Janine Goodrich**  
American Lutheran, Newport

**The pandemic has provided** an opportunity for people to slow down and reflect, and to think about what their priorities are in their life.

Spiritual practices are part of those priorities. In my congregation, some people have taken advantage of that.

The level of their engagement is heightened. The spiritual path has been heightened by the pandemic. In a general sense it almost has served as a year-long sabbath. Some folks have been able to find a richness in the forced pause in their lives, giving them opportunities to continue their spiritual search.

Sometimes the church emphasizes the journey outward and engagement. The pandemic established and reconnected us with our roots, a good root system from a spiritual perspective. We are not human doings, but human beings. Spiritual

activism that forgets to grow its roots is pretty short lived. From my perspective as a pastor, the pandemic offers the opportunity to focus on the journey inward, which we often neglect.”

**Steve van Kuiken-Community**  
Congregational UCC, Pullman

**We have a stronger online presence** and are continuing that. In feedback, people say they feel closer to the church because of the online choices. The pandemic took us out of our comfort zones to use technology.

We have had a larger focus on in-home spirituality, that the pandemic pushed us to. I have been preaching and teaching that church is about care for self, care for family, care for neighbor and that church is more than just Sunday morning worship as the center piece. How we take care of ourselves and others spiritually supports our communal life.

**Katherine Tuttle**  
Wilbur Community Church

For spiritual growth, I learned to bake sourdough bread because I couldn’t buy any yeast. Personally, I did things I didn’t think I would ever do in my life, like sending sermons to parishioners. I thought people needed to be there to hear it. A sermon offers spiritual growth, so it’s about reaching out to people to make a connection. I had to learn technology. We have all learned hybrid worship. I think that the good thing that will come from this is that we will be able to be connected with people that would never walk through the doorway of the church.

**Marilyn Wilder**  
Trinity Episcopal Oroville  
Tonasket Community UCC

**Relationship is clearly** number one. People miss it terribly. That is true between family members in the same home, between friends and at workplaces, but just as much in church. We’ve had no gatherings.

In church, relationship is a vital part of the congregation. It helps us to be healthier and stronger together, stronger in faith. It’s the reason to come. When the relationship tie is disrupted, it’s not as easy to be Christian, to love or feel the love as much.

**Jeff Milsten**  
Redeemer Lutheran, Dayton  
Pomeroy Congregation



# Calendar of Events

- June 1-4** • **"The Incarnation in the Holy Eucharist,"** Sacred Liturgy Conference, Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, Catholic Diocese of Spokane, <https://sacredliturgyconference.org>
- June 2** • **Women in Leadership 2021**, webinar on increasing women in corporate leadership, overcoming gender obstacles and shaping healthier business environments, Gonzaga and Whitworth universities, 11 a.m. [spokanejournal.com](http://spokanejournal.com)
- **Diversity Dialogues:** Conversations about Race and Equity, Spokane Community College, YouTube, Hilton Als, 5 p.m., [scc.spokane.edu/live](http://scc.spokane.edu/live)
- June 3** • **Fig Tree Board Annual Meeting**, zoom, noon, 535-1813
- June 3, July 1** • **Peace and Justice Action Committee**, zoom 5:30 p.m., [amurillo@pjals.net](mailto:amurillo@pjals.net)
- June 4-6** • **Artfest Spokane**, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. First, [artfestspokane.com](http://artfestspokane.com)
- June 6** • **Faith Action Network Spring Summit**, online, 2 to 4 p.m., [bit.ly/2021SummitJune](http://bit.ly/2021SummitJune)
- June 7-18** • **Habitat for Humanity Spokane Blitz Build**, 999-7141, [habitat-spokane.org](http://habitat-spokane.org)
- June 8** • **Let's Talk - How to Have Conversations about Race with Children**, Melissa Bedford, EWU, on multicultural children's literature as a tool, South Hill Virtual Event, 6:30 p.m., <https://events.spokanelibrary.org/events/>
- June 8-10** • **"Our Faith through the Eyes of Faith,"** Spirit Center, Monastery of St. Gertrude, 208-962-2000, [spirit-center.org](http://spirit-center.org)
- June 9** • **"From Crime to the Classroom: How Education Changes Lives,"** 10:30 a.m. or 6:30 p.m. Humanities Washington, Online. [humanities.org/events/2021-06/](http://humanities.org/events/2021-06/)
- **Diversity Dialogues:** Conversations about Race and Equity, Spokane Community College, YouTube, Omari Amili, 6:30 p.m., [scc.spokane.edu/live](http://scc.spokane.edu/live)
- **PJALS Membership Meeting**, zoom, 7 p.m., register <https://secure.everyaction.com/orc9UDnk80qVILCE3bLhBQ2>
- June 10, 24 July 8, 22** • **Showing up for Racial Justice**, video conference, 5:30 to 7 p.m., [slichty@pjals.org](mailto:slichty@pjals.org)
- June 12** • **AAPI Heritage Day**, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history, culture and arts, CenterPlace's west lawn plaza, 2426 N Discovery Pl Dr, Spokane Valley, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. [charitydoyl@yahoo.com](mailto:charitydoyl@yahoo.com), 928-9664.
- June 13** • **"Voices of the River,"** event with poet Laureate Rena Priest to build appreciation of the Lummi Nation, Humanities Washington, online, 11 a.m., [info@humanities.org](mailto:info@humanities.org) 206-682-1770
- June 15** • **June What? - Why African Americans Celebrate Juneteenth**, Roberta and James Wilburn, South Hill Virtual Events, 6:30 p.m., <https://events.spokanelibrary.org/events/>
- June 17** • **Justice Night**, "The State v. Blake: Vaccination and Record Vacating Clinic," The Way to Justice, 845 E. Sherman, 3 to 6 p.m., [thewaytojustice.com](http://thewaytojustice.com)
- **"What Your Home Says about the World,"** Michelle Janning, sociologist and writer, professor at Whitman College, Humanities Washington, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. 1st Ave., 7 p.m., [humanities.org/events/2021-06/](http://humanities.org/events/2021-06/)
- **Mobile Food Bank Distribution**, Spokane Valley Partners, 217 S. First St., Rockford, 2 to 4 p.m.
- June 18** • **Pillar Awards**, Inland Northwest Juneteenth Coalition honors people uplifting Spokane's African American community, [inwjc@gmail.com](mailto:inwjc@gmail.com)
- June 19** • **Juneteenth: A Celebration of** Resistance," short videos, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. First, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 456-3931
- June 22-24** • **"For Such a Time as This: Faithful Witness in a Chaotic Culture,"** Whitworth Ministry Summit, annual gathering of pastors and ministry leaders, Whitworth University, 300 W Hawthorne Rd. [oce@whitworth.edu](mailto:oce@whitworth.edu), 777-3275.
- June 23** • **"Militarism and Nonviolence,"** Peace and Justice Action League (PJALS) webinar on militarism and principles of nonviolence, 7 to 8:30 p.m., <https://secure.everyaction.com/gUKO5PoKEY50haKYb2Dg2>
- June 28-July 2** • **Training Opportunities** for the Justice Involved, Spokane Resource Center - see following listings
- June 28** • **"Trauma Informed,"** Layne Pavey, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- June 29** • **"Implicit Bias,"** Kurtis Robinson, 9 a.m. to noon
- **"ACES,"** Kiantha Duncan, 1 to 4 p.m.
- June 30** • **"Motivational Interviewing,"** Casey Jackson, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- July 1** • **"Motivational Interviewing,"** Michael Reid, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- July 2** • **"History of Race in America and the Criminal Justice System,"** Jac Archer, Revive Center and the GSP Race Equity Training Team, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- June 30** • **7th annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival**, Spokane Riverkeeper, online films about adventure, advocacy and water protection, 7 to 9 p.m. 464-7614, [hello@spokaneriverkeeper.org](mailto:hello@spokaneriverkeeper.org)
- **Publication of Resource Directory**, The Fig Tree, order copies at 535-4112
- July 1** • **Deadline to apply to perform** at the 2021 Fall Folk Festival, Nov. 13 to 14, 838-3683, [spokanefolkfestival.org](http://spokanefolkfestival.org)
- July 8, 22** • **Showing up for Racial Justice**, zoom, 5:30 to 7 p.m., [slichty@pjals.org](mailto:slichty@pjals.org)
- July 19-21** • **Praying with Jesus**, Spirit Center, Monastery of St. Gertrude, 208-962-2000, [spirit-center.org](http://spirit-center.org)
- July 23-30** • **Come to the Quiet**, Spirit Center, Monastery of St. Gertrude, 208-962-2000, [spirit-center.org](http://spirit-center.org)
- July 28** • **Self Care and Preventing Burnout** Workshop, PJALS webinar, 7 to 8:30 p.m., [pjals.org](http://pjals.org)
- July 29-31** • **Mission U - Pacific Northwest Conference** United Methodist Church examines anxiety, the culture of violence affecting children in and out of schools. Sessions on "Finding Peace in an Anxious World," "Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools," "Becoming Peacemakers in a Culture of Violence: A Curriculum for Youth Leaders," "Responding to Violence: A Curriculum for Children's Facilitators," Zoom, [revmariano@aol.com](mailto:revmariano@aol.com).
- Aug 12, 26** • **Showing up for Racial Justice**, video conference, 5:30 to 7 p.m., [slichty@pjals.org](mailto:slichty@pjals.org)
- Aug 21** • **Unity in the Community**, multicultural celebration of the Northwest's diverse communities, Riverfront Park Clock Tower, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., [nwunity.org](http://nwunity.org)
- Aug 23-29** • **"Living as a Monk in Everyday Life: A Benedictine Cohort,"** Spirit Center, Monastery of St. Gertrude, 208-962-2000, [spirit-center.org](http://spirit-center.org)
- Sept 1** • **Fig Tree Mailing and Distribution**, Emmanuel Family Life Center, 631 S. Richard Allen Ct., 9 a.m., 535-1813
- Sept 2** • **The Fig Tree Development**, noon, and Board, 1 p.m., Zoom, 535-1813
- Sept 3** • **"Brilliant Blunders That Left a Mark,"** Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience Short Story Contest entry deadline, [FLLConscience@gmail.com](mailto:FLLConscience@gmail.com)

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# Mission Community Outreach does curbside pickups during COVID

Mission Community Outreach Center marked its 25th year by finding new ways to serve the Spokane community with online orders and curbside pickups to meet COVID protocols and protect clients and volunteers.

On May 14, it held an outside anniversary party, honoring two of the four men who founded it in 1996 and their wives who were volunteers, Walt and Barbara Shields and Duane and Marnene Arkills. The other founders from the former Mission Ave. Community Presbyterian Church nearby were the late Ray Border and the late Irwin Winship, former pastor.

The church envisioned a community center for low-income people living in the Mission Ave. area and found a location at 1906 E. Mission Ave. The founders considered options and chose to focus on clothing for families of school children. They did tutoring for a while.

"We decided to do what was effective and efficient, so we eventually focused on clothing, hygiene and baby care items, but have had limited kitchen items, small housewares, bedding and towels. We provide all items free to those in need," said Ali Norris, executive director, in an interview with Bob Fisher, board chair.

Bob added they have served families transitioning from homelessness, immigrant families and low-income families in the community.

"We have no qualifications for households to meet," Ali said. "We started with a focus on this neighborhood, but over time, realizing we had enough items, we just wanted to give them to people in need, so we opened the services to anyone in need."

"We are barrier free to provide an easy, comfortable shopping experience for customers," she said.

Ali began in an administrative role at Mission Community Outreach Center in December 2017 and became executive director the following October.

A graduate of University High School, she completed undergraduate studies in political science and international studies at the University of Idaho in 2013, followed by a one-year



Bob Fisher and Ali Norris outside Mission Community Outreach. Photo courtesy of Mission Community Outreach Center

internship in the U.S. Senate in Washington, D.C., and a year in AmeriCorps with Cheney Parks and Recreation. She completed a master's degree in public health in 2017 at Eastern Washington University.

Working at Mission Community Outreach Center, she finds that what she does benefits the community's public health, rather narrowly viewing public health related to medical services.

"Good clothing, shoes and hygiene items play into a family's health," Ali said.

"Providing essentials gives a family hope, allowing them to take a deep breath and take off a bit of stress while they continue to look for work, education and housing," Ali said.

Bob met founder Walt after hearing him on Christian radio in 1999. Appreciating the center's work, Bob and his wife Connie started supporting it. He volunteered and came on the board in 2005. Connie continues to volunteer weekly.

"I see it as an expression of my Christian faith based on our being called by the Gospel to do this kind of work," said Bob, who was a financial planner for 35 years with Thrivent, a Christian based financial organization.

A 1973 graduate of the University of Idaho in business, he grew up in Southwest Idaho and moved to Spokane in 1974 where he met Connie.

They attend Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, where Bob recruited member Mark Kinney to serve on the board in 2008 and then to be executive director

from July 2011 to October 2014.

Mission Community Outreach Center has been run mostly by volunteers. Walt was volunteer executive director.

Now, however, Ali is paid as full time executive director.

Bob said the center is an extension of the ministry of many Spokane area churches collaborating on "doing what Christians are called to do."

Some support it financially. Some provide volunteers. Some collect clothes, shoes and other items.

Currently the supporting churches include Mary Queen and St. Aloysius Catholic parishes; St. Luke, St. John's, Hope, Beautiful Savior, Redeemer and Holy Cross Lutheran churches; Millwood, Hamblin Park and First Presbyterian churches; Spokane Valley United Methodist and North Hill Christian churches.

For example, St. Aloysius Catholic Parish and others recruit volunteers to help with the back-to-school shoe event. Millwood Presbyterian does a toilet paper drive providing up to 30 cases a year.

Along with churches, some agencies, service clubs and businesses like Kiwanis, Rotary, J.C. Penney's, Liberty Mutual and Thrivent provide items, grants and volunteers, said Ali.

"Last year, COVID changed the way we operate," she said. "We launched an order form for online shopping. Volunteers come in weekly and fill the orders. People come by to pick up the orders outside."

Those without access to a computer could order by phone, and a few come to the door.

The center also has referrals from homeless shelter case managers who made orders for clients.

"We have also given clothing, hygiene and baby items to 14 nonprofits this last year," Ali said.

Bob added that they have also had referrals from the Red Cross and agencies serving domestic violence victims.

"A broad array of people come—families stretched financially or burned out as families in Malden, people experiencing difficult situations, physical and mental health struggles or unemployment," Bob said.

"One of my favorite parts of

the work is serving everyone and making them feel welcome," Ali said, telling of upgrades to improve the atmosphere so people feel they are shopping in a store and can pick out what they want. "It's important for people to feel they are shopping, not coming to get free stuff."

Volunteers keep the place clean and organized.

The center has not been as busy with online orders as it would be in person, she said. It has served more people in need through agencies this year. We are looking forward to serving out clients in person again soon."

For information, call 536-1084, email [mcoc.spokane@gmail.com](mailto:mcoc.spokane@gmail.com) or visit [www.4mission.org](http://www.4mission.org).



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*are here for patients' families to instill hope, reassurance and validation throughout the grief process.*

— PATRICIA VALDÉS, MSW, PHD  
BEREAVEMENT SUPERVISOR




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