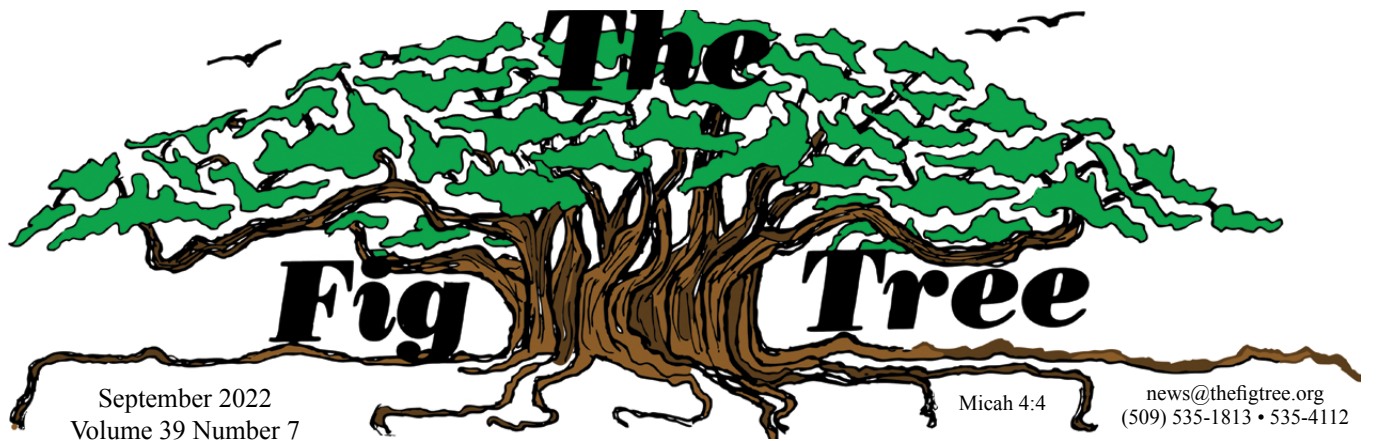


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CALENDAR ON PAGE 15
FEATURES 80+ EVENTS



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

Assemblies reveal impact of faith on world

By Mary Stamp

Since 1983, the World Council of Churches and its assemblies have influenced the founding and ongoing publication of The Fig Tree newspaper.

Fig Tree editor Mary Stamp has attended assemblies since the 6th Assembly in Vancouver, BC, in 1983. A document on “Communicating Credibly” was part of the background in founding The Fig Tree in 1984.

This year, The Fig Tree is being represented by Mary, staff member Marijke Fakasiieiki and volunteers Catherine Ferguson and Gen Heywood, all as accredited press.

“We plan in this issue and online at thefigtree.org to provide links for people here to gain a taste of the event. Because the Assembly is Aug. 31 to Sept. 8, we will provide coverage of it in September and October issues,” said Mary. “We invite donations to help us print more pages for that coverage.

“Awareness of the life and voice of Christians around the world gives us insights into our faith and the role of our faith in relationship to other faiths and to the intersection of faith with



Photos from 2006 and 2013 assemblies give flavor of worship, study, business and ties.

the issues of the world and issues affecting the everyday lives of people,” she said.

This summer, Mary conversed via Zoom with Sri Lankan, Australian and Dutch friends from the 1969-70 study program she participated in with 60 people from around the world at the WCC Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland.

The Sri Lankan, a 90-year-old former Anglican bishop active in the church, told of petrol shortages, food shortages and struggles of the people as the government was overthrown. Kenneth Fernando was, nonetheless, hopeful.

Two couples who live in Australia rejoiced that their May 21 election chose a new prime minister who, in their opinion, will forward action to reduce climate change destruction. They were hopeful.

The couple from The Netherlands were less hopeful, given the impact of heat and fires in Europe from climate change.

Encounters with people who live far away and face issues in their contexts inspired Mary in founding The Fig Tree. That inspiration continues in sharing stories

Continued on page 4

Holocaust Exhibit stirs reminders of personal intersections with history

For Brad Matthies, Gonzaga University’s associate dean for library services at Foley Library, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Exhibit, “Americans and the Holocaust,” stirred reminders of his family’s intersection with that period.

That’s what it is intended to do. It is to help Americans reflect, as the introductory panel says, on “the motives, pressures and fears that shaped Americans’ responses to Nazism, war and genocide.”

For him, the exhibit is an opportunity to allow the university

both to share new scholarly research and to “offer a credible counter-narrative to the hateful rhetoric of today.”

The free public exhibit, which runs from Tuesday, Aug. 23, to Friday, Oct. 7, was awarded to the Foley Library as one of 50 out of 250 applicants.

Housed in the Cowles Rare Books Reading Room on the third floor, its double-sided panels circle the room, inviting viewers to consider different themes and questions.

“We are the only library in our state to offer this exhibit that

invites critical thought, social justice and cultural engagement,” Brad said. “Those values represent the mission of Foley Library, Gonzaga University and the Gonzaga Center for the Study of Hate.”

During a pre-event tour, someone’s comment reminded him that his German Lutheran grandmother and mother had escaped from Berlin in the 1940s and settled in Northeast Nebraska. To avoid anti-German stigma, they changed their name from Braun to Brown.

In the section asking what Americans knew, the information panel on media is supplemented with a stand-up touch screen visitors can tap to learn what local media covered about Nazis, the persecution of Jews and the war.

“As a librarian with research skills, I can readily research 1940s Germany,” he said, adding that Foley Library has about a third of the books referenced by the exhibit. Spokane Public Libraries have about two-thirds

Continued on page 6

New Resource Directory connects people to help

The 2022-23 edition of the annual, comprehensive Resource Directory has been published and is being distributed by mail and delivery.

Its 200 pages provide information on congregations, ecumenical and interfaith ministries, human services, children’s and family resources, health care, senior services, justice and advocacy, environmental care, arts and culture, and civic services.

It is supported by \$43,945 from 128 advertisers and \$14,750 from 18 community partners.

Community partners are Rotary Club of Spokane 21, Banner Bank, Providence Health Care, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary U.S.-Ontario, Paul Viren & Associates, Second Harvest of the Inland Northwest, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, Innovia Foundation, Empire Health Foundation, the Community Building, Washington Trust Bank, Aging and Long-Term Care of Eastern Washington, Northwest Mediation Center, Goodwill Industries of the Inland Northwest, Fred Hutch Cancer Center, Eastern Washington University, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Coeur d’Alene and Greater Spokane County Meals on Wheels.

Funding includes donations from individuals and organizations. In addition, many volunteers facilitated the delivery of copies. Second Harvest volunteers assisted with deliveries.

The Tribune Publishing Company (TPC) in Lewiston, which prints The Fig Tree newspaper, did the printing.

“We welcome continued giving to the Resource Directory through the fall,” said directory editor, Malcolm Haworth.

For information, call 535-4112, email resourcedirectory@thefigtree.org or visit thefigtree.org for online access to the directory resources.

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11th Assembly addresses climate and war

At its assembly, the World Council of Churches (WCC) will raise issue of climate justice and underline the need to care for creation, as well as address other issues facing the world, said the WCC's acting general secretary Ioan Sauca.

"If we don't change our behavior, in 50 years our planet will be uninhabitable," he said in August at the WCC offices in Geneva. "We must act now," he said. "Leaders will be asked to act now to care for our common planet, the Earth."

More than 4,500 participants will address the assembly theme "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." The first thematic plenary is on Sept. 1, which churches worldwide mark as the Day of Creation.

"The emphasis on creation will be highlighted then," he said. "It is a theological issue. God's plan in Christ was also the reconciliation and healing of the whole creation."

Ioan said there would be messages in Karlsruhe from world Christian leaders including His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and His Holiness Pope Francis, highlighting the importance of God's creation.

The WCC has long been at the forefront of efforts to place the issue of climate justice on the world's agenda, playing a major role at the COP21 climate conference in Paris in 2015. Climate pilgrims from around the world met then to demand action for climate justice and call for the care for creation.

"The WCC deals with creation not as a fashionable issue of our time, but as a basic element of its very identity," he said.

Before the COP26 in 2021 at Glasgow, Ioan joined religious leaders in Rome to call world leaders to recognize the urgency of the crisis and to take action to preserve God's creation.

The WCC is one of the faith-based-organizations that has a permanent presence in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process, he noted, and it has been present at all the UN climate conferences since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

It had a prominent role on the environment before Rio. In 1974, the WCC organized a world conference on Science and Technology for Human Development that issued a call for a "sustainable and just society." In 1979, a WCC conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology warned about climate change from the build-up of carbon dioxide.

Holding the assembly in Karlsruhe highlights efforts of German churches and people to care for creation. Since the 1970s, the WCC's commitment to the environment helped stimulate the ecological movement in churches in the German Democratic Republic, East Germany.

Ioan praised a recent statement by German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock that the climate crisis "is now the biggest security problem facing everyone on earth."

In early August, Ioan visited Ukraine to express solidarity with people there and ensure their voices are heard in Karlsruhe. A WCC team that visited churches in Ukraine was the first high-level religious leaders to visit local parishes.

The WCC's main governing body, the central committee, discussed in June a proposal to suspend the Russian Orthodox Church as a WCC member but came to the unanimous conclusion that the WCC should remain an open platform where churches meet and challenge one another.

The WCC brings people together, "not because they agree with one another, but because they disagree," said Ioan.

"Saying that does not mean we agree with this war," he continued. The central committee described this action as an illegal and unjustifiable war inflicted on the people and sovereign state of Ukraine.

By Stephen Brown, editor of The Ecumenical Review

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

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Legislative Conference keynote named

The Eastern Washington Legislative Conference for 2023 will be held in person and online on Saturday, Jan. 21, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond.

Gen Heywood, pastor at Verdale United Church of Christ and convener of Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, will be the keynote speaker on the theme, "Caring for Our Common

Home Now and Forever."

She will share from her sabbatical experiences traveling globally and intersecting with people from around the world at the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly from August to October.

To accommodate the hybrid format and tech facilities at the church, there will be two to three in-person and online plenaries on

housing, refugees and one other issue, plus two in-person and two online workshops.

The program will begin at 8:30 a.m. for registration.

Organizers invite those interested to join in planning meetings at 1 p.m., Tuesdays, Sept 13, Oct. 11, Nov. 8 and 22, Dec. 13, and Jan. 10 and 17.

For information, call 535-4112 or email event@thefigtree.org.

Vigil for 'Healing the Earth' is Oct. 2

A Vigil for the Healing of the Earth will be held from 3 to 4:30 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 2, at the Old Mission Landing on Dredge Rd. near Cataldo Mission in Idaho at exit 39 off Interstate 90.

Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience of Eastern Washington and North Idaho (FLLC) have organized Healing of the Earth and Earth Day Vigils every six months since Earth Day 2019.

Speakers will tell how they are affected by living on one of the nation's largest SuperFund sites—from the Montana border west into Spokane. A SuperFund site takes major funding to clean and contain the pollution.

Pat Millen, OSF, interim convener of FLLC, and justice, peace and integrity of creation coordinator for the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, said she

hopes that those participating in these vigils advocate in their faith communities, neighborhoods, nation and the world for policies and practices that support environmental sustainability.

Attendees will see signs at the boat launch that warn: "The soils and sediments in this area contain harmful levels of lead, arsenic and other heavy metals. Young children and pregnant women are at greatest risk from exposure."

People will participate in a Grieving Circle to express their grief about the Earth's ecological devastation. They will learn about groups working to overcome the effects of pollution and climate change.

The goal is also to inform people what groups are doing and how to join them to be part of the solution.

"Every six months, we gather as a community to celebrate our collective response to the healing of the earth, our common home. St. Francis of Assisi reminds us in his Canticle of Creation that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our lives and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us, Pat added.

Founded in 2018, FLLC works to overcome racism, militarism, poverty and ecological devastation, principles set forth by the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival.

"The care of our planet crosses cultures, classes, religions and non-religions," said Pat. "We need to be united in healing our planet."

For information, call 253-797-0168 or email pmillen@osfphila.org.

Earth Ministry tours state to build ties

During August and September, Seattle-based Earth Ministry has been traveling throughout Washington State to connect with communities, build relationships, celebrate and raise funds for faith-based organizing around environmental justice.

The gatherings are opportunities to recognize the community as a resource, share stories and tell about accomplishments.

There will be an online gathering from 6:30 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Sept 8, and gatherings from noon to 2 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 17, at Collaboration Coffee in Yakima; 3 to 4:30 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 18 at Pioneer United Methodist Church in Walla Walla, and from 5:30

to 7 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 20, at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Spokane.

For information, call 206-632-2426 or email emoffice@earthministry.org.

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Senior Resource Fair will be Sept. 19

The 2022 Senior Resource Fair is from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday, Sept. 19, at the Spokane Valley Senior Center in CenterPlace Event Center, 2426 N Discovery Pl.

Representatives from local senior services—transportation, housing, legal assistance, healthcare, Medicare, home services and others—will offer resources. RSVP for lunch.

For information, call 926-1937 or visit spokanevalley.org/seniorresourcefair.

Whitworth Leadership Forum is Sept. 20

The Whitworth President's Leadership Forum will take place from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 20 at the Spokane Convention Center.

Retired U.S. Navy Admiral James Stavridis will speak on roots of the war in Ukraine, profile Vladimir Putin based on personal experience and analyze the state of the conflict and its impact on the global economy.

James was NATO's 16th Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, 15th Commander of the U.S. European Command, and the longest-serving combatant commander in recent years.

For information on tickets, call 777-3449 or email iaevents@whitworth.edu or visit whitworth.edu/plf-22.

VOA sets Eye Contact Art Exhibit Sept. 22

The Volunteers of America (VOA) Spokane fundraiser, "Eye Contact: Art Exhibit" is 5 to 8 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 22 at the Historic Washington Cracker Building, 304 W. Pacific.

Artists, who are all youth, will showcase their work, connecting attendees with needs of vulnerable people in the community. The evening includes food, drinks, live music, a silent auction of local artists' artwork, performance art and a gallery show of work by women and youth experiencing homelessness.

For information, call 710-8944 or email rbarnden@voaspokane.org.

Habitat donors vie to rappel tall building

Seeking to put God's love into action, Habitat for Humanity Spokane is offering a unique fundraising opportunity: "Over the Edge for Affordable Home Ownership."

Participants who raise \$1,000 for affordable housing initiatives of Habitat for Humanity Spokane will be able to rappel down the Bank of America Building, Spokane's tallest building, in "Rappel for Affordable Housing" on Saturday, Oct. 15.

Habitat highlights the need to build affordable housing for low- to medium-income families in Spokane to build community and hope. The nonprofit partners with communities of faith to put faith into action and strengthens philanthropic ties to make real change in the communities they serve.

For information, visit habitat-spokane.org/over-the-edge.

HRC holds Gala fundraising dinner

The Davenport Grand Hotel at 333 W Spokane Falls Blvd. will be the site of the HRC Ministries 6th Annual Gala beginning at 5 p.m., Friday, Sept. 30. The dinner and program run from 6 through 8:30 p.m.

There will be music by the Zonky Jazz Band, a silent auction and a dinner, and an opportunity to honor volunteers.

Proceeds support HRC Ministries' work to help individuals and families affected by poverty, abuse and neglect.

For information, visit hrcministries.com/gala.

Carl Maxey Center celebrates Re-Opening

The Carl Maxey Center (CMC) will reopen its building at 3114 E 5th Ave. in Spokane's East Central neighborhood with a five-day celebration from Sept. 13 to 17. The 1920s building that houses the African-American focused cultural center was closed in early 2020 to begin a four-phase remodel process.

Phase 1 of the remodel wrapped up earlier this year, but COVID's impact on the nation's supply chain delayed the arrival of an electrical component to complete the final inspection the last week of August.

A soft opening was held in late February.

"I am excited that we are finally able to announce the official reopening our remodeled Carl Maxey Center for the community. It's been a long time coming," said executive director, Sandra Williams. "This is only the beginning. We continue to seek contributions for work that still needs to be done on this multi-year project, but we're off to a great start thanks to support from donors and the Spokane community."

The center is a neighborhood cultural center, a gathering place and a community-based nonprofit that provides programs and services to address needs of Spokane's African-American/Black community.

It is a resource for communities of color in Spokane and the



Pastors C.W. Andrews, Happy Watkins and Amos Atkinson play dominos with Ethan Mendoza-Pena, right, during a game afternoon at Carl Maxey Center. Photo courtesy of Sandra Williams

greater Spokane community, creating opportunities for residents to gather, interact, celebrate, network, share experiences, discover resources, receive services, gain support and make connections in an environment that is uniquely African American, Sandra said.

Each day of the Grand Re-Opening, the center will highlight programs and services.

Festivities begin at 4 p.m., Tuesday, with a ribbon cutting followed by an open house from 4:30 to 6 p.m., featuring the works of local artist Berton Jones-Bey, and a dominoes competition from 6 to 8 p.m.

The focus on Wednesday is on health and wellness. The Carl Maxey Center partners with Molina Healthcare, Amerigroup and Red Cross of Spokane to

host a community health clinic and wellness fair from 4 to 8 p.m.

From 5 to 8 p.m., Thursday, there is a Black Business Reception to celebrate Spokane's Black business owners and entrepreneurs and launch the Black Business & Professional Alliance of Spokane.

The focus from 7 to 8:30 p.m., Friday is on Black Culture. The Carl Maxey Center's 5th Avenue Spotlight will feature Alethea and Friends in a concert.

The Grand Re-Opening celebration will culminate with a partnership between the center and Fresh Soul Restaurant for a community barbeque and soul food cook-off from 2 to 6 p.m., Saturday.

For information, call 795-1886 or visit carlmaxeycenter.org.

River ethics conference is Sept. 27-28

For Indigenous people of the Columbia River and its tributaries, salmon were at their life's center. Destroying salmon was part of the genocide, said organizers of the 9th One River, Ethics Matter (OREM) international conference that focuses on restoring Spokane River salmon. It will be held online from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 27 and 28.

The previous conference, OREM-8, on restoring salmon to the Okanogan River, drew an international audience of about 650. The 2022 academic host, Eastern Washington University, can handle up to 1000 participants.

The hosts are the Spokane Tribe of Indians and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, with support from Upper Columbia United Tribes.

This year's conference will also build on Pope Francis' recent visit to Canada regarding the genocide there, said John Osborn of the planning committee.

"OREM will continue to empower people to talk about the various facets of the genocide, including the boarding schools,

missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and salmon extirpation," he said.

OREM brings together three processes in ethics: a consultative process used in clinical medicine, the transformative process of the Columbia River Pastoral Letter from the Roman Catholic Bishops of the international watershed, and the Truth and Reconciliation process in response to apartheid in South Africa, John added.

The four panels in the conference are from the four sections of the Columbia River Pastoral Letter and help frame the broader public dialogue about the past and future of the Columbia River.

"The Spokane River was home to one of the most bountiful salmon runs in the entire Columbia River watershed. From time immemorial, Indigenous people gathered at Spokane Falls for the returning summer Chinook Salmon. Salmon remain deeply important for Indigenous culture and sustenance," organizers said.

"Today, however, dams block returning salmon. The Grand Coulee Dam alone cuts off more than 40 percent of total salmon and steelhead habitat in the Columbia Basin," organizers said.

Conference materials note that "against all odds—a genocidal past with a climate-crisis future—tribes have stepped into a leadership role to protect and restore rivers and salmon, and our collective future."

For information, call 939-1290, email john@waterplanet.ws or visit riverethics.org. Register is at inside.ewu.edu/orem.

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2022 Assembly will offer new perspectives

Continued from page 1
of people who make a difference because of their faith and values.

Mary offered an overview of previous assemblies she, her daughter Marijke and other family members have attended.

• **The first Assembly**, which both of Mary's parents, Lloyd and Elizabeth Stamp attended, was Aug. 22 to Sept. 4, 1948, in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, on the theme, "Man's Disorder and God's Design."

This assembly officially founded the World Council of Churches with 147 churches from different confessions and many countries. Mary's father also attended the Faith and Order, Life and Work meetings in 1937 leading up to the first assembly.

• **The 2nd Assembly**, attended by Mary's father, a United Church of Christ minister, was held in August 1954 at Evanston, Ill. Delegates from 161 member churches discussed the theme, "Christ—the Hope of the World," in the midst of Cold War tensions.

• **The 3rd Assembly** drew 197 member churches in 1961 at New Delhi, India, on the theme, "Jesus Christ – the Light of the World."

• **The 4th Assembly** drew 235 member churches in 1968 at Uppsala, Sweden on the theme, "Behold, I make all things new." Vatican II led to Catholic observers participating and exploring cooperation.

• **The 5th Assembly** on "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites" gathered 285 member churches in 1975 at Nairobi, Kenya.

• **The 6th Assembly**, the first one Mary attended with her children—Marijke, Karen and Malcolm—was July 24 to Aug. 10, 1983, in Vancouver, B.C.

Under the theme, "Jesus Christ - the Life of the World," 301 member churches emphasized and experienced common worship in a great white tent. There was hope from the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document and such ecumenical experiments as the Lima Liturgy.

The nuclear threat and neo-colonialism permeated discussions. Groups discussed witnessing in a divided world, taking steps towards unity, moving towards participation, sharing life in community, confronting threats to peace and survival, struggling for justice and human dignity, learning in community and communicating credibly.

• **The 7th Assembly**, Feb. 7 to 20, 1991, in Canberra, Australia focused on the theme "Come, Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole

Creation." Mary and Marijke attended. Delegates from 317 member churches reflected on four sub-themes: sustaining creation, truth setting people free, unity and reconciliation, and calling for the Holy Spirit to transform the world.

• **The 8th Assembly**, which both attended, gathered 339 member churches to celebrate the 50th year since the foundation of the WCC. They met from Dec. 3 to 14, 1998, at Harare, Zimbabwe, around the theme, "Turn to God-Rejoice in Hope."

Members renewed their commitment to stay together and be in solidarity with their African hosts. The Assembly set up a commission on the participation of the Orthodox churches in the WCC and created a Forum of Christian Churches and Ecumenical Organizations to extend ecumenical outreach beyond WCC member churches. The festival of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women preceded the assembly.

• **The 9th Assembly** Feb. 14 to 23, 2006, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, gathered 348 member churches with more than 4,000 participants, on the theme "God in your grace, transform the world."

They urged member churches to prioritize unity, catholicity, baptism and prayer. Other key issues were economic justice, the Christian role in religious plurality and youth overcoming violence. Delegates revised the constitution to make WCC decision-making based on consensus.

• **The 10th Assembly** was Oct. 30 to Nov. 8, 2013, in Busan, Republic of Korea, on the theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace." The WCC's 345 member churches heard that the search for unity in Korea was a sign of hope for the world—a land divided by poverty and wealth, happiness and violence, welfare and war. The message: "We are not allowed to close our eyes to harsh realities or to rest our hands from God's transforming work. As a fellowship, the WCC stands in solidarity with people and churches in the Korean peninsula, and with all who strive for justice and peace."

Mary explained that assemblies feature daily morning and evening interconfessional worship services with singing, Scriptures, prayers and reflection on each day's theme. Those services offer a sample of the spiritual diversity in the fellow-

ship of the WCC.

In Karlsruhe, representatives of 352 member churches gather from 110 countries, representing more than half a billion Christians "committed in the quest for visible unity grounded in shared faith in God, witness to the saving work of Jesus and imitation of Jesus' self-giving love for all humanity," said Agnes Aboun, Central Committee moderator.

Daily spiritual life also includes small, language-based home group Bible studies with a midday prayer.

As the business sessions and thematic plenaries of the assembly unfold, the spiritual life components nurture the soul and renew the spirit as participants sing, pray, reflect on and discern the future direction and action of the global ecumenical movement.

Worship creates openness to where God is leading delegates as they declare the theme, "Christ's love is moving the world to reconciliation and unity."

A daily plenary focuses on an aspect of the assembly theme.

In business plenaries, delegates from member churches address the assembly and create an overview of the WCC's life until the next assembly. They elect the new central committee and eight WCC presidents.

Delegates participate in a home group with participants from across regions, confessions, professions, age, "old-timers" and "newcomers" at the assembly. The daily groups are spaces for exchange and learning, for sharing at the assembly and with WCC governing bodies, member churches and partners.

An assembly is much more than business. Bible studies give participants an opportunity to discern God's purposes for themselves and the ecumenical movement.

Groups are small enough to allow everyone to contribute and large enough to give a range of perspectives. To be involved in group Bible study is to be open to one another, not to persuade others to a particular point of view. They are a place where participants can integrate what they hear and do in the assembly to discover the possibilities of transformation that God offers.

For information, call 535-1813 or visit oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly.



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Freedom Project East helps people released from prison to reintegrate

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

After serving more than 25 years in prison, Jermaine Williams, who entered the criminal justice system as a youth, now uses his experience to help others reintegrate into area communities.

He began re-engaging with that system and people emerging from it as a volunteer and now as the director of Freedom Project East.

“What I do is rooted in racial equity. Systems are structured to disenfranchise folks, disadvantage them and create makeshift positions of authority. I address that head on, in a humane, culturally-sensitive way, understanding that our liberation is tied together,” he said.

Born into poverty in the “hood” or “real ghetto” of Chicago, Jermaine moved back and forth to Milwaukee. At 15, he went to Seattle for a cousin’s funeral. For the next two and a half years, he floated between Seattle, Milwaukee and Chicago.

At 17, he assaulted a man and sexually assaulted a 16-year-old girl. In two trials, he was sentenced to 36 years, but was released after 25 years and three months in prison.

Jermaine was transferred to Airway Heights Corrections Center in April 2016 after his first juvenile board hearing, the Indeterminate Sentence Review Board. Before he met with them again in January 2020, he completed the programs required and had “checked every box and more,” which is why they found him eligible for release.

A nonviolent communications program of Freedom Project Washington and a psychological evaluation led a panel to determine Jermaine was suitable for early release.

While in prison, he started volunteering with Freedom Project WA. A week after his release in May 2020 in Spokane, he continued volunteering with the project, doing research for the Black Brilliance Research Project and King County Equity Now.

By fall 2020, Jermaine became director of Freedom Project East.

“I seek to dismantle systems of oppression rooted in white supremacy and mass incarceration,” he said.

Aware that the police force evolved in part from runaway slave enforcement, Jermaine believes that the criminal justice system should be abolished because it is inherently structured in an inequitable, racially unbalanced, inhumane way.

“I also focus on the humanity of individuals we support,” said Jermaine, who focuses on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) formerly incarcerated people who are struggling with re-entry.

Freedom Project WA provides services for both BIPOC communities and white participants.

Jermaine has completed a 14-month term on the Washington Supreme Court Racial Justice Consortium, an effort to bring racial equity to the justice system through partnerships of community leaders with everyday people.

“**My prison experiences** contributed to my passion for this work. There were themes in my life I didn’t understand, such as



Jermaine Williams

the trauma heaped on my people, growing up in poverty, the heritage of slavery, the theory that black people have a higher pain threshold and medical professionals assuming black people cannot afford services,” he said.

Jermaine saw the impact with his grandmother and mother relying on home remedies, rather than going to a doctor.

Jermaine began practicing Islam two years after he was imprisoned. Becoming Muslim gave him contact with people of other cultures and countries. Islam offered him new ideals and traditions. One principle of Islam is “to love for your brother what you love for yourself.” Such principles took root in him.

Eventually, he said, others in prison saw him as an example and sought his counsel because of how he carried himself as a result of his Islamic beliefs.

“That helped me set aside what I was dealing with. My first marriage was in shambles. I didn’t know if I would ever be outside,” he said. “My family was living in abject poverty. I faced immediate problems but focused on getting out to have a second chance.”

While incarcerated, he felt he was too old to be considered young, but too young to be considered old, so he said he had people look up to him while he was trying to find others to look up to.

“Prison supervisors sent people getting in trouble to talk to me. It made a difference. I became a peer specialist, using my lived experience to inspire others to make different choices,” he said.

He met Dora Hunter, now Daaa-Rahemaah Williams, during a visitation at a Juneteenth Celebration in June 2014 at

the Coyote Ridge Correctional Center in Connell. They married nearly four years ago.

“When you find your passion, you find your purpose,” she told him, encouraging him to find what he was passionate about.

Freedom Project WA’s executive director, who is also directly impacted, and the Freedom Project Team, created a volunteer position for Jermaine, where he began to live out his passion.

“I knew this was my destiny. Even if I was not working for Freedom Project, I would have continued this work as a volunteer on the inside,” he said.

Another principle of Islam is that “any time we remove an obstacle or distress for another, God will remove an obstacle from our life now or in the next

life,” he said.

“Using that principle in my work, I seek to remove an obstacle from someone else’s way. People come to me with many obstacles. I encounter people who are more than qualified for a job, have finances to purchase or rent a house, have skill sets in hospitality or take care of disabled parents or friends, but as a result of a past blemish on their record, they no longer qualify,” he said. “With obstacles to the formerly incarcerated reintegrating, we help those transitioning from prison to meet their basic needs.”

Jermaine helps people understand the importance of meeting their needs, so they are not tempted to harm themselves or others in their frustration.

“It was psychologically tough when I came out in a new city,” said Jermaine, whose health suffered in prison.

With support from The Carl Maxey Center, I Did the Time, the Smart Justice Coalition, Spokane Community Against Racism and The Way to Justice, he created the Freedom Project East, incorporating their services and the relationships that he needed when he first reentered the community.

“When resources dry up, relationships are there for the long haul. Sometimes people need to talk and may call at 3 a.m. They want to be heard and accept advice based on my lived experience,” he said. “The relational part is crucial.”

Wrap-around services include housing support, jobs, clothing, work, food, transportation, medical support, mental health services, peer counseling and peer support.

Freedom Project East also provides anti-oppression and mass incarceration (AOMI) training,

using Nonviolent Communication (NVC) with a racial equity lens to help with healing. Groups pay for the trainings.

In one workshop, he gives people information and chance to see and work on issues.

In a second workshop one to two months later, he covers how people see themselves and how to see people for who, not what, they are.

This is a way to help people overcome implicit bias, so they can move beyond white supremacy, Jermaine said.

“If I’m aware of what is happening in my environment and the internalized oppression, I cannot just go along to get along,” he added. “I made some bad choices but I grew and reformed. I’m not an exception. Each of us is amazing. Some need to be cultivated so they keep dreaming, rather than letting others stomp on their dreams.”

Jermaine knows many amazing people who are or were incarcerated, people who lack the opportunity to let their glory shine.

“Most staff and volunteers in Freedom Project were once incarcerated and seek to give back,” he said. “That makes our work credible. We are better than our past mistakes. Our philosophy is to know that everyone can do better and to instruct others how to do better,” he said. “Our liberation is tied together.”

Jermaine hopes formerly incarcerated people will have the same chance as those who make mistakes but were not incarcerated: to sweep their mistakes under the rug, rise above them, do amazing things and be who they are meant to be.

For information, call 904-3367 or jermaine@freedomprojectwa.org.



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NAMI Spokane provides free services to anyone in Spokane and the surrounding communities who suffers from mental health conditions. (We also teach concerned partners and family members how they can help.) Our education courses and support groups are led by trained people who have endured similar struggles.

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Exhibit invites people to do further study and engage in action

Continued from page 1 of the materials.

The exhibit's goal invites people to go beyond its panels of information, interactive displays and videos to stir interest in further study and engagement.

Exhibit organizers have prepared a handout when people ask, "What can I do?"

That handout suggests that visitors can learn ways they can become involved from the Spokane County Human Rights Task Force, the Spokane Human Rights Commission, the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations and reading The Fig Tree newspaper.

Brad said four educational events coincide with the exhibit.

- The free, public opening event, "Americans and the Holocaust: Remembering our Past to Inform Our Future," is offered with partners, Foley Library, the Gonzaga Center for the Study of Hate and the Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle.

In person and livestreamed from 7 to 8:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 8, at Gonzaga's Hemmingson Ballroom, it features Julia Thompson, who works at the Seattle center, interviewing Holocaust survivor, Carla Peperzak, 98, who worked with the underground in the Netherlands during the war.

Gonzaga history professor Kevin O'Connor, who teaches about Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, will provide historical context before the interview.

After the interview, Kristine Hoover, director of the Center for the Study of Hate, will look at present and future concerns and implications.

Pre-registration is required.

Other events include:

- The Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., are offer-



Brad Mattheis shows the section on media.

ing an in-service seminar for regional junior high and high school teachers of social studies, history and civics to equip them to teach about the Holocaust and related topics. The teachers' seminar is Sept. 7 and 8.

- The Gonzaga Center for Community Engagement and the Opportunity Northeast Initiative are facilitating special tours for Garry and Shaw Middle Schools and Rogers High School classes. Other schools and congregations may arrange tours for 15 participants.

There is also a booklet for self-guided tours for people to use during hours the exhibit is open.

- Rabbi Elizabeth Goldstein of the Religious Studies Department and the Jewish Bulldogs are hosting an event to introduce the Gonzaga student body to the Jewish faith, culture and music.

In the introductory panel, a looping silent film provides context for challenges Americans faced in the 15 years between the end of World War I in 1918 to 1932, the year before Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany and Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated as the U.S. President.

The first section explores

what Americans knew about the Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews. It includes a newspaper collection compiled by teachers, students, librarians and history buffs who sent articles from local newspapers to the Holocaust Museum's online database.

The next section examines "Did Americans Help Jewish Refugees?" It introduces the American immigration process and obstacles in the 1930s and 1940s, the challenges Jews faced in seeking to leave Europe and come to the U.S., and stories of a few Americans who assisted refugees. Jewish immigrants were more than 50 percent of all immigrants to the U.S. in 1939.

A third section looks at reasons Americans went to war and debates in American society over whether to enter the war.

A fourth section looks at how Americans responded to the Holocaust after learning in November 1942 of the plan by Nazis and collaborators to murder all European Jews. A film in this section connects the timelines of the Holocaust and World War II.

"Americans could have done

more," Brad asserted.

Public walk-in hours are 3 to 8 p.m., Wednesdays and 1 to 5 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays, and by appointment for group tours from Aug. 29 to Sept. 30. From Oct. 1 to 7, the hours are 1 to 5 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays, and 3 to 9 p.m., Monday to Friday, and by appointment for group tours.

For Brad, hosting an exhibition like this exemplifies one reason he came to Gonzaga four years ago.

As an academic librarian, he started in instruction and research, teaching classes in information literacy—helping college students think critically and use the library.

During his 11 years at Butler University in Indianapolis, he decided to enter library administration. He was library director for six years at Casper College in Wyoming before coming to Gonzaga.

When the position at Gonzaga opened, he applied readily because he knew about Gonzaga from working with a previous dean who had worked at Foley Library.

"As an academic librarian, I support the American Library Association's professional code of ethics related to intellectual freedom, social justice and education of the public," he said. "I appreciate that we can do good in the community through the library."

Growing up in Norfolk, Neb., in a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, Brad—who doesn't call any one denomination home and worships at various churches in Spokane—said the values of serving community and doing good "were baked into me at an early age" during studies at a Lutheran parochial school.

Those values continued to be developed through his undergraduate studies at Wayne

State College and graduate studies at Indiana University in Bloomington.

"Our awareness of the region's white supremacy calculated into the reason Paul Bracke, dean of Foley Library, courted this exhibit," Brad said.

Brad said "Americans and the Holocaust" is a 10-year project of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, anchored in an exhibition that opened in April 2018 in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the museum's 25th anniversary.

The exhibition stems from the museum's mandate to reflect on "the American aspects of the Holocaust."

The Gonzaga exhibit, "a snapshot of the full exhibit," poses questions that encourage people to think critically about the past and about the role of Americans in response to threats of genocide today, Brad said.

The "Americans and the Holocaust" traveling exhibition is visiting 50 libraries from October 2021 through November 2023.

For information, call 313-7017, email mattheis@gonzaga.edu, or visit gonzaga.edu/holocaustexhibit for tickets, hours and tours.

YWCA organizes banners for Domestic Violence Month

In October, YWCA Spokane is bringing back "Recognize. Respond. Refer." Domestic Violence Action Month (DVAM) banners across downtown.

Businesses and individuals can sponsor DVAM banners to display downtown in October. Sponsored banners will display a custom message provided by an individual or organization.

The DVAM banner sponsorship form is available at ywca-spokane.org/dvam. For banners to be produced and hung at the start of October, the deadline to commit is Sept. 12.

Along with the banners, YWCA Spokane encourages the community to go purple, the nationally designated color for domestic violence awareness.

The YWCA invites people to develop creative with purple displays, décor or lighting to show support for survivors. YWCA Spokane can provide ideas.

YWCA Spokane seeks to support survivors and say the community values healthy relationships.

For information, visit ywca-spokane.org/dvam or email dvam@ywcaspokane.org.

Serving seniors in rural communities requires partnering with everyone

After serving several nonprofit agencies and gaining skills, Paige Collins feels she was led to the work at the Council on Aging in Colfax.

"I love the feeling of taking care of people in need and surprising them with what our agency and partners have to offer," said Paige, who grew up Lutheran in Bellevue, Wash.

Years ago, driving across the state and through the Palouse to and from college at Washington State University in Pullman, Paige felt that the people living in the old farmhouses were lucky.

Eventually, she and her husband realized they could move there to be closer to one child at Fairchild AFB, another at University of Idaho and a third at WSU. They now live in La-Crosse and operate a nonprofit, Livestock Rescue, at their farm.

After earning a bachelor's in criminal science with a minor in social work at WSU in 1989, her goal was originally to go into criminal justice and mental health work, but career choices led her to fall in love with the nonprofit world after volunteering with a food bank in Seattle.

In a few months, she became the food bank's manager. Eight years later, she began working for Northwest Harvest in Spokane, and seven years ago Suzy McNeilly of the Council on Aging in Colfax urged her to apply there.



Paige Collins coordinates outreach in Whitman County. Photo courtesy of Paige Collins

The council has two sites in Colfax providing for food and transportation needs in Whitman County.

The agency's nutrition side is varied. They have eight senior meal sites they oversee around the county. They also support 13 food pantries along with the Meals on Wheels program for Pullman and Colfax.

"For the number of staff we have, we are busy," Paige said.

"Being in a rural area, it's 100 percent different than serving in downtown Seattle where there are 27 food banks competing

for the same pots of money. Here, we partner with everyone on everything. We oversee most area food banks to make sure everyone has food," she said.

This work is only possible through support from communities they serve.

"The communities really do step up," she said.

Food sources are Second Harvest and Northwest Harvest. They do a grocery rescue at Walmart and Safeway in Pullman, and Rosauer's in Colfax.

In the summer growing season, they have a robust farm-

to-food program supported by state and other grants. Soon they will bring in large quantities of produce to give away at the food pantries and the senior meal programs.

Meals on Wheels serves 20 individuals in Pullman, and 10 in Colfax every day.

The Food Pantry program added another food bank last July. Cougar Food, housed on the WSU campus, serves students.

Through Senior Meal sites, people can come for a sit-down meal every day of the week in different parts of Whitman County. Most locations have a core group of 30 people who show up. Pullman has more, Endicott has fewer, Paige reported. Senior Meals also allow individuals to take to-go meals home.

"The Food Pantry numbers have jumped dramatically, as they were serving more than 1,000 a month," she said. "Now we serve 3,200 individuals every month through all food pantries."

The Council on Aging continually needs volunteers in the Colfax office, at senior meal locations and at area food pantries.

"Most rural food pantries are covered, but we can use the extra hands in Colfax pantries," she said.

"We try to be a resource hub in Whitman County for nutrition and transportation, everything that people might need," said Paige.

"We have good connections with resource services in the

county. If folks call needing chore help at home, we connect them with Rural Resources, the Community Action Center or whoever has the resource needed," said Paige.

The transportation program, COAST Transportation, was the original part of a business started in the late 1970s, transporting seniors to go shopping.

Now they transport anyone with a need for a ride. That program operates in five counties in Idaho and four counties in Washington.

"Last year drivers drove more than 500,000 miles," Paige said. "They are busy, so they are always seeking new volunteers."

COAST transportation drivers take people to have their hair done, go shopping, visit a nursing home or go to doctor appointments for no charge.

"We always need volunteer drivers. We cover 57 cents a mile. It's a good job for someone who works or has just retired, who does not want to sit around. They can drive as much as they like or as little as they want," she explained.

"We need volunteer drivers every day. That is the greatest need right now," said Paige.

For information, call 397-4305. pcollinscoa@gmail.com.

CAP offers Cost of Poverty Simulation

Community Action Partnership is offering a Cost of Poverty Experience (C.O.P.E.) Simulation from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 13, at Community United Methodist Church, 1470 W. Hanley in Coeur d'Alene, to allow staff and volunteers of nonprofits to gain a hands-on understanding of living in poverty.

The C.O.P.E. Simulation offers options to be a participant, experiencing the poverty simulation or to be a "vendor," someone who works in a homeless shelter, community services or law enforcement.

"Poverty simulations offer an alternate perspective to staff and volunteers who work with

people experiencing poverty. They open minds to a new way of looking at the world and invite more room for compassion," said Kimberly Spencer, community services manager with Community Action Partnership.

For information, call 208-770-3000 or email k.raugh@cap4action.org.

Climate Center hosts two September events

The Gonzaga Center for the Study of Climate, Society and the Environment is hosting two events in September.

A screening of the documentary "Youth v. Gov" will be held at 6 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 8, at Hemmingson Auditorium. The film covers the story of Juliana v. The United States, a constitutional lawsuit taken on by 21 American youth aged 14 to 25.

Our Children's Trust, a nonprofit, has represented the youth since 2015, challenging the gov-

ernment's violation of their constitutional rights to life, liberty, personal safety and property by creating the climate crisis.

A talk on "Polar Bears and Global Warming: Connecting the Dots to the Rest of Us" will be at 6 p.m., Wednesday Sept. 28, at Hemmingson.

Steven Amstrup, a chief scientist for Polar Bears International, will present fun facts about polar bears and his work to convince Secretary of the Interior that loss of ice in the sea threatens

polar bear survival in the Arctic. They are the first species listed as endangered because of global warming.

He will share updates from his work in 2020 on the impact of further ice melting and its connections to climate change affecting everyone, including the environment, economy and way of life in the Inland Northwest.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/ClimateCenterEvents.

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For Indigenous people of the Columbia River and its tributaries, salmon were at their life's center. Destroying salmon was part of the genocide. Against all odds - a genocidal past with a climate-crisis future - tribes have stepped into a leadership role to protect and restore rivers and salmon - and our collective future. Restoring Spokane River salmon is part of this story and our focus for OREM-9.

OREM - is supported by the Columbia Institute for Water Policy and Sierra Club.
For more: riverethics.org

Community team transform motel into haven to house 90 refugee families

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

The former Quality Inn on East 4th Ave. near downtown Spokane has become the front line of the Ukraine relief efforts in Spokane.

Under the executive directorship of Mark Finney, the former executive director of World Relief, the complex, now named Thrive Center International, currently provides three to six months of temporary housing for refugees.

Approximately 90 Ukrainian refugee families most from the Mariupol region reside there now with the probability of more arriving through September and October.

Mark describes the project as the fulfillment of a dream.

“At World Relief I saw that we could provide good social services for folks but because we couldn’t control where their housing was, a lot of times we were unable to serve them effectively because of transportation issues or childcare issues. Moms with young kids couldn’t participate with programs. So no matter how good the programs were, refugees couldn’t take advantage of them,” he said.

Even while still at World Relief, staff was looking for a new facility where offices could be on site and the refugees with the highest needs would be able to live there and receive the services they needed as they began a new life in the United States.

When the opportunity for the former motel occurred along with the government funding to finance it, Mark leaped at the chance and was quickly joined by Jim CastroLang, who is the operations administrator.

Just as quickly three other staff were hired to complete the team that would make it all work.

Anna Bondarenko became the assistant manager, and Lidia Pauline is the general manager.

Both women came to the United States as young children, Anna from Kyrgyzstan and Pauline from Ukraine. Both are fluent in Russian, English and their nations’ languages.

The fifth member of the team is Marshall McLean as communications coordinator. In September, a sixth member of the team will come on board as a volunteer coordinator.

As the team agrees, Thrive isn’t just about giving refugees



Yelyzaveta Shchukina painted a wall in a common space of the Thrive Center.

Photo courtesy of Thrive Center

a place to survive until they can get work authorization and permanent housing and move on to stable live. It is a place for them to thrive.

Anna and Lidia handle the reception desk and assist the refugees in whatever ways they need. They never know what they might be asked to do.

Recently they received a call from a young Ukrainian man on his way to Spokane as a refugee. He asked for a large bouquet of flowers and some balloons for his arrival, because as soon as he arrived, he had a ring to propose to his girlfriend who was already living there with her parents.

He had been on the verge of proposing when the war broke out. He fled with the family to western Ukraine and then Europe but got separated from them on the journey through Europe. Before he could catch up with them, they already had been put on a flight to the U.S.

He told Anna and Lidia he was not going to miss this opportunity again.

The Thrive Center Facebook page posted the video of his arrival and proposal with many from the center there to celebrate with him when she said yes.

Another request came from a parent whose child had pierced his foot in an accident. Anna directed them to one of the two nearby urgent care facilities.

Three women have had new babies born since coming to Spokane.

Anna, in particular, has helped them find the items they need in their new home.

Sometimes she helps others locate the internet resources they need to find government forms for work authorization permits or insurance for their cars or a place to have a car repaired.

In the middle of August, Lidia was arranging repairs for the swimming pool in the facility. It hadn’t been used for over a year and as the temperatures soared to triple digits, they had their first pool party.

“A pool isn’t really necessary here,” explained Mark, “but we want Thrive Center to be full of joy and a place where people thrive and not just survive.”

The staff also learned that one of the women, Yelyzaveta Shchukina, was a mural painter and they invited her to decorate a wall in one of the common spaces.

She painted a Ukrainian scene with bright blue skies, green fields and perky yellow sunflowers—the colors of the Ukrainian flag. The scene reminds her of the Ukraine but also could be in the Spokane region as well.

Once remodeling is completed by the building’s owners, the refugee housing center will have 153 rooms, two event spaces, a

full commercial kitchen, and two dining areas providing shelter for refugee and immigrant families and on-site facilities for education and programming.

Currently, among the approximately 90 families living there, the smaller families each have their own hotel rooms on the side of the building that has the single rooms and the larger ones on the side which has suites, essentially double rooms that can be opened up into a single unit.

Each family is responsible for their own meals, and the rooms have a two-burner hot plate, a microwave and a small refrigerator to make that possible. The rooms are small but there are multipurpose spaces where children can play and

parents can relax outside of the small rooms.

“When the people from the Ukraine come and see this place, they tell us they feel welcome. This is more than they expected. That’s special to us. We want this to be a place that’s full of life,” said Mark, emphasizing the vision.

In time, Thrive Center will most likely be home to refugees from many different cultures and the headquarters for Thrive International.

With its event space, it is even now beginning to be used as a place for community events and partnerships with organizations doing similar work in the Inland Northwest.

Already during the summer, an English language instructor from Roosevelt Elementary School had a seven-week reading program for kids in the space, and Jackson Lino runs a youth program and the Neema Youth Choir there.

Mark and Jim both acknowledged that the response from the community has been awesome and much appreciated.

“Our community partnerships are important. We have received government money and that’s great, but our vision is that we wouldn’t just be a government contractor,” said Jim.

“We want to be an expression of the community. We are a very young project, and our hope is that we can have faith communities partner with us not just financially but with volunteers.

“A big project like this only works with a good team and community support,” said Mark.

For information, visit thriveint.org or email marshall@thriveinternational.org.

Manzanita House is a place for immigrants

Manzanita House was created as a place for immigrants to develop community and collaborative solutions—inspired by the resilience of the manzanita plant that withstands wildfires, said Brielle Balazs, of Manzanita House.

In June, it held a community block party and in August, it offered a Back-to-School Resource Fair, at Knox Presby-

terian Church, 806 W. Knox, where its office is located.

The block party included cultural music, food, immigrant businesses, local organizations and food distribution in partnership with Second Harvest Mobile Market.

The back-to-school fair offered backpacks, children’s clothing and shoes, school sup-

plies and other resources.

For information, call 309-8404, email bbalazs@mhsokane.org or visit manzanitahouse-spokane.org.

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women HELPING women FUND

LETTER OF INTENT APPLICATION

Women Helping Women Fund's LOI application opens on September 23. A grant information session will be held on September 22 at 12PM.

Qualified applicants must be a nonprofit organization that holds a 501(c)3 status and serves women and/or children in Spokane County.

To RSVP to the grant information session and to view additional information, visit:
whwspokane.org/grant-info
 Contact 509-328-8285 or info@whwspokane.org for any questions.

Pastor's sabbatical takes her on a trek to intersect with others around world

For her sabbatical after more than eight years as pastor at Veradale United Church of Christ (UCC) in Spokane Valley, Gen Heywood's travels to Iceland, Germany and New Zealand include 11 days intersecting with people from around the world at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly from Aug. 31 to Sept. 8.

She is there as accredited press reporting for both The Fig Tree and Spokane FaVs.

Gen left July 31 with questions about how she and her congregation can be more faithful servants in these times. She also seeks to recharge her photographic skills.

She intends to bring back ideas for worship, creation care and creative ways to explore history and heal from the region's Christian dominionism and white supremacy.

For example, in Goslar, Germany, she hoped to learn how they have kept their water from being poisoned by 1,000 years of mining silver, copper and lead, to compare their legacy with that of Bunker Hill Mines in Idaho.

"They didn't recognize the problem for many years," Gen said she learned at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Mining Museum. "They used the polluted water to generate power and created wooden pipes to bring good water out of the hills. The water there is still polluted. They use plants to identify heavy metals and then to help pull them out of the water."

She is curious to learn what those plants are.

Gen's sabbatical is an extension of her community involvement and her congregation's ministry that include online worship, Bible study, prayer meditations and meetings, plus weekly interviews with people of faith, vigils for grieving losses and work for social justice.

After she returns to the church on Nov. 14, she will give presentations and share photographs of her experiences to help 110-year-old, 73-member Veradale UCC, strengthen its stands for social justice and relationships in the community.

Gen's daughter, Hana, joined her in Iceland from Aug. 1 to 9, traveling by car so they could photograph Iceland's night skies, wildlife and landscapes.

"Today, Iceland is a good place for women and has women leaders providing a different type of leadership, but that was not always the case," Gen said, based on having read a book that presents the good and the bad of the nation's history of hurting and stealing from people, yet now being a place with a good economy that cares for the land.

To Germany, Gen brings questions about how the country has been taking responsibility for its



Gen Heywood is photographed near a glacier in Iceland.

Photo courtesy of Gen Heywood

past. She knows German from spending 1978-79 as a high school exchange student in Elze.

Gen takes her questions to people in churches and museums in Berlin, Goslar, Leipzig, Würzburg and Munich before attending the WCC Assembly.

In Berlin, her hope was to learn about resistance and how art helps people take responsibility for the crimes of the past and create systemic change. She sought to learn about the hard work Germans are doing to confront their past and the present rise of extremism in order to gain tools to address extremism in the Inland Northwest.

Her visits in Leipzig, Würzburg, Nuremberg and Munich included connections with church history, learning about bigotry, art and culture, past and current Jewish communities and the rebuilding of the Dachau concentration camp.

On August 29 and 30, Gen joined a pre-WCC Assembly workshop on indigenous cultures in Karlsruhe, and Aug. 31 to Sept. 7 she is participating in the assembly as a photojournalist.

"Just as German churches told stories of faith through pictures and art, I will convey stories of my observations through photographs," Gen said.

On Sept. 3, she will join a group from the assembly to visit the Hunsrück area for a program led by Renate Fuchs, who is active in the peace movement there and visited Spokane as part of a 1986 exchange of the national UCC global partnership with the Evangelical Church of Germany. In 1988, Renate also hosted a group of youth from the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ.

After the assembly, Gen will continue to travel in Germany

and will fly from Frankfurt to New Zealand Sept. 13 to join a group of professional photographers for a photography tour Sept 17 to national parks and other sites to improve her skills in landscape photography.

After she returns in October, Gen will compile information from her observations to prepare presentations in December at the Veradale United Church of Christ and in the community.

Gen received a Lilly grant for this sabbatical and is applying for other grants to help her take her presentation on the road and explore in more depth issues that emerge from her initial brief encounters. She also hopes to travel to meet with theologian Susan Neiman in Germany. **Meanwhile, the congregation** is reflecting prayerfully on how to improve their ministry to each other and the wider community, and to "discern where Jesus is calling us next," wrote members in the application for the Lilly grant.

They are being served by a sabbatical interim pastor, Roger Lynn.

The moderator, Wayne Shull, expects "to build stronger and lasting relationships inside and outside the church. Our small congregation does mighty things, taking a visible stand, and collaborating with other organizations that work for social justice. The congregation supports this renewal time for our pastor. We believe by building more relationships beyond our doors, our membership and resources will increase, enabling us to do even greater things."

Veradale UCC's community involvements have included N-Sid-Sen, Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience (FLLC), Spokane Interfaith Council,

Hope House Women's Shelter, Spokane Valley Partners, Poor People's Campaign, its Community Garden, the Pride Festival, Vanessa Behan Crisis Nursery, Rosa Parks Birthday Party for the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, social justice marches, a photography workshop and serving as a community meeting location.

Upon returning, Gen expects to "receive a congregation that has discerned their gifts for ministry, and the congregation will receive a refreshed pastor who

gained new skills and learned valuable lessons, deepened by her own spiritual journey."

Gen, who earned a master of divinity at Andover Newton Theological School in 1989, and bachelor's degrees in German and music therapy in 1983 at Emmanuel College in Boston, was ordained in 1989 in Maine and served churches there and in Sunnyside, Calif, before starting at Veradale UCC in 2014.

In January 2018, she gathered people of faith and non-faith in the community in support of the Washington State Poor People's Campaign to overcome racism, poverty, militarism and ecological devastation. From those gatherings, the FLLC was born as a ministry of the church. She will bring sabbatical insights back to FLLC, too.

For information, email genheywood@gmail.com or follow her journey in pictures at instagram.com/gen_heywood_photography and follow the church's journey at veradaleuucc.org or facebook.com/VeradaleUCC.

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Unity in the Community continues its legacy of celebrating cultures

For the 28th year as the region's largest multi-cultural celebration, Unity in the Community gathered people from the many cultural and racial communities in the region to celebrate diversity, build understanding and foster respect among those communities and the wider community.

"Sowing Compassion, Growing Communities" was the 2022 theme for the Aug. 20 event in Riverfront Park in Spokane, said co-chairs of the organizing team, Mareesa Henderson and April Anderson.

"Our goal is to enhance the betterment of the Northwest's diverse communities, promote unity and connection among all

people through community education and awareness," pointed out April and Mareesa, explaining the mission. "We also seek to serve the most underrepresented people to create equity and inclusion."

A young woman from the Indian Youth Club of Spokane spoke before she danced.

She discouraged people from comparing themselves with others and advised: "We need to be happy with who and what we are."

That set the tone for the mission of Unity in the Community.

Vendors were set up in a Youth Fair, Career and Education Fair, Health Fair, Early Learning Fair, and General Vendors.



Woman from Indian Youth Club offers words of inspiration.

The event included more than 110 booths in the Clock Tower Meadow and on the Howard St. Bridge.

Children who received stamps at each booth in the Cultural Village received free back-to-school backpacks.

Entertainers throughout the day on the main stage included dancers, singers, musicians, gymnasts, drummers and speakers representing African-American, Native American, Asian Indian, Pacific Islanders, Filipinos, African, Middle Eastern and more cultures.

More than 30 sponsors made the event possible.

For information, visit unitynw.org.

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Bonner Homeless Transitions draws people from forests into services

By Kaye Hult

Bonner Homeless Transitions in Sandpoint helps “the hidden homeless” who live in the forests and mountains transition into permanent housing.

People aren’t aware of how many homeless people are here, but the hidden homeless include families, children, widowed women, and women fleeing domestic violence, said program manager Joanne Barlow.

Many do not want to participate in a formal program, so the center works with other entities in Sandpoint to help provide for their needs.

Bonner Gospel Mission has a men’s shelter. There is no women’s shelter in the area.

One restaurant, the Hoot Owl Cafe, serves dinner, and some churches serve meals.

“We give blankets and food that churches donate. The Amish make quilts for us to give. These provisions help people manage,” Joanne said.

Donations they don’t use, they give to Helping Hands and Healing Hearts.

Bonner Homeless Transitions accepts single women, women with children, men with children and couples with children. If people are accepted and choose to work with the center, they enter a program with expectations and goals, Joanne said.

The center provides housing for 10 adults and 14 children with apartments in two houses.

Residents may stay for up to two years. In exchange, they have to take part in case management geared to their needs and are expected to work at least part time.

Bonner Homeless Transitions helps residents tackle issues, such as mental illness or anxiety. Many are referred to local counselors.

“We require weekly and random drug testing,” she said. “Probation and parole officers stop by every week. We work with judges and the police.

“This has to be a safe place for our clients. I have security



Joanne Barlow guides hidden homeless to services.

cameras. I call the police on people who are not supposed to be here,” Joanne said.

The center helps clients change their attitudes.

For example, many leave relationships believing they need to jump into a new relationship. The center encourages them first to learn to live on their own, Joanne said.

The center helps clients with other issues, like getting a Social Security card or driver’s license. Some are recently out of prison or struggle with substance abuse and are unable to enter subsidized housing.

One woman, who had been in and out of prison and rehab centers for 20 years, came from a drug rehabilitation center. She had no teeth, which limited the jobs she could find, Joanne said.

First, she worked at the local animal hospital, cleaning cages.

“We talked her into getting teeth and paid for them,” Joanne said. “One day, she came in, teeth in, hair done up, dressed nicely. We didn’t recognize her. She has begun working at the front desk at a prestigious hotel. She’s been clean and sober for almost two years. I don’t see her going

back. She’s clean, well-dressed and has beautified her living space. She’s reunited with her children and has a new life.”

A man, who had been a heroin addict for years, came to the center with three children, ages 10, nine and six, Joanne said. His wife was in prison.

Younger children seem happy at the center but tend to have difficulties with being there when they start middle school. About 65 percent of homeless children will not graduate from high school, she said.

At first, the man fought the requirements to meet with his case manager weekly and do regular drug testing.

“We involved him in a group in which he became a leader, and he changed overnight,” she said. “He took many classes to learn as much as possible. He went to work at a pharmaceutical company, starting at the bottom and progressing to management, making \$65,000 per year.”

Joanne added that with housing such a major issue, she has had “to learn to think outside the box.”

Many make too much money to qualify for subsidized housing, but don’t have enough

income to afford a home or an apartment, she said. People with rental homes are selling them. Evicted renters have nowhere to go.

Joanne has written letters of appeal to apartment management companies and the State of Idaho for clients who have been turned down for subsidized housing. She has solicited letters from the community and churches. She has helped settle all but one person in housing.

Someone offered a client a mobile home on contract. She could live in the mobile home park behind her job.

A new program in Idaho is the Housing Preservation Program (HPP). In May, Joanne sent 15 to the resource center in town to apply. HPP pays for three months in a motel at no more than \$100 per night, and then pays rent for up to 15 months.

They need some income, such as Social Security. They may apply for subsidized housing or share an apartment with another person.

The center also owns property with four houses, called Trestle Creek, outside the town of Hope. It used to be part of the homeless transitions program and now is a low-income housing community managed by Bonner County Housing Agency.

Bonner Homeless Transitions was founded in 1991 as the Bonner County Homeless Task Force by a group of local women who opened a shelter in 1994. Although it did not last, it was changed to transitional housing, which receives funds through donations and grants. Its new name reflects that it is not part of the county.

Joanne came in 2013 with a background assisting clients in need. She began working at the Trestle Creek facility. When the center’s program manager died, she took on that role.

“I had a ‘Leave It to Beaver’ childhood growing up in Bellingham, Wash., and going to high school in Kennewick. I attended Western Washington State College.”

For about 10 years after marrying, she co-owned two 7-11 stores in Seattle. She taught

classes part-time at Walla Walla State Penitentiary, while living in Kirkland.

In Spokane, she worked in human resources for the Dakota Direct call center, then at SL Start in Coeur d’Alene, which acquired the welfare contract for Idaho’s Region One, then Region Two.

Joanne was director of the Welfare-to-Work Program for nine offices in Bonners Ferry, Coeur d’Alene, Post Falls and Kellogg, providing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance and food stamps. She retired from that work.

To continue helping others, she took a two-year contract as a job developer with New Mexico’s welfare program.

Eight years ago, Joanne settled in Sandpoint to be near family. She learned about Bonner Homeless Transitions and was hired.

Her part-time assistant, Mary Jo Knutson, was previously a case manager.

She also works with volunteers and a nine-person board.

Bonner Homeless Transitions is funded through grants, donations and two fundraisers: the “Little Black Dress” event in May and “Avenues for Hope” in December, which raises funds for many nonprofits addressing homelessness in Idaho.

Some donate financially and others donate furniture and household goods, which they keep in a storage barn. “When our clients move out, we help them with needs in their new place,” Joanne said.

Sandpoint United Methodist Church and Holy Spirit Episcopal Church support them with monthly funds, supplies, activities with children, food, paper products and other needs requested each month.

“I do this work because I like to give and be helpful,” she said. “It makes me feel good and useful and worthwhile. I want everyone to feel good and to see there is kindness in the world.”

For information, call 208-265-2952, email joannebarlow09@gmail.com or visit bonnerhomelesstransitions.org.

North Idaho groups offer series on ‘Finding Our Place’

The Human Rights Education Institute, Museum of North Idaho and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Coeur d’Alene are collaborating to offer a six-session documentary and discussion series on “Finding Our Place in the Inland Northwest.”

World Relief names director

Christi Armstrong, former employment services coordinator with World Relief Spokane, is now their new executive director, bringing her years of serving refugees seeking employment opportunities in the Spokane area to her new role.

Recent upticks in refugees being resettled into Spokane include Afghanistan refugees last fall and Ukrainians this winter, spring and summer.

Volunteers, new staff and donations are needed to help with the new refugee arrivals, she said, including faith-based and business community support.

For information, contact, jli@wr.org, (509) 484-9829

The first session is Thursday, Sept. 8, at the church, 501 E. Wallace.

The series is an opportunity to create thoughtful, small group, public discussions about realities, challenges and opportunities in the region. It is underwritten by a Project Neighborly grant from the Idaho Community Foundation.

The topics are “When Country Becomes City” on Sept.

8; “Owners and Laborers” on Sept. 22 at HREI, 414 W. Fort Grounds Dr.; “Paycheck to Paycheck” on Oct. 13; “Displaced in One’s Homeland” on Oct. 27; “Being Not White in North Idaho” on Nov. 10, and “Who Is My Neighbor?” on Dec. 8.

The discussions are facilitated by The Langdon Group, a subsidiary of J-U-B Engineers, Inc.

For information, call 208-644-5333 or 208-292-2359.

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Disability Action Center has impact in making life more accessible

By Kaye Hult

Sherri Boelter, independent living advocate at the Disability Action Center NW office in Post Falls, said she has “always had a heart for people,” but her own diagnosis with a disability has freed her to greater understanding of those with disabilities she works with.

“I work to make an impact for people with disabilities, to change things to make life more accessible, so that they can live independently. They often decline more quickly without support to stay in their own homes,” she said.

The Post Falls Disability Action Center (DAC) serves Region 1 in Idaho, the five northern counties of Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah and Shoshone.

Sherri said their core services include personal and community advocacy, peer counseling and support, independent living skills training, information and referral, transition from institutions and youth transition.

While much of the work is in the office is information and referrals, Sherri plans more community outreach in order to raise awareness of the local office and provide services to those who need them.

“Disabilities don’t define who we are,” she explained.

She has done outreach at the high schools and senior centers in Clark Fork and Pinehurst.

“Those communities are so isolated,” she said. “My goal is to bring awareness of the resources that are available.”

The Disability Action Center NW is planning small-scale ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Awareness Resource Fairs in both places in September.

When Sherri presented a workshop on emergency preparedness to seniors in Rathdrum last spring, participants walked away better prepared in case of an emergency.

Recently, DAC went to a Veterans Stand Down.

Because weather can define whether people are able to travel, she plans to host workshops during the winter on Zoom to keep people connected to the DAC community.

“We are such a people-oriented program,” she added. “COVID was hard! Zoom’s great, but not the same as one-on-one.”

“My main service is to provide peer support,” she said. “I offer resources and referrals so people with any disability can remain in their own homes and be active in their own community.”

“I’ve been diagnosed with



Sherri Boelter

Photo courtesy of Yvonne Parkinson

Adult ADD,” she said. “I thought I was tired. When I was diagnosed, it was freeing to understand that I have a disability. “At first, I was fearful because of people’s possible stigma reaction. I have to rein myself in, to focus. It’s not easy.”

Because of her disability, Sherri is able to relate to others with disabilities, to make a peer connection with them.

DAC has held Meet and Greet gatherings where people gather to talk about how DAC can help.

Right now, the biggest concern is the lack of housing.

Sherri provides advocacy and education on housing and homelessness.

“Our voices need to be heard in Boise,” she said. “Random rebates are not adequate. The state needs to put funds in a housing coalition fund. Post Falls needs to create a homeless shelter and to help those transitioning from homelessness to success.”

In July, DAC celebrated the 32nd anniversary of the ADA with an event at McEuen Park in Coeur d’Alene, focusing on support animals and presentations by Canine Companions.

Since then, DAC has had inquiries such as from people with disabilities in search of affordable housing. Many lost their homes because of rent increases. Some have sought peer support for day-to-day struggles, just needing to talk to someone and find out what resources are available.

“Accessibility is key,” she said.

For example, one woman recently picked up a wheel chair. Donna’s MS (Multiple Sclerosis) progressed slowly. It was hard to notice the changes, she said, likening it to a frog in boiling water.

Suddenly one day, she realized she couldn’t walk far any more nor keep plans she had made. She had to use her walker to cross the lawn.

A friend’s harsh, but well-intended words, and Donna’s inability to do her job properly were her wake-up calls. “I realized I was missing out on life,” she said.

Asking DAC about funding for a wheelchair was something Donna said she would never do. “It signified that I was giving up and letting my disease win,” she said.

After a weekend of reflection, however, she decided to adopt another perspective: “A wheelchair is a tool. It doesn’t define me. It can be there to return the part of my life that I had given up. It could return my freedom.”

Sherri provided Donna with a motorized wheelchair that could give Donna independence. She picked it up the next day.

“For someone with a disability, things like canes, walkers and wheelchairs are not just equipment. They are life-changing necessities,” Donna said, expressing gratitude to Sherri and DAC.

“I’m doing what I love,” Sherri said. “I’ve been in non-profit work for 28 years in different capacities. With my background, I am good at advocacy and peer support, because I can relate to people who struggle.”

Born in Bakersfield, Calif., after she finished high school in Porterville, Sherri studied two years of college in drug and alcohol counseling. She raised her three boys in Novato, in the Bay area, and then started working for a behavioral health program, providing services to people in rural communities.

After working in a drug and alcohol program in Corcoran State Prison, she worked for a nonprofit resource center as a case manager for their behavioral health program.

She started as a domestic violence counselor, then managed their homeless shelter. For two years, she worked in a nutritional program for low-income families.

Sherri moved to North Idaho in 2015 to be closer to her father. Now, her entire family has moved to the area.

DAC will host the Get Outside! (G.O.) Independent Living Conference, in partnership with

the Nez Perce Tribe Vocational Rehabilitation Services, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday and Thursday, Sept. 14 and 15 at Clearwater River Casino, 17500 Nez Perce Rd., in Lewiston.

At that event, people with disabilities can meet and explore options for employment, recre-

ation and education. Workshops will offer training in leadership and advocacy skills for making communities more accessible. There will be a resource fair.

For information, call 208-457-3891 or email sherri@dacnw.org. RSVP for the G.O. conference on DAC’s Facebook.

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Artist created COVID bubble with activities for neighbors' triplets

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Local artist Karen Mobley wove stories from COVID isolation when she created a daily space of awe and sacred community with eight-year-old neighbor triplets, Kelsey, Madelyn, and Tyler.

Rarely going anywhere without writing down her thoughts, anecdotes and poetic pieces, she compiled a book from notes on their daily experiences, encounters with her cats and creative arts in her home.

Karen's three cats—Betye Saar, Andrew Chonk E. Nugget Wyeth, and Madame Marie Mouse Curie—were regular participants in play dates.

Over a year of confinement, they baked, made art, told stories, did a fashion show and painted a mural on Karen's garage.

"Their humor and goodwill were the highlight of my year. I wrote down some of what they said so I could keep laughing and share their fun with their parents and my friends on Facebook," Karen said.

Living in the limited time and space of their COVID "bubble," they created a space of warmth, laughter and reflection, she said.

Last November, Karen published *Catatopia: A Year in Confinement: Little Kids, Art and Writing from the COVID-19 Cloister*.

"During COVID when schools closed to in-person learning and children were homeschooling online, my neighbors' children were restless. They came over every day to play with my kittens," said Karen.

"If not for COVID, my neighbors' children would have done other activities, but coming to my home gave them a chance to leave their house to do different things. It was also a good time for me, because I live alone," she said.

She began posting vignettes on her Facebook page where friends commented on them.

"Kids can be creative. Our 'Catatopia' and art adventures included making things with Amazon boxes, tape and a linoleum knife," said Karen.

One day, one of the triplets asked if there were any opera singers called Marie, announcing that her cat, "Marie wants to be an opera singer."

Karen looked up a 1957 YouTube video with Maria Callas singing.

"Wow, that's old!" the child exclaimed. "Karen, do you have anything in your house that is antique or at least 30 years old?"

When Karen said most things



Karen Mobley stands by the mural the children painted.

in her house were over 30 years old, the child responded, "Wow! You must be rich."

Another time one child asked "Where have you been? I've been worried about you." Karen said she went to the hardware store to buy tape. Seeing an option for creativity, the child asked, "Tape?"

When one commented: "Marie, the cat, you are outstanding. You are the best purr-er and the most helpful cat. I LUVVV you. Can I kiss your feet?" Karen said, "Ugh! No!"

The child continued, "Who purrs the most? I know. Marie purrs a billion times a day. Andrew five times and Betye twice a day. We've never heard you [Karen] purr, but I bet you do." Karen replied, "Purr?"

The child said, "You're a cat and you are in charge of Catatopia. I had a dream about a cat that let us paint on the walls. She was you."

"After I started saving stories, I realized I had 80 scrapbook pages of anecdotes. In talking with friends, I realized that other people could enjoy the material," said Karen.

"I didn't realize how encouraging it was for people to read the silly little quips. We also covered some hard stuff through humor. I wouldn't have been able to do this without their intelligence and wit," said Karen. "Even though COVID has been a sad, problematic time, we had fun."

Slowly, Karen turned the experience into a book, arranging

well-being—whether it's working with Spokane Rotary on refugees, water and other issues, or at Westminster serving neighbors or reaching out to lonely neighbor children," she said.

"Being called to serve others is an important part of what I do. I can't speak for God, but the expectation that we are going to use the gifts we are given to be of value to others is important in my faith," she said.

Karen, a freelance visual artist who consults for Spokane Arts and ArtsWA, exhibits her work locally. She also does creative writing, oil painting, multimedia and drawing for commissioned pieces.

More than 20 years ago, Karen came to work as arts director at the City of Spokane Arts Department. She was there from 1997 to 2012.

She grew up on the Wyoming Fish and Game Sunlight Basin Elk Refuge, where her father worked. Her mother was a writer.

Before coming to Spokane, Karen was a museum director in Casper, Wyo., and Las Cruces, N.M., from 1987 to 1997. She earned a bachelor's degree in 1983 in visual arts at University of Wyoming in Laramie and completed a master's in fine arts in 1987 at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

Not knowing what to do—be a teacher or a lawyer—she returned to the creative sector with studies at the University of Wyoming. She worked at a frame store and other jobs before doing arts administration.

Karen is a public art contractor with Spokane Arts, a non-profit that builds and supports arts and culture in Spokane.

With ArtsWA and the Spokane Public Facilities District, she does project management for outdoor sculptures and murals. Recent projects include project management for the Podium, Spokane Public Library and Virginia Grainger Elementary in Okanogan.

Karen thought COVID would slow things down, but she continued her freelance work.

Her recent cancer diagnosis and treatment, however, led her to take some time off. She has also documented her journey with cancer treatments, offering reflection many in the community have appreciated.

Karen said *Catatopia: A Year in Confinement*—which is available at Auntie's Bookstore, the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, From Here in River Park Square and Wishing Tree Books—has opened her to new friends and connections.

For information, visit her website karenmobley.com.



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Stories and history help solidify who is in power, keep others silent

Power is about who tells the story or stories, how often they are able to repeat the story and how many they are able to reach with their version.

Who tells the stories and what they tell is seen today in efforts by some who wish to have libraries and schools restrict access to some books. Some wish to erase part of history, silence visibility and voices of people of different cultures, and ignore relationships that are in our society.

We see that played out in the political field as media gatekeepers tend to focus on the loudest, most controversial and best rate-grabbing voices.

For my thesis in journalism at the University of Oregon, I compared the coverage in the New York Times and Der Kurier, the daily in Vienna where I studied for six months. I tallied what stories were covered

and how they were played. My thesis was that we are what we read: our world view is shaped by the media we choose or by the media choices we have available

The difference today is I can go on my phone and choose from a wide array of media, so I can read a range of perspectives. I note that more than half of the stories are labeled as “analysis” or “opinion.” It’s good they are labeled, but where’s the news people hunger to read?

A UO summer course on “Women in Media” in 1978 confirmed my experience: it was hard for women to be hired as reporters, few voices of women were in news or editorial columns, and images of women invited violent and sexualized stereotypes. I joined media literacy efforts to challenge that trend. Today more women—albeit younger beautiful women,

not older wiser ones—are visible in media.

I follow also the World Association for Christian Communication, which enables people to be seen and heard. It has done global studies on including stories of women in media.

In addition I connect through the World Council of Churches (WCC) with their emerging understanding of gender violence through the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, the Just Community of Women and Men in the Church and Thursdays in Black.

Inclusion is important in WCC gatherings. People representing diverse theologies, cultures, regions and perspectives meet to share, listen, learn, respect and gain understanding. The goal of encounters is not to persuade or win but to find common ground for common action.

Business meetings operate by consensus. Delegates raise orange cards if they are “warm” to a proposal and “blue” cards if they are cool to it. More discussions deal with reasons people are “concerned” in order to include those concerns. In contrast, in Robert’s rules, the majority wins—end of story. Consensus continues dialogue until everyone is heard and included.

Similarly, The Fig Tree seeks to provide credible communication that presents a myriad of voices and stories.

We hope our readers will follow the 11th Assembly to gain insights into the ecumenical movement at oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly.

Then volunteer to join in our efforts as part of that worldwide pilgrimage.

Mary Stamp - Editor

One woman’s story lends insight into stories of many who are silent

When the Supreme Court voted to overturn Roe v. Wade on June 24, with far-reaching implications, I, at 74, remember well the lack of adequate birth control and rules oppressing women. Single and poor women who were pregnant found themselves without the needed hope and help to plan and have a better life with families.

I believe women need to “come out” and share their stories.

I love this country, this state, this county and the town of Tonasket where I live. I feel more at home here than anywhere I have lived. I have many friends and a good community. As a veteran of the Vietnam War, I took the oath and have served my country, worked in nursing

for 45 years, retired and now volunteer for my community.

I hope what has happened on the federal level will not tear my community apart and I hope that somehow we can and will make this right again.

I know many women here in this county have had abortions for many reasons. The decision is not easy and anyone I know who has made that decision has searched hard and deep before making it. I have talked with many older women over the years as I worked in the nursing home. Some were poor when they were young, had more children than they could support and ended up having to give them away.

These stories broke my heart. Some

women said if they could have had an abortion they would have done so.

Roe v. Wade gave women and girls hope, a way out of impossible situations and the ability to plan their families, benefiting not just them, but their partners and children as well.

I had to make the decision twice, once because I had made a commitment to serve, and the military would not allow pregnant women to continue to serve. The Army had paid for my education, and I wanted to serve. The other time was because birth control, an IUD, did not work, and I did not want to risk an in utero injury to a child. I was 24, single and unsettled after the war. I was not in good shape.

Getting myself back took time.

Since I made those two decisions, I ended up in Washington state, had two former husbands who I have loved, and now a husband who is the partner I love. I have two stepchildren and two biological children whom I love very much. My daughter has two children, and they have my three great-grandchildren. My son has one child and another on the way.

That makes nine wonderful people who are alive because of those decisions. I love all nine of them very much.

I wonder how many people are alive and loved because their mother had to make that decision?

Karen Schimpf - Contributor

Letters to the Editor

Sounding Board

Commentaries

WCC pre-assemblies set the stage for the Assembly issues, discussions

By Catherine Ferguson, SNJM

Churches united make a difference!

A critical event, which occurs about every eight years takes place from Aug. 31 to Sept. 8 this year in Karlsruhe, Germany.

More than 4,000 participants from around the world from the member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC), their ecumenical partners, and other churches and faiths gather in its 11th General Assembly to pray, celebrate and deepen their commitment to visible witness and common unity.

The WCC Assembly is the highest governing body of the WCC.

WCC member churches can be found in all regions of the world and include most of the world’s Orthodox churches (Eastern and Oriental), as well as African Instituted, Anglican, Assyrian, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian, Old-Catholic, Pentecostal, Reformed, United/Uniting and Free/Independent churches, Disciples of Christ and Friends (Quakers).

In the 1930s and 1940s, the majority of the churches involved were based in Europe and North America.

Representation of churches by geographical regions arose from a vision of Christian unity no longer held captive by “western parochialism” but providing a balance among churches of East and West, South and North. This balanced diversity was deemed essential to the catholicity, or universality, of the worldwide church.

Preparations for this Assembly, whose theme is “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” have been ongoing for several years.

The most participative have been Pre-Assembly meetings around significant issue areas. At these gatherings, members develop positions they want to bring to the Assembly and learn how to be effective in such a large diverse gathering in language,

es, cultures, theologies, organizational structures and decision-making bodies.

Three pre-Assemblies were held earlier this year and three will be held just prior to the Assembly. Their results will be published in the October issue of The Fig Tree. The three earlier gatherings give some indication of issues at play in this Assembly.

- The Africa region pre-assembly held virtually at the end of July strategized ideas that should constitute the African voice at the assembly. They named the challenges they face on the continent: conflicts, extremism, migration, COVID-19 and engagement of youth and women, among others.

“Even though our world, as Africa, has many challenges that we need to take seriously as we journey towards the assembly, we do not do so as people without hope, as God has given us resources and gifts that can take us into a better future. We have proven resilience because we understand the dignity God has given us is not negotiable,” said Setri Nyomi, a pastor in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

- A Pre-Assembly for Specialized Ministries held in March recognized this moment as an opportunity for transformational change, addressing three critical issues confronting humanity and creation: overcoming racism, discrimination and xenophobia; the rise of populism, the climate emergency and committed to action on each of them.

Statements came from that gathering:

- **Racism:** “Racism, xenophobia and discrimination have structured society to benefit some and denigrate others. The realities these structures create are incompatible with the God-given dignity of every person—and with Christian faith. Together with WCC members churches we commit to work towards overcoming

racism, discrimination and xenophobia in all regions of the world.”

- **Populism:** “Truth is twisted, trust is manipulated, and those with privilege and power dominate. We witness the rise of nationalist populism across the globe. As trust declines in social institutions of many kinds, with spiraling misinformation fueled by social media, there are unprecedented threats to human dignity, justice and inclusion—life itself.”

The statement continues: “Together with the WCC member churches, we commit to live our responsibility to ensure that all voices are heard, knowing we must find ways to amplify those voices in civil society who seek to pursue the common good.”

- **Climate emergency:** “The climate and ecological emergency threatens all of creation, including the whole human family. Responding to this crisis is impeded by how unequally its impacts are felt in different locations.”

That statement continues: “Together with the WCC member churches, we commit to provide leadership and action that conveys hope in the face of the existential threat facing creation and humanity.”

- Orthodox Churches pre-Assembly was in mid-May in Cyprus. The 50 participants included delegates from 20 Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches: hierarchs, priests, deacons, professors, laity, men, women, youth, observers and consultants.

They said: “As Orthodox, we are committed to the goal of Eucharistic unity, which has been the vision of the WCC from its initiation. The call for unity, reconciliation, justice and peace remains our mission today, as our incarnate Lord invites us to abide in His love by keeping His commandments.”

Discussions centered on current global challenges and how the Orthodox agenda at the WCC 11th Assembly can keep

dialogue open. Their report included discussions on anthropology, the ecological crisis and COVID-19.

Participants also heard from the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church about the armed conflict in Ukraine and gained understanding of this situation.

In the last days of August, the pre-Assemblies for Youth, the Just Community of Women and Men and the Indigenous Peoples were held.

- The Youth Pre-Assembly anticipates 400 young people to participate in inter-generational dialogue and strategize for a common message for the Assembly.

- The Just Community of Women and Men plans to explore the assembly theme from a contextual gendered perspective—underscoring women’s participation and calling for special focus on women’s concerns, struggles and contributions in church and society.

- The Indigenous Peoples Pre-Assembly will challenge and critique notions of reconciliation too eager to gloss over wrongdoings and violations of the past such as colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, which have destroyed indigenous cultures, communities and the interconnected web of creation without addressing the ongoing systemic and structural causes of oppression and injustice of the past and present. Reconciliation is an intentional commitment to restoring wholeness in all creation.

- Finally, in its pre-Assembly, the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network takes the dimension of celebrating the gifts of persons with disabilities, visiting the past and present wounds and coming up with steps of how to transform the injustices.

There will be articles in the next issue/s to communicate the significant reflections and actions of the Assembly.

For information, visit oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly.

Calendar of Events

To Sept 5 • **Pigout in the Park**, Riverfront Park, 507 N. Howard, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., 625-6600

To Oct 7 • **"Americans and the Holocaust,"** Gonzaga Foley Library, 3 to 8 p.m. Wed, 1 to 5 p.m. Sat and Sun and group tours, 313-7017, gonzaga.edu/holocaustexhibit

Sept 1 • **Spokane Homeless Coalition**, The Gathering House, 733 W. Garland, 9 a.m.

• **The Fig Tree Benefit and Board Meeting**, 12 to 3 p.m. 535-4112, mary@thefigtree.org

• **Building School Gardens in Burundi**, Inland Empire Garden Club, Shadle Park Library, Pat Munt, 4 to 6 p.m., 444-5308

Sept 2 to 5 • **Labor Day Weekend Retreat:** "Perfection of Generosity," Ven. Thubten Chodron, Sravasti Abbey near Newport, 447-5549, sravastiabbey.org

Sept 3 • **Liberty Lake Summer Festival: Spokane Symphony**, Pavilion Park, 727 N. Molter, 6 p.m., 755-6726

Sept 5 • **Labor Day Concert at Comstock Park**, Spokane Symphony, 6 p.m.

Sept 6 • **"Working with Our Emotions: The Mind Is the Source of Our Happiness as Well as Our Pain,"** Ven. Thubten Semkye, 5:30 p.m., sravastiabbey.org

Sept 8 • **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center Chapel, 5:45 to 8:45 p.m., 818-6733, brucebecalkins@gmail.com

• **"Youth v. Gov," Documentary Screening**, Gonzaga Center for Climate, Hemmingson, 702 E. Desmet, 6 p.m., lburlingame@zagmail.gonzaga.edu

• **"Finding Our Place in the Inland Northwest,"** first of a six-session documentary-discussion series with the Human Rights Education Institute (HREI), Museum of North Idaho and St. Luke's Episcopal, 501 E. Wallace, 6 to 8 p.m., 208-664-5533; 22nd at HREI

• **"Americans and the Holocaust: Remembering our Past to Inform our Future,"** Hemmingson, 7 to 8:30 p.m., 313-7017, gonzaga.edu/holocaustexhibit

Sept 8, 22 • **Showing Up for Racial Justice**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS), 5:30 p.m., slchty@pjals.org

Sept 9 • **2022 Veterans Creative Art Festival**, Spokane VA Medical Center, 4815 N. Assembly, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., 434-7000

Sept 10 • **Spokane Garry: A Historical Expedition**, Spokane Parks and Recreation, 808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 230-8993, dbeine@gnu.edu

• **March for the Fallen 2022**, Riverside State Park, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., honoringheroes@wafhp.org

• **Team Hope Walk** for Huntington's disease, Riverfront Park, 10 a.m., 503-734-6610

• **Art on Monroe**, N. Monroe Business District, 10 a.m.

• **Creative Circle: Shawn Vestal**, Volunteer Drive, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit, 7 to 8:30 p.m., 279-0299, spark-central.org

• **Every Brilliant Thing**, life-affirming play for Suicide Awareness Week, University of Idaho Recreation and Wellbeing, The Forge Theater, 404 Sweet, Moscow, 7:30 p.m., 208-885-6465

Sept 11 • **Sharing the Dharma Day**, Sravasti Abbey, online 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. 447-5549, sravastiabbey.org

Sept 12 • **Inland Northwest Opera: La Traviata**, Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox 1001 W. Sprague, 3 p.m.

Sept 12-14 • **Downtown Hidden History**, Southside Community Center, 3151 E. 27th, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., 535-0803

Sept 13 • **Sept 13 • Women's Business Center Entrepreneurial Summit 2022: "Bringing Joy Back to Business,"** Spokane Library, 906 W. Main, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., eventbrite.com/e/2022-womens-business-center-entrepreneurial-summit-tickets-401489354467

• **Peace and Justice Action Committee**, PJALS, 5:30, zoom, jarcher@pjals.org

• **Friends of Turnbull Annual Meeting**, 26010 S. Smith, Cheney, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., activities@fotnwr.org

• **Climate Action Meeting**, 350 Spokane, Saranac Bldg, 3rd Floor, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Sept 14 • **Sabes Que?** HBPA Community Meeting, Esperanza Program, Fiesta Mexicana

• **Double Crossed: American Missionary Spies of World War II**, Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 6:30 p.m., 444-5390

Sept 15 • **Open House**, Partners with Families and Children, 106 W. Mission, 3:30 p.m., partners@partnerswithfamilies, 473-4816

• **Wild and Scenic Film Festival**, 50th anniversary of Clean Water Act, Spokane Riverkeeper, Hemmingson Auditorium, 6 to 9 p.m., spokaneriverkeeper.org/calendar/2022/wildandscenic

• **45th Anniversary**, Tenants Union of Washington, Saranac Rooftop, 25 W Main, 6 p.m., tenantsunion.networkforgood.com/events/43696-tenants-union-45th-anniversary-celebration-september-15th

Sept 15-18 • **51st Annual Deutschesfest**, Odessa, Hwy 21 and Hwy 28, deutschesfest.net

Sept 16 • **Fig Tree at Spokane Valley Farmer's Market**, CenterPlace, 2426 N. Discovery, 3 to 7 p.m., svfm.org

• **Lionel Hampton School of Music Fundraising Gala**, Mader Farm, 13506 Hillside Rd, Genesee, Idaho, 6 to 8 p.m., 208-885-6231, music@uidaho.edu

Sept 17 • **Spokane River Clean-Up**, People's Park, 2500-2834 W. Clarke, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., 838-4912

• **Inland Northwest Walk to Defeat ALS**, Mirabeau Point Park, 2426 N. Discovery, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 425-656-1650

• **Spokane AIDS Walk**, Spokane Regional Health District, 1101 W. College, 10 a.m., 324-1500

• **Oktoberfest**, Memorial Community Center, 415 Wellington, Hope, Idaho, 5 to 8:15 p.m.

• **Cooking for a Cause 2022**, Senior Action Network

of Eastern Washington, Davenport Grand, 333 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 5:30 p.m., sanewa.org/cooking-for-a-cause.html

• **Spokane AIDS Network Red Dress Party**, Nyne Bar & Bistro, 232 W. Sprague, 474-1621

Sept 17, 18 • **Spokane Symphony Masterworks 1: Fantastique!**, Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m. and 3 p.m., 624-1200

Sept 18 • **Talking Circle**, American Indian Community Center, 1025 W. Indiana, 6 to 8 p.m., 535-0886

Sept 19 • **2022 Senior Resource Fair**, Aging and Long Term Care of Eastern Washington, 2426 N Discovery Pl, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. 926-1937, spokanvalley.org/seniorresourcefair

• **NAACP General Membership Meeting**, zoom, 7 p.m., spokanenaacp@gmail.com

Sept 20 • **Silent Day of Prayer, "Storytelling: Mine, Yours and the Lord's: Discover How Your Story Invites You to Respond to God's Call,"** Fr. Ed Marier, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net

Sept 21 • **Summertime Spiritual Moment**, "True or False: Jesus was a Convert? Mother Mary, Too?" Fr. Mike Savelesky, IHRC, 8 to 10 a.m., ihrc.net

Sept 22 • **Art Activism**, The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, 3:30 to 5 p.m., 444-5308

• **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 5:45 to 8:45 p.m., 818-6733, brucebecalkins@gmail.com

• **"Eye Contact,"** Homeless Art Exhibit and Fundraiser, Washington Cracker Co. Bldg, 304 W. Pacific, 624-2378, voaspokane.org/eyecontact

Sept 22-24 • **86th Annual Greek Festival**, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox, 1703 N. Washington, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., 328-9310, holytrinityspokane.org/festival

Sept 23-25 • **Silent Teresian Carmelite Retreat**, Fr. Jerome Early, IHRC, 4 p.m. to 1 p.m., ihrc.net

Sept 23-25 • **Valleyfest**, Spokane Valley CenterPlace 2426 N. Discovery, valleyfest.org

Sept 23 • **Fig Tree at Emerson-Garfield Farmer's Market**, 2310 N. Monroe, 3 to 7 p.m., market.emersongarfield.org

Sept 24 • **El Mercado**, Latinos En Spokane Outdoor Cultural Market, 1901-1999 E. Spofford, 11 to 3, 558-9359

• **How Stories Unite Our Community**, Melissa Bedford, Shadle Park Library, 3:30 p.m., 444-5308

• **The ARC of Spokane Annual Meeting and Community Awards**, Hemmingson, 4 to 6 p.m., arc-spokane.org/stars

• **Building Dreams - Bright Futures for Our Kids**, West Central Community Center Annual Auction and Dinner, 1603 N. Belt, 6 to 9 p.m., 326-9540, westcentralcc.ejoinme.org/BD22

• **Human Rights Banquet**, Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations, Best Western Inn, Coeur d'Alene, 208-765-3932

Sept 25 • **Valley Multicultural Festival**, CenterPlace, 2426 N. Discovery, 688-0300

Sept 26 • **Central WA Cluster Gathering**, Faith Action Network, 2 to 4 p.m. online, fanwa.org

• **A Look at Ukraine with Lance Rhoades**, Shadle Park Library, 6:30 p.m., 444-5308

Sept 28 • **Polar Bears and Global Warming: Connecting the Dots to the Rest of Us**, Gonzaga Center for Climate, Hemmingson and Livestream, 6 to 9 p.m., gonzaga.edu/events

• **Native Business Gala**, Northwest Native Development, Northern Quest Resort & Casino, 100 N. Hayford, Airway Heights, 6 to 11 p.m.

Sept. 28 • **Gracias Christmas Cantata**, First Interstate Center for the Arts, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd, 1 to 7 p.m. 808-5488, christmascantata.us

Sept 28-Oct 2 • **5-Day Icon Workshop Retreat**, St. Joan of Arc, Fr. Damian Higgins, IHRC, 6910 S. Ben Burr, 4:30 p.m. to 1 p.m., ihrc.net

Sept 30 • **Corbin Senior Center Health Fair**, 827 W. Cleveland, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 327-1584

• **HRC Ministries Annual Gala**, The Davenport Grand Hotel, 333 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 5 to 8:30 p.m., jill@hrcministries.com

• **Into Africa Auction**, Partnering for Progress, 2426 N. Discovery, 5:30 p.m., partneringforprogress.org

Oct 1 • **Mennonite Country Auction**, Menno Mennonite Church, Ritzville, open 9 a.m., booths 10 a.m., auction 12 p.m., 659-0926, mca@mennomennonite.org

• **An Evening of Ooh La La**, Safety Net Inland Northwest, Northern Quest Resort, 100 N. Hayford, Airway Heights, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., safetynetinlandnw.org

Oct 5 • **The Fig Tree Distribution and Mailing**, 631 S. Richard Allen Ct., 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. 535-4112, development@thefigtree.org

Oct 6 • **The Fig Tree Benefit and Board Meeting**, on Zoom, 12 to 3 p.m. 535-4112, mary@thefigtree.org

• **Transitions "People Who Care" Fundraiser**, Centennial Hotel, 202 W. North River Dr., 12 to 1 p.m., help4women.org/pwc2022/

Tuesdays • **Talk-Oh! Tuesdays**, Kootenai Environmental Alliance and Lake Coeur d'Alene Waterkeeper, kealliance.org/TalkOhTuesdays

• **Drop In & Write**, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit Pkwy, 5:30 to 7 p.m., 279-0299

Tues-Sats • **Our Stories, Our Lives: Irwin Nash Photographs of Yakima Valley Migrant Labor**, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, 1535 NE Wilson, Pullman, 335-1910

Thurs • **NAMI Spokane Family to Family Group**, 6:30 to 8 p.m. ed@namispokane.org

• **Celebrate Recovery**, The Salvation Army Spokane, 222 W. Indiana Ave., 5:30 to 7 p.m. 325-6810

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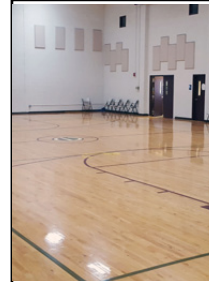
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VetsGarage occupies veterans hands and minds as they gain skills

By Emma Maple

For some veterans, finding activities to fill their day and keep their minds occupied can be difficult.

The VetsGarage in downtown Spokane addresses these concerns by providing tools and a space for veterans and community members to exercise their creativity and keep occupied.

“The concept of the VetsGarage is not unique,” said John Pollack, technical director of the VetsGarage. “It’s a makerspace, a place where there is a shop and tools. Typically, the tools are ones we don’t often have in our house.”

The population the VetsGarage caters to makes the organization different from traditional makerspaces.

“Most of the people here are veterans. That’s who we’re trying to help,” John said. “We’re not exclusive to them. Anyone can join. We subsidize the costs for everyone, but veterans pay less to become members.”

Dennis Pollack, John’s father, started the VetsGarage in 2011. Before founding it, he worked under contract for Washington State’s PTSD program, which allowed psychologists to do diversified things.

“We worked with family members, spouses and children, which the Veterans Administration (VA) can’t readily do,” Dennis said.

With the state PTSD program, he worked with veterans from many wars.

“In seeing some veterans, I saw the need for a program similar to one I experienced when I was working with the VA in 1966 or 1967,” he said.

The VA program, called Fairweather, was a place for people with emotional problems to keep their brains occupied and learn working skills. The VA used work-study to employ students to help the program and be there in a crisis.

“I thought there was a need, and veterans thought there was a need for a similar but different program. It would be a place for veterans to go and work with equipment on their own time,” Dennis said.

This idea led to the VetsGarage, which opened its first location in a one-car, unheated garage.

In their early years, the VetsGarage worked with a county-



John Pollock said Vets Garage offers veterans many tools and resources to involve veterans in varied projects.

owned building that formerly housed the Spokane County Veterans Outreach Center.

Dennis thought it was a good idea to combine what he was doing with what the county was doing.

One person who came through this program illustrates the heart of what the VetsGarage hopes to do in Spokane. When he and Dennis met, the man had been homeless and decided he needed some services. Through community help, he is now attending grad school.

Seven years after the VetsGarage opened, it had to relocate because the county needed additional parking. In 2020 it moved into a bigger space at its current location at 224 E. Pacific Ave.

The VetsGarage offers activities based on members’ interests.

One of the most popular activities is wood turning.

“Most people like to work with wood,” John said. “It’s easy to make something useful out of wood. Everyone needs a table or needs to fix a chair.”

The Inland Northwest Woodturners club supports the woodturning activities. Twice a week, a club instructor comes to the VetsGarage to teach people how to use wood-turning tools.

“People can go from having no ability to making some beautiful projects,” John said. “It’s time consuming, but is a good way to use time.”

The time-consuming aspect of activities may be one of the biggest benefits of the Vets Garage.

“We use the term ‘a positive distracting activity,’” John said.

“The vets are creating something, and it’s engaging their bodies and their brain just enough to keep their minds away from whatever may be an issue that day.”

In addition to woodturning, the VetsGarage has computer numerical controlled (CNC) tools. These are computer-controlled machines that cut out whatever people design. In the past, it used the tools to cast metal jewelry by making patterns and molds. They have also used the CNC machine to melt down metal and turn it into a decorative piece, often dedicated to someone who had served.

The VetsGarage has just set up special tools so they can work with carbon fiber composites, which are used to build fighter jets and expensive cars.

Another activity they sometimes offer is metal sculpting. This involves forming a flat sheet of metal into something complicated, like a car part or a piece of furniture.

“The VetsGarage has all the tools here one would need. Maybe not all the tools one might want, but we have all the tools the vets need,” John said.

Dennis continues to go to the VetsGarage and help about 10 veterans a week. One who is 66 has just been accepted for a full-ride doctoral program at a university in Australia.

The VetsGarage has about eight people who come in every day, and about 20 people who just come in sporadically, for an event or when they need a particular tool.

When the program first be-

gan, Dennis thought it would be easier to spread the word than it has been.

“Maybe I was naïve. When we first started, I thought that if we could involve 1,000 veterans in the Spokane area, for \$10 a month, we could do tons. That never happened.”

During the pandemic, the Occupational Therapy program at Eastern Washington University paused outreach projects, but that will resume this fall, and they will do some recruiting, John said.

For vets involved, the hope is that it can “give people a place to exercise their creativity,” said John. “There are so many things that are hard these days. The cost for housing is high, and people are having a hard time finding housing they can afford. Many people are retired and are not used to things being as expensive as they are now. The VetsGarage is an affordable place where they can come and work on things.”

“Many people who come in are having a tough time. They just need something to do, something they can create. Some may never have made anything out of wood,” John said. “Then they create something, and it’s a work of art. That’s satisfying.”

The VetsGarage provides a social environment that veterans may not be able to find outside of the garage.

“We work with people on a project, and banter back and forth. Time flies. We don’t realize how much time has gone by because we’ve been so engaged in what we’re doing,” John said. “For many, this is their outlet, a place they feel safe.”

When COVID hit, the VetsGarage struggled. John said there

were people who didn’t want to come in because of health concerns, and people who were not happy with the safety rules. They address these concerns to accommodate people.

The VetsGarage constantly struggles with affording materials and space. Most of its budget goes to rent. Dennis noted that nonprofits need someone dedicated to raising funds.

Even though the VetsGarage has been in operation for nearly 12 years, no one has been paid a salary.

The VetsGarage seeks reliable funding sources. They charge a membership fee, which they try to keep low. They also make things to sell to customers.

“That’s something people can get together to do,” John said. “Many veterans are happy to help raise funds by making things to sell.”

Dennis tried to sell products at a table outside a warehouse store but made only one sale. Now they are considering advertising products on their website, clkmore.wixsite.com/vetsgaragespokane.

They have received some grants, but Dennis said grant money doesn’t last.

The VetsGarage invites community involvement. John and Dennis want people to visit VetsGarage to learn about it during its hours of operation from 1 to 7 p.m., Monday to Friday, and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday.

They hope people experienced with shop tools will become part of the VetsGarage community.

“Because God gave me grace. I need to pass that on.” Dennis said. “I just want to help people.”

For information, email VetsGarage2015@gmail.com.

TUESDAYS
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3:30 to 7:30 p.m.

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“When I went the Falls I had a goal that I wanted to transfer here. It was always on my radar.”