

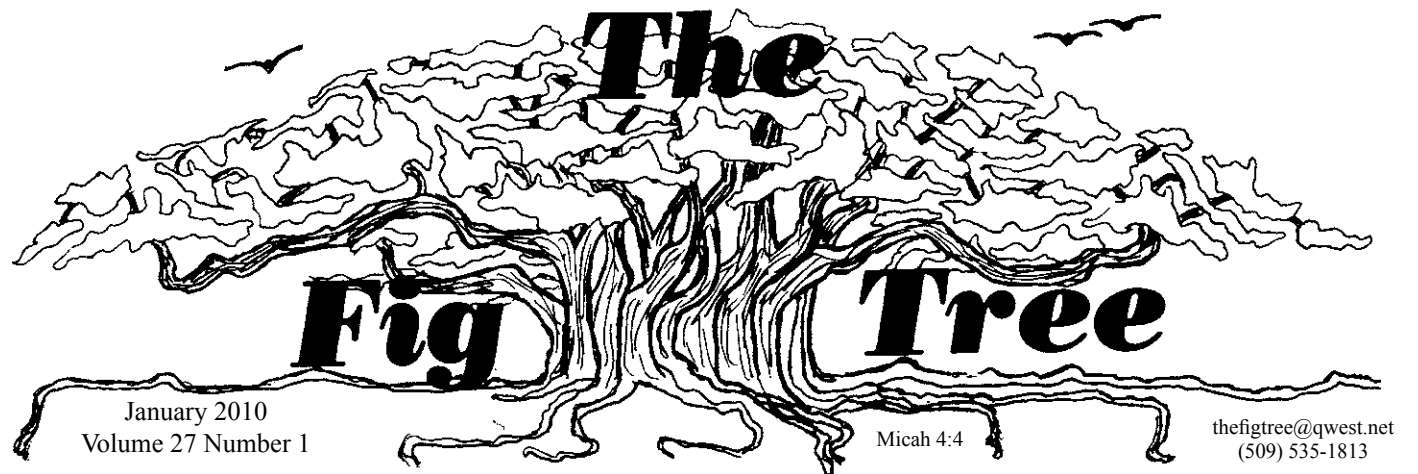
STORIES INSIDE

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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest

in color online at www.thefigtree.org

Biblical stories resonate today

By Mary Stamp

The Gonzaga University's winter performance, "Weaving Our Sisters' Voices," weaves together dance and poetry to convey the intersections of contemporary issues with ancient stories of Vashti, Jochebed, Miriam and nine other named and unnamed women from Scripture.

A collaboration of the theatre/dance, religious studies and music departments, it weaves together insights and talents of its creators, poet-writer-biblical scholar Linda Schearing and director-choreographer Suzanne Ostersmith.

Performances are at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays, Jan. 29 and 30, and Feb. 5 and 6, and at 2 p.m., Sundays, Jan. 31 and Feb. 7, at the Magnuson Theatre in the Administration Building.

The spark for the production began when Suzanne choreographed "The Medieval Mysteries" for the theatre program in 2002 and realized that 90 percent of students auditioning were women, but 90 percent of the parts were for men.

"The disparity ignited my desire to create a piece about the lives of women in Scripture in relationship to our lives," she said.

In 2005, she met Linda, professor



"Weaving Our Sisters' Voices" cast members Heather Seybold, Kaitlin Vadla, Dorothy Chung, Mary Davis and Amelia McClelland form the symbol they rebuild.

of Hebrew Scriptures, and proposed that she write the script and Robert Spittal of the music department rework a musical composition for it. The script and music were developed that summer. After fall rehearsals, the first performance was for the Gonzaga Guild in November 2005.

They did a spring 2006 tour performing at University Ministries, the Women's Hearth, Whitworth University, two Interfaith Council Circle of Caring events, a Gonzaga retreat, Volunteers of America shelters and programs, St. Thomas More Parish and Russell Theatre. More than 850 people saw it.

While dance and ritual movement were part of Suzanne's life from an early age, her degrees are in theatre.

Since 2000, she has started and has directed minor-degree programs in theatre and dance, part time at both Whitworth University and Gonzaga University.

Suzanne grew up in the San Francisco Bay area and earned a bachelor's degree in 1989 at the University of California in San Diego, including summer programs at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and the British

Continued on page 4

Karen refugees adapt to new culture, struggle to find jobs, learn English

By Virginia de Leon

In three years since the first Karen refugees moved to Spokane, the population has grown to more than 300 and the people have learned English, adopted a new culture and are now part of the local community.

"Everybody likes it in Spokane," said Moon Light, whose family was the first to seek refuge in the area. "Our children like school. People around here are friendly. They help us."

Although many are still looking for work and adapting to life in the United States, these immigrant

families who escaped persecution in their native country of Burma and later persevered in Thailand's refugee camps feel grateful for the chance to start again.

To give thanks for their survival and to preserve their language and culture in this new land, the Karen families hold fast to their traditions, including the celebration of the New Year.

On Dec. 19, many Karen refugees in Spokane gathered at the East Central Community Center to sing, dance, pray and observe the beginning of the Karen year 2748, which recognizes the migra-

tion of the first Karen into their traditional homeland of eastern Burma.

The Spokane event featured speeches in English and Karen, traditional dances, contemporary songs in their native language and tables filled with food. In their homeland, this celebration marked the completion of the rice harvest and the beginning of a new season.

This was the second time, the Karen community invited members of the local community to its celebration. Among the guests were families from area churches, volunteers and staff from World Relief, as well as teachers from the Institute for Extended Learning, Ferris High School, Chase Middle School, Sheridan Elementary and other area schools.

"Thank you for coming," Moon Light and others from the Karen community told guests as they escorted them to tables. "Welcome, welcome!"

The Karen community found themselves in Spokane as a result of the violence and persecu-

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Martin Luther King, Jr., Day 2010 events include a concert

Elson Floyd, president of Washington State University in Pullman, will speak on "It Started with a Dream: Many Views, One Vision," the theme for the 2010 Martin Luther King, Jr., Day commemorative celebration from 4 to 6 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 17, at First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar.

A new event for 2010 is the MLK Jr. Family Outreach Center Scholarship Fund Raiser, a Gospel musical called, "How Sweet the Sound." The concert is from 5 to 7 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 16, at the Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 806 W. Indiana.

The Annual Unity March will begin at 10 a.m., Monday, Jan. 18, at the INB Performing Arts Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

After the march, the Community Resource Fair with displays of area nonprofits and service organizations will be held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., on the second and third floors of River Park Square. At the same time, there is a Children's Learning Resource Fair on the second floor of the Spokane Transit Authority Plaza, 701 W. Riverside.

Elson, who has been president of the four-campus WSU since 2007, came to WSU after serving four years as president of the four-campus University of Missouri and four years as president of Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. At Kalamazoo, he taught counselor education, counseling psychology, teaching, learning and leadership.

From 1995 to 1998, he was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in administration. Prior to that he was executive director of the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board and vice president for student services/

Continued on page 2

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Climate Summit disappoints World Council

From the perspective of the World Council of Churches (WCC) the December Copenhagen climate-change negotiations lacked transparency and consensus, said WCC program executive on climate change Guillermo Kerber. The accord—negotiated primarily by the United States, China, India, South Africa and Brazil—supports scientific thinking for keeping temperature increase below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, but failed to set commitments to reduce emissions to halt the temperature rise.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon framed it as an “essential beginning,” but many non-governmental groups (NGOs) say it does little to end the damage of climate change, particularly for the poor. Many call for resuming negotiations to set targets for industrialized countries to decrease carbon emissions 40 percent by 2020 and to set up an annual fund of \$150 billion to allocate in the most vulnerable developing countries, as retired South African Archbishop Desmond and supporters proposed.

“The struggle continues,” Guillermo, said. “We need to build on the mobilization by churches and civil society with prayers, bell ringing and advocacy, to reach a fair, binding deal.”

Getting a dose of reality on climate change

Three presentations at a side event sponsored by the World Council of Churches and Caritas Internationalis during the recent UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen addressed: Why should religious people be involved in the climate change debate? How should religious people, particularly Christians, view themselves in relation to the earth and God, the creator of the earth?

At the event called “Renew the Face of Earth: Faith-based Approaches to Climate Justice,” Joy Kennedy, a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Working Group on Climate Change and the United Church of Canada, carved out the moral issue of climate change to more than 140 people.

“The world’s citizens are recognizing there is imminent danger,” she said. “People are suffering now. At its root, climate change is a profound moral issue about who people are in relation to the earth and God. If we believe the planet is just a natural resource bank to be exploited, excavated, extracted and dumped on, then we will treat it that way. If we believe we are part of a sacred creation dependent on its gifts for our survival and for life, then human activity requires responsibility and we will act out of love to serve and protect our home.” Joy calls churches to move from a theology of dominance to a theology of humility, and for repentance and restitution to replace “greed with an economy of enough.”

The problem is not with the poor but the rich

Fr. Emy Gillen, president of Caritas Europa, next set out the moral foundation for why religious people should be involved in the debate on climate change. He called for that involvement because “we share the human condition with all other people living on earth.” The moral framework includes human dignity as a core principle, solidarity, the common good, sustainability and preference toward the poor. To make poverty history, he suggests making greed and richness history.

Pacific Islander pastor offers a reality check

Beyond theology, the Rev. Tofiga Falani, president of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu, said, “our petition is that we want to survive.” Tofiga, who is also a member of the WCC Central Committee, said his is a small voice from a place that is hard to see on the world map. Tuvalu, South Pacific atolls that are barely a meter above sea level, is threatened by rising sea levels. Climate scientists say the 12,000 people on Tuvalu and others on small South Pacific islands are at the forefront of climate change. Tofiga said the church’s role is to address issues that “jeopardize the way forward for our people, because we carry God’s image,” he said. “God loves everyone.”

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Legislative Conference will be on Jan. 30

For the 2010 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference on Saturday, Jan. 30, Bishop Martin Wells of the Eastern Washington Idaho Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be keynote speaker, talking on why people of faith to be involved in advocacy.

The Washington Association of Churches (WAC), the Lutheran Public Policy Office (LPPO), Catholic Charities Spokane and

The Fig Tree are organizing the event to educate on advocacy by the faith community.

“Faith and the Public Forum” is the theme for the conference, which will be held from 12:30 to 5 p.m., Jan. 30, at the Cathedral of St. John, 127 E. 12th Ave.

There will be a presentation on “How Advocacy Has Changed,” and a panel of political leaders, government officials, religious advocates and nonprofit advo-

cates discussing “How to Engage Change at the Local Level.”

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

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

For information, call 535-1813.

Pastor elected to lead Ministers Fellowship Union

Jimmy Pierce, pastor of Unspeakable Joy Church in Airway Heights since 1998, was elected to a two-year term as the new president of the Ministers Fellowship Union (MFU).

It meets at 10:30 a.m., first Saturdays, alternating between Unspeakable Joy Church, 13315 W. 13th Ave. in Airway Heights and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, 645 Richard Allen Ct., where the MFU vice president, the Rev. Lonnie Mitchell, is pastor.

The goal of the 14-member Ministers Fellowship Union is to “reach out to others in ministry across racial and gender boundaries to do more together and to be a blessing to each other and the community,” Jimmy said.

“As ministers, we need to come together with others in ministry, to learn about each others’ ministries and to share advice,” he said.

Another area for common action is in drawing together youth from their churches.

Each year, the Ministers’ Fellowship Union has done an Easter Sunrise Service, a Thanksgiving service, a New Year’s Eve watch night service and in 2009, a Juneteenth celebration. They plan to add more events.

Jimmy, the son of a Baptist pastor from Alabama, lived in Memphis, Tenn., before joining the Air Force, which took him to service on bases in Blytheville, Ark.; Alexandria, La.; King Salmon, Alaska; Rapid City, S.D.; Korea; Rome, N.Y., and North Dakota before coming to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane.

In South Dakota, he began training in healing ministry, and in North Dakota, he served as a pastor of a Church of God in Christ

through which he and his wife, Phyllis, took a two-year course—over four years—in pastoral training and counseling.

He retired from the Air Force in 2004 to serve in ministry at the now 60-member church he serves with his wife.

Their ministry includes providing backpacks and school supplies in the fall and music programs in a nearby park.

“Our goal is to help people increase in faith, especially in the midst of adversity and tragedy,” Jimmy said. “Through our healing and deliverance ministry—laying on of hands and one-to-one counseling—we help people deal with issues such as rape or molestation so they can be whole, as Jesus wants them to be.”

“We help them deal with what they have gone through so they can live more productive lives,” he said.

For information, call 868-1184 or email jdpierce6@msn.com.

WSU president will speak on MLK Day

Continued from page 1
 administration at eastern Washington University.

The native of Henderson, N.C., earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and speech in 1978, a master’s degree in education in 1982 and a doctoral degree in higher and adult education in 1984 from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

In November 2008, seeking to “lead by example,” Elson took a \$100,000 salary reduction. In June 2009, he announced an additional 5 percent cut in response to the state budget crisis.

Organizers for the Martin Luther King, Jr., Day events include the Rev. Happy Watkins, Ivan Bush and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Family Outreach Center.

For information, call 455-8722.

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Commemorative Celebration

Sunday, Jan. 17

Speaker: Dr. Elson Floyd - President Washington State University

4-6 p.m., First Presbyterian Church - 318 S. Cedar St.

Unity March & Community Resource Fair

Monday, Jan. 18

10 a.m., INB Performing Arts Center - 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

11 a.m.-2 p.m. - Community Resource Fair, Riverpark Square, 2nd & 3rd Levels

Children’s Learning Resource Fair at STA Plaza, 2nd Level

For information, call 455-8722

Religious Communication Congress is April 7 to 10

Best-selling *Tuesdays with Morrie* author Mitch Albom will speak on "Embracing Change" at the Religion Communication Congress 2010 next April 7 to 10 at the Chicago Marriott.

His new book, *have a little faith*, debuted in the No. 1 spot on the Oct. 16 New York Times nonfiction best-seller list. The book describes his journey of faith, influenced by a Jewish rabbi and a Christian pastor.

The novelist and sports writer will address more than 1,000 communication professionals from a variety of faith backgrounds at the once-a-decade event. Participants include local congregational leaders, national and international religion correspondents, webmasters, bloggers, professors and students.

Fig Tree editor Mary Stamp will lead a workshop on The Fig Tree model of journalism.

The four-day conference is a time of fellowship, networking and instruction for many of today's faith-based communicators. Now in its fourth decade, the Congress will hold to its tradition of discerning information about conventional media, while looking ahead at what's in store for current and rising media professionals.

Among other RCCongress speakers are: Diana Eck, founder of Harvard University's pluralism project, which includes information on The Fig Tree; columnist and distinguished authority on American religion, Martin Marty; Ingrid Mattson, first female president of the Islamic Society of North America; Otis Moss III, pastor of Chicago Trinity Church; musician, composer and storyteller Ken Medema, and Barbara Bradley Hagerty, National Public Radio's religion correspondent.

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a movement that teaches young leaders to look beyond diversity and build relationships of mutual respect and shared values, will be at the closing banquet.

For information, visit rccongress2010.org.

Sisters of Providence choose new leaders

Four Sisters of Providence beginning five-year terms of leadership for Mother Joseph Province are Sister Karin Dufault, Portland, Ore., as provincial superior/Leadership Team coordinator; and Sister Jo Ann Showalter, Spokane, and Sister Judith Desmarais and Sister Maureen Newman of Seattle as provincial Councilors.

The team have reappointed Karen Lauby as secretary and Jennifer Hall, as treasurer.

Together, they will be the Leadership Team for Mother Joseph Province, headquartered in Renton, Wash., and covering Alaska, Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana, Washington and El Salvador.

They lead the religious community, coordinate the Providence Pariseau Corporation and co-sponsor the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center and Intercommunity Mercy Housing in Seattle, and Transitions in Spokane.

The former provincial superior and council members served as the corporate sponsors of Providence Health and Services. As of Jan. 1, that role was taken over by sisters and lay people in

Providence Ministries.

Sisters of Providence respond to needs of the poor and vulnerable through education, parish ministry, health care, community service, housing, prison ministry, pastoral care, spiritual direction, retreats and foreign missions.

Since 2005, Sister Karin, a registered nurse and native of Yakima, has served as executive director of Supportive Care Coalition: Pursuing Excellence in Palliative Care, in Portland. She has held various administrative roles with Providence Health and Services and developed oncology and gerontology programs.

Sister Jo Ann Showalter of Spokane grew up in the Willamette Valley, was married and worked as an imaging technologist before she became a Sister of Providence in 1994. Her ministries include medical radiography, environmental education and prison visitation.

Sister Judith Desmarais, who graduated from St. Joseph Academy in Yakima, entered the order in 1962 and made a perpetual profession in 1971. As general councilor for the General Chapter in Montreal, Quebec (1997 to 2007), she set up the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Center, served on UNANIMA

International, which works for justice, and became involved in the issue of trafficking of women and children. For 14 years, she directed ministry with deaf people that grew out of her nine years of teaching primary schools in Vancouver and Seattle.

Sister Maureen Newman, who grew up in Eastern Washington and Seattle, joined in 1964 and taught elementary school 32 years in Olympia, Vancouver and Seattle. She later served as assistant principal. She has also helped at a day care for migrant workers and a tutoring program for Hmong tribes people, and has visited Central America with Going Home and Witness for Peace.

For information, visit www.sistersofprovidence.net.

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'Inspiring' boy speaks at Coeur d'Alene events

Zach Bonner, 12, founder of the Little Red Wagon Foundation in Valrico, Fla., and honored as Beliefnet's Most Inspiring Person of 2009, is the featured speaker at two events in Coeur d'Alene.

He will speak at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Day children's event for Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls fifth graders, which begins at 9 a.m., Friday, Jan. 15, at North Idaho College.

The annual event is an opportunity for children to hear from people who work in King's spirit to promote civil rights.

Presentations will also feature local people who were fifth graders 25 years ago, telling how they have carried King's legacy in their lives.

Zach, concerned about the destruction of Hurricane Charley in 2004 in Florida, went door to door, pulling his red wagon and asking neighbors to share some of their water with neighbors who

did not have water.

From that experience of helping others, he formed the foundation and has raised thousands of dollars to help children "in distressed situations" in simple and fun ways. His website is at <http://litedredwagonfoundation.com>.

teredwagonfoundation.com.

He will also speak at the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations' annual fund-raising gala at Parkside tower in Coeur d'Alene. For information, call 208-765-3932.

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Women today identify with injustice affecting women in biblical times

Continued from page 1

American Drama Academy in Oxford, England.

After graduating she moved to Seattle and worked in professional theatre for 10 years. In their first year of marriage, she and her husband Mark spent four months in Nicaragua, where she taught dance to children after school at Barrio Acahualinea, a shantytown near a dump. They also spent time in Brazil and Bolivia.

In 1998, her husband decided to come to his hometown, Chatteroy, to be near his parents. Settling on a small farm with llamas, she searched for dance and theatre opportunities.

In 2000, Rick Hornor, director of Whitworth's theatre department, invited her to teach a musical theatre dance class. Then the director of Gonzaga's theatre invited her to teach there, too.

Suzanne grew up Presbyterian, but has been involved with and attends a variety of churches. She enjoys working with hundreds of students a year in classes and performances at Whitworth's Presbyterian-affiliated campus and Gonzaga's Catholic campus.

"I love theatre because it makes people come alive. As I teach techniques, I see students gain confidence and find new ways to express themselves," said Suzanne, who has been involved in directing, choreographing and/or performing in more than 80 shows in her career. "I encourage students to move their bodies to embody emotions."

In teaching and in life, she said, her faith leads her to see God's face in the faces of everyone she is with, especially in the faces of her students.

Now in her 17th year at Gonzaga University, Linda grew up in Ohio and Florida. In her 20s, she became involved in the Salvation Army, as a cook and counselor with a program for runaway girls. She completed studies at the College for Officer Training in Atlanta in 1974 and served four years in Rhodesia.

Her studies for a master of divinity degree at Candler School of Theology and at Emory University in Atlanta stirred her interest in the church's role in advocating justice and led her to become Catholic in 1982, before she began doctoral studies at Emory.

While completing her PhD in 1992, she taught a year at Rhodes College in Memphis and four years at Luther College, in Decorah, Iowa, as well as at Emory.

She and her husband, Angel Fitzpatrick, moved to Spokane when she began at Gonzaga in 1993. They now live in a 1916 farmhouse on a small farm in



Suzanne Ostersmith choreographs "Weaving Our Sisters' Voices."

Fairfield, south of Spokane.

Linda sees writing "Weaving Our Sisters' Voices" as an extension of her teaching.

"Teaching is my vocation, but I don't confine teaching to the classroom," she said.

When Suzanne came to her with the idea of the drama, Linda was teaching a class on the "Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," looking at stories of women in Hebrew Scriptures.

As they began to discuss which women to choose and how to include an element of conflict, Linda suggested developing the drama around the story of the Levite's concubine. She was pushed out the door into a crowd of men to save the Levite. Abused, beaten and raped all night, she was barely alive in the morning. When she died, the Levite divided her body into 12 pieces and sent a part to each of the 12 tribes.

"We used the stories of other women to help bring healing, to give her a burial," Suzanne said.

"The Levite's concubine symbolizes a call for justice for victims," Linda added. "The play makes her whole and helps the audience see they have a call to help make people whole, too."

"We recover unknown and unnamed women, like the five daughters of Zelophehad and Job's wife," she said. "We also look at how Mary feels as a mother, excited about her baby and later unable to protect him."

"Stories of women biblical characters are exemplars or cautionary tales," Linda said, explaining that more men are named and more chapters are spent developing their characters in the Bible.

"It's important to recover women, whose lack of visibility and lack of character development leaves them subject to being stereotyped and leaves their power unseen."

"Scripture transcends its historical context and is relevant in other generations, in our generation in the 21st century," she said.

With the women chosen, Linda wrote poetry to capture their stories and how each calls for justice. Suzanne broke it into parts, assigned characters—first three and now five—and decided how to stage it.

"In 2005, we did the touring show with three women actors," Suzanne said.

When she was asked to direct the main stage performance at Gonzaga University's Magnuson Theatre in January 2010, she decided to do "Weaving Our Sisters' Voices" with five actors, two musicians, a full set and costumes.

A symbol designed by a student for the first performances represented the Levite's concubine torn apart and put back together. For this performance, costume designer Summer Berry made it as white quilted pieces held by Velcro on a black circle at the center of the backdrop. The pieces are taken down as the concubine's body is torn apart, and are set at the edge of the stage.

"As the pieces are put back after stories of other women are enacted, the puzzle is rebuilt, leaving a picture of wholeness," Suzanne said. "Our goal is to empower women."

"We choreograph dance and movement with large pieces of white sheer fabric to serve as scarves, a rope, bells, the Red Sea parting, water in Miriam's well, a baby, Christ's body, veils, seductive clothing, carpet and other elements of the stories," she said.

"Today's injustices were inherent in biblical times. Women could not inherit, but the daughters of Zelophehad argued in court so they could inherit their father's land, because he would not want

them to be destitute.

"Injustice riles me," Suzanne said.

The Levite's concubine had fled his abuse and gone home, but the Levite came and took her back. In 2005, when the actor said, "I understand restraining orders today are not effective either," it resonated with experiences of women at the Women's Hearth. One spoke up, "That's for sure."

"Women's voices," the performance begins. "Women know what it's like to love, hate, hope

and fear. Words and lives of our sisters, mothers and grandmothers have shaped who we are.

"Women far away in time are our sisters, mothers and grandmothers in spirit—angry over injustice, triumphant over adversity."

"Women are more than objects. They are people who struggle for food, water, life and human rights. Some are silenced. Their stories are our stories, our legacy."

For information, call Suzanne at 313-6553 or Linda at 313-6797.

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Church steps out of 'comfort zone' and into lives of homeless people

After church one Sunday in November, members of Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church heated water in a 100-cup coffee pot, packed it in one of three cars with pre-packaged cups of soup, colorful scarves, hats and gloves, and plastic baggies of hygiene and toiletries products.

Stepping outside their church walls, out of their element and outside their comfort zones, nine members, including the associate pastor, the Rev. Julene Trimborn, went to a spot under the freeway and offered soup, warmth, necessities and friendship to homeless people who sleep there.

Glad Tidings, which is at Fourth and Havana, previously had food and clothing banks, but when they rented the space to a school for six years, they began to give out gift certificates at local supermarkets to people in need who came to the church.

Julene said it was the first time in her 28 years of ministry at the church that they had done something like this. Since Nov. 15 they have also visited the people there on Nov. 29, Dec. 13 and Jan. 3.

"It showed God's love more than anything I have done or any sermon I have preached," Julene said. "It's about why we as the church exist."

Previously, the church's group of 15 older women have knit scarves, hats and gloves to give to Vanessa Behan, Ogden Hall and street ministries. They also have made quilts and sent them to overseas missions. Now their wider church office suggests that they buy and send gift cards from a major retail chain with stores around the world. Younger women who work find buying gift cards is something they can do.

"I'd never done anything like this. At first, we had no idea what we were doing," said Julene, who has a food handlers permit. "We did not plan ahead to organize details, but just did what we could do."

The previous Sunday, several members went to the area near Division and Third to locate people who might need what they had to offer. They saw blankets in the skateboard park under the freeway.

Since then, she estimates that 25 different people have gone, including four teens.

"It was a blessing to us," Julene said. "We have been sheltered and would not have experienced the blessing if we stayed in our church walls. Too often we wonder why people are on the street,



Julene Trimborn, Ann Potter and Dana Bretch prepare soup, knits and toiletries for homeless people.

but the fact that they are there, we should care."

The blessing came in the smiles, gratitude and appreciation of the homeless people for the gifts of some of the basics of life. On the first day, the church members set out boxes with the knit goods and bags of toiletries, asking if the people could use them.

"People came out of nowhere. Eventually more than 40 came in the hour and a half we were there," she said.

One man, who calls himself Father Time, said, "You did more than you will ever know."

Both groups brought each other happiness.

Beyond the food and things shared, Julene said they entered into conversation and listened to stories.

She found the men and women "polite" and "just people." She thought everyone looked the same, bundled in warm clothing so it was hard to tell who the homeless people were.

Many were vets. One said he never thought he'd be there. He was living paycheck to paycheck until he lost his job.

"Many of them are like us, but had bad times. Some saw things in war and will never be the same. They were there, hungry and

cold," she said.

"We're not a rich church. Many in our church have been laid off. It's up to us to do what we can do to meet a need and to be grateful for what we have."

"Although we went out of our comfort zone, we were comfortable," she said. "We don't have such experiences within the church walls. It was more fulfilling than anything I could buy."

She said it was about being inspired to do what was at hand, what the church could do with what they have.

"If we wait for enough time, enough money or someone to organize something, we may not do anything, but if I bring what I have—a few sandwiches, knit goods, extra coats, or cups of soup—it doesn't require training, just common sense," she said.

"We did not do it to lift up the church, but to follow God's call to go to the highways and byways. We did not even talk about God, but we showed who God is. God is love, not religion, but relationship," Julene affirmed.

Julene was pleased that on Nov. 15, two other church groups were doing the same thing.

"We helped each other as churches should do," she said. "There have been too many splits

in churches, with people packing their bags and going because they want something done their way. We need to minister in God's way. We were God's church ministering together.

"We're the church, not a building. We can go anywhere and we're the church. We may have differences, but we need to focus on doing what Jesus said to do and quit talking about our differences," she said.

Another time, a young man from Life Center recognized Julene and her husband, the Rev. Charles (Chuck) Trimborn, who is senior pastor at Glad Tidings. He stopped, joined them in handing things out, offered to come again and gave them \$15.

They used the \$15 to buy boots for one woman, whose shoes had been stolen, making it hard for her to get out of her bedroll.

Julene gave some background on her ministry. She and Chuck, who have been married 40 years, met at the University of Montana where he studied business and she studied music.

They moved to Spokane for him to work in real estate and began attending the church in 1976. Sharing his business savvy and serving on the board sparked his call to ministry.

While studying, he served seven years under the previous senior pastor. Then the church asked him to be senior pastor in 1987. Julene became youth pastor, then associate pastor also responsible for music. She teaches Bible classes

and sometimes preaches.

Both had training through Berean College of the Bible, an Assembly of God school in Springfield, Mo., that offers graduate and undergraduate distance-learning studies in theology. Chuck graduated in 1982 and she graduated in 1989 and was ordained in 1990.

Glad Tidings, a large congregation before splits because of the freeway and differences of opinion, now has 150 members.

The church started in 1939 in a building near Sacred Heart Hospital. Its present building includes an education wing built in the 1950s and rebuilt after a fire. The sanctuary was built in the 1960s and an addition in 1974.

Julene was the first woman to serve as a pastor at that church, but she said Assembly of God churches have always recognized women in ministry.

The new aspect of ministry to people under the freeway is also "blazing a trail" for new life in the congregation, she added. "People have risen to the occasion. There is no feeling like participating in this—for doing what we have been taught in the Bible to do—for those who go and for those who are bringing things we can take."

"We took a leap of faith. I can see how God multiplied the simple things we have taken. I believe it's our ministry," Julene said.

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Program helps teens transition life from institution to community life

Through Lutheran Community Service's Residential Treatment Care Program, Coy Patros supervises a "step-down" program, helping juvenile offenders transition from an institution to living in community, going to high school or college, or finding a job.

The program, which began in 2003 with the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, counsels and mentors six boys and one girl from 14 to 21 years old to modify their behavior by rewarding them for positive actions, rather than trying to find out what "caused" their criminal behavior, said Coy, program supervisor.

It is one of several multi-dimensional foster care programs working to transition juveniles into society.

Youth work for three months to a year with an individual therapist, a skills trainer, foster parents and a family consultant. The program is geared to change behavior and attitudes so young people can move forward. It's coupled with skills training to point them in positive ways.

"We don't care where their behavior came from, we want to help them change their behavior so they can, for example, take correction without comment, an important skill if they want a job," Coy said.

The young offenders, who were jailed for offenses from theft to manslaughter, are placed in foster homes or with their own families as they reintegrate into society and learn skills—from budgeting, to ordering a hamburger, to having fun without getting high, to gaining job skills.

The program has a 70 percent success rate, in contrast to 50 percent success rate for group homes, he said.

Not all succeed. Some go back to prison if they run away or don't pass drug screening. The hardest youth to work with are those who have been in gangs, he said.

"We engage their families, involving them in family consultation and teaching them basic parenting skills, such as how to say no, knowing where their children are, and parenting in non-judgmental ways," Coy said.

"It's not always the parent's fault that the child is defiant or addicted to drugs," he said.

To help the young people, LCS offers weekly support and access to Coy 24/7.

"Being on 24/7 is not unlike monastic life," he commented, noting that he is on a break from Benedictine monastic life.

Coy grew up in Neligh, Neb., graduating from the small-town high school in 1983 and completing studies in religious education in 1989 at Mount Marty College



Coy Patros in his office at Lutheran Community Service

in Yankton, S.D. He spent two years at the Benedictine mother house in Germany, completing seminary studies at Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon in 1994 and studying counseling for a year in England.

He then entered monastic life in Schuyler, Neb., serving as cook, librarian, recruiter and priest taking communion to a nursing home every day.

In 2002, he decided he needed a break.

"I'm still seeking God," he said.

Before coming to Spokane as a therapist with Lutheran Community Services of the Northwest, he worked with developmentally disabled and mentally ill homeless adults in crisis services in Olympia.

Wanting to live in the country, he settled near Elk on a 10-acre farm with horses and chickens.

Coy's work with the Residential Treatment Care Program is varied, including transporting the youth. It's his responsibility to know where the youth are.

"We take community safety seriously," he said.

Youth are given points for the good things they do—such as getting up on time, being ready on time and cleaning up after themselves in the morning—and for their attitudes and maturity at home in the morning and evening—such as telling their parents or foster parents they love them.

They lose points for things they need to work on, such as rolling their eyes or making "snarky"

comments in response to correction, lying or back talking.

"It's like a game. They have to know the rules," Coy said. "The rules help the parents or foster parents learn to see their goodness. Being in the program evokes goodness."

He told of one boy asking, "Why are you guys so nice."

"That's who we are," said Coy.

"Rather than talking about God, we try to put God forth in our lives," he commented about how he sees the role of staff in reaching the youth. "We're God dressed in jeans."

"My faith drives me to help. How could I be in ministry and not help," said Coy, who attends Mass at different parishes and is engaged in spiritual direction at St. Joseph Family Center.

For him, faith is about living in ways that lead people to say, "See how they love one another," rather than being caught up in talking about God and religious things. He is sad that "Christian" has become a "dirty name" for some.

There is no effort to instill religion. Although the program is sponsored through Lutheran Community Services, it's up to the youth to decide if they will go to church with their foster parents, on their own or not go.

Coy pulled a ceramic statue from his bookshelf depicting Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

"This is my idea of being a supervisor or priest. It's being a servant," he said. "I also recognize that I'm a sinner working

out my life but at the same time compelled to do good and to let my light shine.

"It's crazy to the youth that even if they are in trouble, we are still compassionate," he said.

"Yes, everyone makes mistakes and may not live up to commitments, but we try to live authentically. My understanding of conversion recognizes that we all fall down and get up, then fall down and get up. Even saints like Mother Theresa struggled, praying but needing prayers."

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Volunteer assumes varied roles in United Way, at church, as friend

By Yvonne Lopez-Morton

Designing her life around the belief that her faith requires her to care for others, Ann Lewis is committed to a philosophy of volunteerism that has impact on both individuals and the community.

Volunteering primarily through United Way, Calvary Chapel and as a friend to an AIDS patient, she seeks to "ensure that vulnerable populations are included, not isolated," she said.

"Christ told us we have a responsibility to care for others and not turn our backs. God has been good to me and lets me know I am still capable of helping others even though I am 80 years old," said Ann, sharing how she lives that faith in the three settings.

Known as "Mom" to staff and volunteers of the Spokane County United Way where she has volunteered for more than 20 years, she embraces that description.

"Like any mom, I am a hugger and love being hugged back," Ann said. "I also treat people as their moms would treat them. I love everyone at United Way. I give hugs, hold them, scold them, encourage them and tell them what they need to do and why."

She will tell staff and volunteers to eat properly, get rest and sends them home if they are sick.

A donor to United Way for 44 years, she brought to the organization skills she developed while at Farm Credit Bank, where she worked for 22 years until her retirement in 1987.

Ann started as a keypunch operator at the bank and progressed from using basic computer skills to complicated state-of-the-art systems. She eventually became a part of management as the data processing supervisor.

While she calls on her management skills daily at United Way, she does not hesitate to fill in at the reception desk or help with office duties when necessary.

She spends most of her time as a volunteer, but United Way brings her on temporarily as staff during major campaigns. This fall, as she has done for years, she oversaw "campaign central," caring for the team of professionals on loan to United Way from local businesses.



Ann Lewis finds varied ways to volunteer.

Spokane County United Way is a nonprofit organization that partners with local agencies, volunteers, donors and local businesses to identify and evaluate community priorities and invest in programs that create solutions to pressing community issues.

Ann said that in 2008 the local United Way invested \$3,864,000 in programs in the community, as well as United Way programs that provide direct program support.

"It is one of nearly 1,300 local organizations in the United States that are part of the worldwide United Way network in 45 countries and territories," she explained.

United Way began in 1887 in Denver, when a priest, two ministers and a rabbi realized that by cooperating they could better address the city's welfare problem, so they formed a united campaign to support 10 health and welfare agencies.

Last year, she said the local United Way established "a bold vision for the future" with five-year goals to decrease child abuse and neglect; increase kindergarten readiness, and increase the high school graduation rate.

Along with the loaned executives, staff and team of more than 100 volunteers, she understands that to achieve these goals, it is

necessary to invest today in education, income and health.

She supports United Way's commitment to ensure children are nurtured, safe and succeed in school, and that people have the means to meet their basic needs through employment and sustainable assets, so they are able to make healthy choices.

Ann said United Way's priority to include vulnerable populations comes through partnerships with others in addressing challenges with youth, adult and elder populations challenged because of dependency or disability.

"There have to be services to meet basic needs," Ann said. "We support programs and services that make it possible for all citizens to have a chance to be the best they can be."

Born in Wichita, Kans., Ann moved to Claremore, Okla.—the hometown of humorist Will Rogers—when she was seven. She grew up in a Southern Baptist home. Her first job when she was 16 was as a tour guide in the Will Rogers Museum, where she

earned 50 cents an hour.

After her marriage, she lived in both Tulsa and Bartlesville, Okla., and moved to Spokane in 1959 when her husband was relocated because of his job.

She spent the next few years rearing their children before she reentered the workforce at Farm Credit Bank. While she was at the bank, she started her volunteer journey with United Way.

Although Ann and her family attended church regularly, in 1980 she decided to seek a new place to worship. When she visited Calvary Chapel at 511 N. Hastings Rd., she found her faith reinforced and has worshipped there since.

As at United Way, she has assumed many roles in her 23 years of volunteering at the church, from teaching classes to working in the church office.

For 20 years, she has worked in Calvary Chapel's information center, its "go to place" on weekends and between services to have questions answered and find printed materials.

One highlight of Ann's affiliation with Calvary Chapel has been participating in three mission trips to Russia from 1999 to 2004. Each of the two-week trips to Russia was part of the Calvary Chapel "Church Planting Min-

istry." On the first trip, she and other members helped establish a Calvary Chapel in Moscow. Her second and third trips helped existing Calvary Chapel ministries in Moscow and Volgograd.

"I was moved to meet so many young Russians who were hungry for meaning and faith options in their lives. I was also moved at how they were open to Christ," she said. "In Russia, the young people are leading the way for Christianity."

Ann's commitment to helping others also resulted in a 10-year personal and supportive relationship with a woman AIDS patient who referred to Ann as her Christian mother. Although the patient passed away, Ann remains a "grandmother" to the children the woman left behind.

"I had such joy seeing her go from wanting to give up to valuing each day and enjoying life," she said.

Through her relationship with this AIDS patient, she has met and supported other people with AIDS.

"As part of God's family, I feel we all have a responsibility to do what we can to care and support each other, no matter what the circumstances," Ann said.

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Seminarian works in Spokane while in distance-learning seminary program

Barb Gwynn fits seminary studies into her life, ministry and work in Spokane.

Grounded in work in a local congregation, she is a member of the first class of students seeking a master's in divinity degree as distance learners with Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. The students connect their practical ministries with academic study of ministry, theology and the Bible.

Barb recently shared her journey of discerning her call and choosing this form of seminary study. After 20 years as a member at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley, she began a part-time ministry at Bethlehem Lutheran on Spokane's South Hill in September.

Barb grew up in the Lutheran Church in Minnesota and completed studies in occupational therapy in 1977 at St. Catherine's College, a Catholic school in St. Paul. She moved to Fargo, N. Dak., accepting a job where she had done an internship. She met and married her husband, Cary, during her eight years there. They moved to Spokane when he accepted a job in engineering.

Although she comes from a Norwegian Lutheran heritage, she and Cary attended nondenominational churches, where she felt awakened to Scriptures.

"As my husband struggled with prolonged depression, I had many difficult life questions not satisfied in those settings," she said. "We began taking our two children to Lutheran churches, drawn by our roots and the message of God's grace."

Before he took his life seven years ago, she was "replanted" in the Lutheran tradition, active in doing Sunday school, the church newsletter, lay ministry, liturgical art, visitation and confirmation classes. In teaching confirmation for five years, Barb rediscovered the Lutheran catechism, faith and doctrine.

"I found stability," she said. Using the Faith InKubators confirmation program that combines music, art, drama and tenets of faith in an energized style to catch teens' attention and invites them to reflect in small groups, she found the "liveliness of God's Spirit in our tradition," she said.

A retired pastor at Good Shepherd, seeing her zeal and learning she was in her 40s, encouraged her to go to seminary.

"At the time, it seemed impossible with my children in school and my husband's battle with depression," she said. "I tucked the idea away, finding it intriguing but feeling I couldn't act on it."

While grieving her husband's death and figuring what to do next, she realized she needed to re-enter the work force.



Barb Gwynn connects with neighborhood of church she serves.

In a Hospice group on "Life After Loss," she shared her fear of going back to work. The leader suggested she go to the Community Colleges of Spokane Change Point program for displaced homemakers.

Sorting out her vocation in that six-week program, her call to ministry re-emerged. She gained computer skills and realized she could work in occupational therapy while discerning her path.

Barb has worked four years at Manor Care, seeing patients a few days a week and spending the rest of her time on seminary studies.

With the Eastern Washington Idaho Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, she began more formally discerning her call through retreats, meeting with the bishop's assistant and the candidacy committee.

Visiting Luther Seminary in St. Paul in 2006, she learned of the new Distributed Learning Program that would combine the seminary's online classes and campus classes, so people could learn while engaged in ministry.

In the fall of 2007, she started classes. Online, she is learning Greek and Hebrew, taking classes in Old Testament and New Testament, Lutheran Confession writings, Christian education, pastoral care, preaching and ministry with aging people.

Others in her cohort—learning group of 15—are from North Carolina, Georgia, California, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Wisconsin, Texas, Minnesota and Montana. For on-campus classes, they stay in a dorm. Beyond the preaching, projects and paper writing, there is much sharing of stories of congregations they work with, discussing what applies in their settings.

Meanwhile, Barb keeps her home in Spokane and works in

occupational therapy to support herself.

Barb works with the Rev. Erik Samuelson at Bethlehem Lutheran, which is exploring ways to transform the congregation in both local and global mission and ministry.

"We are learning how to bring the richness of word, prayer and sacrament into the community. It amounts to changing the fabric of the congregation to find new ways to bring hope and truth to others, to meet needs in the community," Barb said.

"We are exploring how to be part of God's mission and bring God's promises to this community," she said. "There is tension, an ebb and flow between the comfort of tradition and catching a vision for what God will have us do next."

Learning about the neighborhood, she is gaining insights into unmet physical needs and spiritual questions, often arising from misperceptions and reinforced by media treatment of churches, she said.

Barb volunteers 10 hours a week at Bethlehem Lutheran, keeping a journal of what she discerns in her ministry serving the community, preaching, assisting with liturgy, leading small groups and engaging people with Scriptures.

On some Wednesdays, she meets with clergy of eight Lutheran churches to reflect on Scriptures and how to make the week's lessons alive for preaching in Sunday worship.

She also seeks ways to incorporate art and media in her ministry. Her inspiration comes from summer classes she has taken at the Grunewald Guild near Leavenworth, Wash.

"It's important for people to learn to listen to God's spirit

speaking to them through creativity and flowing into their lives in new ways," she said.

Last summer, she spent three months doing clinical pastoral education at the University of Minnesota Medical Center's surgical intensive care unit.

"I found the ICU an equalizer, as both homeless people and company owners deal with cancer or neurosurgery. All were humbled in their vulnerability, and it was space to talk about the Spirit. Whether they were Christian, many were thinking about who they are and who God is."

That experience overlapped with her skills in occupational therapy, knowing what hard work lay ahead for people after surgery and hospitalization.

"What would motivate one person would not motivate another," she learned. "In listening and conversations, I found what

might give each hope, learning their spiritual language as I came alongside them."

Catching people earlier in the medical care process than she does in occupational therapy, she found many wondering if they would survive after surgery and wondering about the "bigger picture" of God's involvement.

"Being missional is about listening to people in the community and bringing hope of the Gospel into everyday, tangible places," Barb said.

"The richness of who God is can be lost if people have had a past conflict with people in church dynamics," she noted. "We need to look at how we relate on a daily basis, even in how we talk at the grocery store or coffee shop."

In any setting, she believes people of faith can speak hope into all they do and face in life.

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Refugees from Burma open eyes of members of local churches

Continued from page 1
 tion suffered by their people in Burma. Since 1962, Burma has been governed by repressive authoritarian regimes, according to the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Several human rights groups also have accused Burma's military government of ethnic cleansing and suppression of religious freedom.

Members of the Karen ethnic group have long opposed the Burmese government and have launched several revolts since the late 1940s. As a result of their efforts to gain autonomy, this minority group has faced discrimination and even death in their own country.

Many Karen tribes people are farmers who were forced to move from their villages in the Kayah and Karen (sometimes known as Kayin) states of southeastern Burma. After fleeing their homeland, the refugees spent many years in crowded camps in Thailand. For many school-age children, these refugee camps are the only home they ever knew. Some have no memory of Burma nor do they identify as Burmese.

Refugees from Burma first resettled in the Spokane area in 2006 through efforts of Pastor Eric Blauer, pastor of a non-denominational Christian community known as Jacob's Well.

Eric and his wife, Lee Ella, sponsored the first Karen families to move to Spokane. They were first introduced to the plight of the Karen people by Eric's brother, Matt, who works for nongovernmental organizations in Southeast Asia and creates documentaries that detail the struggle of the Karen and other refugees.

Most of the Karen people who resettled in Spokane are associated with Jacob's Well. Eric's church provides space for Karen families to gather each week for their own Christian services as well as a center where they can find clothing, help with paperwork and other aid.

These families relocated to Spokane through World Relief, an organization founded by the National Association of Evangelicals in 1944 for relief in Europe after World War II and now working globally to relieve human suffer-



Ferris High student Hailey Moon, holding a Karen child, with Ferris High ESL teacher, Victoria Rouse, who is holding her grandson, at the December celebration.

Photo by Ted Barnwell

ing, hunger and poverty.

According to Linda Unseth, director of World Relief's Spokane office, 337 Karen have moved to Spokane since 2006. Other refugees from Burma—186 people from the Chin ethnic group and two Karenni families—also have resettled in the area.

Most are Christian, while some are Muslim or Buddhist.

Those who speak Chin have found housing in North Spokane and receive support from First Church of the Nazarene on Country Homes Blvd. Some Chin families and Karen have joined New Vision Lutheran Church in Spokane's Garland district.

"They've been a great blessing to our church," said the Rev. Doug Wagley, pastor of New Vision.

At Jacob's Well, the Karen families gather in the sanctuary several times each week for fellowship. They have their own lay pastors and their services are conducted in Karen. Members of Jacob's Well have helped the Karen refugees by offering them weekly English language classes and a clothing bank.

The growth of the Karen population "has been an amazing answer to prayer," Eric told the crowd at the New Year celebration. "They've been a blessing to my life, my family's life, our church and Spokane. Our city is a better city because of the refugees from Burma."

The Karen community has

helped him and others from Jacob's Well develop relationships with teachers, doctors, employers, landlords and others in the area.

"I am grateful to the Karen people for helping me connect to the people of my city," Eric said.

Although they are thankful to be in Spokane, transitioning to life in the United States hasn't been easy for many Karen families.

Language remains a major obstacle. About 70 percent of the Karen in Burma and Thailand speak S'gaw Karen, the most predominant language among Karen refugees in the Spokane area. It is also distinct from the other Karen languages.

Although S'gaw Karen uses Burmese script, the Karen alphabet is significantly different. While the Burmese alphabet has 33 consonants and 29 vowels and vowel diacritics (for the different tones), S'gaw Karen has only 25 consonants and 11 vowels.

The alphabet letters have a round appearance because the Karen, Burmese and others in the region have traditionally used palm leaves as a writing material. In addition to Karen, the children also learned Burmese and Thai in the refugee camps. These languages, however, are vastly

different from English.

Because of the recession, many refugees are struggling to find full-time employment. Many left Spokane for Minnesota and Nebraska hoping to find jobs in the meat-packing industry. Last year, Moon Light and some men drove to the Tri-Cities to work. Other went to Alaska to fish.

"There's still racism and injustice in the work environment," said Eric, adding that some employers have taken advantage of the Karen.

In the last few months, however, Moon Light and a few others have been hired by The Spaghetti Factory, whose owners and managers have treated the Karen with respect and fairness, Eric said. Moon Light started as a dish-

washer but has received training to cook and do other duties.

"They have embraced, trained and empowered the Karen to learn and not just exist at a certain economic level," he said.

Doug and others at New Vision also have tried to help the Karen find work. The church provides transportation so 16 Karen can work seasonally at a farm in Montana.

The situation has improved for the new refugees compared to just a year ago, said Moon Light and others.

Since the Karen population has grown, new immigrants now know where to go for help and support. The Karen community also has established itself and developed relationships in the schools, churches, nonprofits, social services and other organizations. Many are learning to drive. One family has bought a home.

"They still need help but they are far more independent now than ever," Eric said. "Empowerment is happening."

Those who have worked with the Karen have gained from their friendship, because the Karen value family and friendship, said Jim Carney, a member of Jacob's Well. For them, working together is a way of life.

"They've taught me to appreciate how we live," he said. "We take so much for granted but the Karen people are so kind and so grateful for everything. They remind me of what it means to be a community member and the value of taking care of others."

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Walls fall as we step outside our 'comfort zones' to intersect with people

During the 20 year celebrations in November about the Berlin Wall falling, exchanges with several friends I met in pre-wall-fall visits to East and West Germany have given insights about walls and walls falling. We still have walls—one being built on our southern border, another on the West Bank and many that we erect in our personal, church, social and political lives.

The Berlin Wall was built and fell in my lifetime. Today, borders have become less able to divide and control in this age of cyberspace, virtual realities, online communities and internet social networks.

Today's media make it possible for people to be in community, keep connected and build identities beyond walls set up by the powerful to keep power. Physical borders, walls and checkpoints, they say, are for security—perhaps more for government or corporate power brokers.

While the power forces of today—multinational corporations—like borders to evade taxes, labor laws and “regulations” that would make them accountable, they flourish beyond boundaries and rely on the borderless means of communication.

With the Berlin Wall, not only did a wall fall between capitalism and communism—a wall that reinforced enemy images—but also Europe now experiences a new, borderless unity with common currency and policies. Today it weighs how to keep languages and cultures once defined by borders, as people of the world cross former boundaries and create diverse societies.

As borders fall, ground is fertile for universal humanitarianism, acts of charity that lead to encounters with people struggling for survival. Generosity that involves human contact often leads people to question why some people suffer and what more they can do to change the circumstances that leave people out in the cold. What are the personal, political, social and economic causes for injustice? What can we do?

When I visited in East and West Germany before the wall fell, I was moved by the power of personal connection, a ministry of presence, an enemy-image breaking encounter to forge peace. In those exchanges with me along with others from local, regional and national churches, seeds for the wall to fall apart grew.

I remember seeing some places on walls

where plants grew in cracks, gradually increasing the size of those cracks over the years.

“It's one less wall,” wrote a pastor who now lives in Essen, noting that while its fall symbolized freedom for one side, it represented for the other side the victory of capitalism, which he added is “responsible for so many other walls in the world.”

A pastor in Potsdam reminded me that for the younger generation, the Berlin Wall is like distant history. There's no memory of the positive aspects of the East German church, which encouraged seeds of the movement that broke through the wall. Once crowded East German churches now lack members, as do their former Western counterparts, he said. Churches are losing money and closing.

A former church executive reminds us to remember: “As usual, there is much forgetfulness.”

A former synod executive recalled me that when I visited, we could not cross the Glienicke Bridge near his home, but now he crosses it regularly by car.

It took just a few steps, a car and a few simple gifts for one Spokane church to go

outside its walls and comfort zone to open a new ministry. Other churches open their lives to refugees who crossed borders to find new lives and opportunities. Online classes bring seminary insights to ministry in the community. Mentors help youth transition from incarceration to community. A drama connects women today with the struggles and injustices biblical women faced. Common fund raising addresses needs for education, income and health care. Borders fall as we act together.

In reflections I wrote in 1989, I commented that when walls fall, people from the East, West, North, South, are freed from idols of war, images ensnaring imaginations, fetters that chain minds and worn-out ideologies that blind. When walls fall, we face a new dawn of life as we pass through the pain and fear of birth, pass through holes in walls that crack ever more with each plant and person.

When we crack through unholy walls, we need to hold onto the miracle of the moment, so we are not swept behind new walls to dissuade us from possibilities for life beyond borders, walls or divisions.

Mary Stamp - Editor

Revival of urban gardening cultivates hope in midst of economic downturn

As we become achingly aware of the current economic recession when we hear of job cuts, know someone who has lost a job and is not able to find another one, or see a neighborhood house foreclosed, gardens are a source of hope.

Struggles with the effects of the recession in Wilmington, Ohio, were featured in a Dec. 20 broadcast of “60 Minutes.” The story demonstrated the interconnection of problems being faced by individuals, families, communities and our entire country and world.

Wilmington is suffering from all the ailments this recession offers: manufacturing plant closings, lack of alternative sources of employment, foreclosures on homes, unemployment benefits running out, lack of health insurance, the closing of clinics that treat the poor because of lack of pub-

lic funds, food insecurity, fewer or lower donations to nonprofit organizations that serve the poor, and mental health problems made worse by all of the above.

One bit of hope that caught my eye was the growth of community vegetable gardens in Wilmington. People who had never gardened before planted gardens last summer. Both private and otherwise unused public land was used.

People have been eating better, gaining new skills and reaping the rewards of community. Hope often comes in small bits that gradually combine to help alleviate a situation.

Why bring up gardens now? It's cold out there! There are seeds of a community movement already spreading in this area. The Plant a Row for the Hungry program encourages home gardeners to plant ex-

tra vegetables to donate to food banks. Churches are planting gardens that yield produce for members and food banks.

Some community groups are teaching young people to raise vegetables, which are sold to support group activities.

Driving around town, we can see a few front lawns turned into vegetable gardens. One pastor planted herbs and vegetables so that they outlined the path of a labyrinth.

In the Pullman area, a group of gleaners organized last year. They reap berries and other fruit in gardens where property owners are no longer able to do their own harvesting. After giving property owners a share, gleaners donate the harvest to food banks.

I'm not a gardener. I make other contributions and cheer from the shade as I see benefits of a church garden. Children plant

pumpkin seeds, anticipating Halloween and fall pies. Older people now in apartments have a place to continue their love of gardening. People who never gardened learn how. Some people like a specific job, and others like to do a little bit of everything. Gathering early in the morning in hot weather, the group stays together for brown bag lunches supplemented with whatever has matured that week. Seemingly unlikely friendships are formed as people weed together and learn about each other.

To thank the Spokane Valley Food Bank, a woman who formerly used it and took cooking classes at Valley Partners, gave a basket of fruit and vegetables that she had canned to the food bank director.

The ingredients are already here for further cultivating community and hope.

Nancy Minard - Editor

Letter to the Editor

Sounding Board

Newsletter Excerpts

I want you to know that the December issue of The Fig Tree was the best you have ever done. I was heartened to learn of the many, many missions that I didn't even know existed in Spokane.

While I have had to downsize my volunteering due to health reasons, I thought there must be something I can do from home—and sure enough I came up with a couple.

What a warm feeling that gave me and how fortunate to be living in Spokane, a city that takes care of our own. Keep us informed and keep up the good work.

Blessings to you and your staff,
Lois Batson - Spokane

God on High

When you portray God

In all God's glory,

The paint from your brush

Reflects not God's complete story.

Everything throughout the land

From the oceans to desert sand

And the changes throughout their span

Would color the canvas by your hand.

God is present in everything,

From tragedy to the joy of spring.

From the bottom of the ocean

To beyond the sky,

From the clap of thunder

To an infant's cry.

Pray tell, how then do

You picture “God on High?”

Simple

Just open your eyes.

Hal Meili

Emmanuel Lutheran - Cheney

Do you want to be happy? Give Thanks. Develop a grateful spirit. America is not a happy place despite all our blessings. We are not thankful people. The United States ranks 11th in a survey of “life satisfaction.” We were among five who felt their satisfaction with life was not increasing.

If we want to turn this around, we can start practicing saying two words more often, “Thank you.” Start with the Creator. Move on to the lesser beings. Don't stop until you include the mosquitoes.

The Rev. L. Carlyle Martin
Audubon Park United Methodist

How do you answer the question, “So, what do you do?” It's the adult equivalent to “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Recently, I have been having some conversations around the question of vocation. I am having more conversations with people who are out of work. People who are out of “work” find it difficult to go to social gatherings because of the question, “What do you do?” Next time you are at a dinner party or meeting a stranger, I invite you to reframe the question. Next time ask,

“So, what do you feel called to in life?” You may get some strange looks at first.

For many people, what they feel called to do, doesn't match up to what they do to pay the bills. A sense of calling is a faith question. Sometimes it is difficult to see the connection between our calling and the work that puts food on the table. Maybe before you are willing to ask that question of a stranger you need to ask the question yourself: “What is God calling you to do?” What is God calling out to you as a parent, spouse, friend, volunteer, decision maker?” All of these things make up your vocation as a Christian.

The Rev. Eric Dull
St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Most of us understand that life can be difficult, too often taking more from us than it gives. Most of us understand that a strong and successful church does not come easily. So we might ask, “Where is the hope?”

In this dark time of the year, something new is breaking forth out of the darkness into a new light. We begin again to tell all the great stories and in their telling we move through to new urgings—a new sense- of what is possible, of what is becoming, of who God is and who we truly are as human beings.

The mythical stories of our Christian faith are filled with truths vastly more amazing than the facts of each of these stories. When we live and breathe these

stories, our divine and human urgings wonder and hope. In these moments, we know that going forward nothing will be the same. Nothing will appear as it did before. These stories are foundational and they will transform us.

The Rev. Jim CastroLang
First Congregational Church United
Church of Christ - Colville

You may remember when all we had to do was open the doors of the church and visitors would wander in. That doesn't happen as often today as it used to.

We live in a different age: post Christendom. That means the focus of ministry and mission needs to be different.

We have historically encouraged members to invite friends and family to worship with them.

During my sabbatical reflection, the thought occurred to me: if our focus is to be a missional church, why not focus on inviting people to join us doing mission? Instead of trying to get people to visit in worship, why not get people to join with us in mission and let them share in worship with us out of the context of doing mission and ministry together?

Not that we should stop inviting folk to join us in worship, but it is a different focus if we were to encourage “doing mission” before they ever came to worship.

The Rev. David Helseth - Englewood
Christian Church - Yakima

Law School dean speaks at city forum

Earl Martin, dean of Gonzaga University School of Law and acting academic vice president of Gonzaga University will speak on "The Past, Present and the Future of Legal Education" for the Spokane City Forum at 11:45, Wednesday, Jan. 20, at First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar.

He will share his thoughts on the future of legal education both locally and nationwide, the impact of Gonzaga University and how it will continue to help shape the local community.

Gonzaga's School of Law educates students on the ethical values, substantive knowledge and practical skills necessary to become effective advocates and compassionate counselors, Earl explained. Graduates work for some top law firms and locally contribute to improve the Spokane

community, he said.

Since Earl became dean in July 2005, the law school has under-

gone a curriculum overhaul.

For information, call 777-1555 or info@spokanecityforum.org.

Calendar of Events

- Jan 7 • **Peace Works**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, 35 W. Main, 5:30 p.m., 838-7870
- Jan 7, 14, 21 & 28 • **Spokane Winter Indoor Market**, Community Building, 35 W. Main St., 11 a.m., 325-2518
- Jan 9 • **Spokane Multi-faith AIDS CareTeams** Volunteer Orientation and Training, Catholic Charities Family Services Center, 12 E. 5th Ave., 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 358-4273
- Jan 12 • **Economic Justice**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, 35 W. Main, 4:30 p.m., 838-7870
- Jan 12 & 26 • **A Series of Christian Meditations**, St. Joseph Family Center, 1016 N. Superior, 5 to 6:30 p.m., 483-6495
- Jan 13 • **Hispanic Business Professional Association**, Luigi's Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., 11:30 a.m., 863-9236
 • **"My Beloved Community,"** Multicultural Leadership Institute Dialogue Panel—Chris Kim, Korean American Association; Mike Gonzalez, KXLY and Hispanic Business and Professional Association; Michael Leadercharge, Spokane Regional Youth Development, and Eady-Paulson and James Mohr, Institute for Extended Learning, Spokane Community College Lair Auditorium, 10:30 a.m., 533-7378
- Jan 14 • **"Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery,"** Azra Grudic of Lutheran Community Services, Eastern Washington University Women's Center Lecture, 207 Monroe Hall, EWU, Cheney, noon, 359-2898
 • **Police Accountability Committee**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, 35 W. Main, 4:30 p.m., 838-7870
- Jan 16 • **"How Sweet the Sound,"** Spokane Community Gospel Mass Choir, Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 806 W. Indiana, 5 to 7 p.m., 455-8722
- Jan 17 • **Martin Luther King, Jr., Commemorative Celebration**, "It Started with a Dream: Many Views, One Vision!" Elson Floyd, President of Washington State University, First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar St. 4 to 6 p.m., 455-8722
- Jan 18 • **Martin Luther King, Jr., Unity March**, INB Performing Arts Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 10 a.m., 455-8722
 • **Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Community Resource Fair**, 2nd and 3rd floors, River Park Square, 808 W. Main, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and **Learning Resource Fair for Children**, 2nd floor STA Bus Plaza, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., 455-8722
 • **Martin Luther King, Jr., Movie**, Woolf Conference Room, Jepson Center, Gonzaga University, 5 p.m.
- Jan 20 • **"The Past, Present and the Future of Legal Education,"** Earl Martin, Spokane City Forum, First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar St., 777-1555 or info@spokanecityforum.org
 • **Spokane Community Gospel Mass Choir Concert**, North Central High School, 1600 N. Howard St., 1 p.m., 434-5042
- Jan 21 • **"Good Works in Action Tour,"** Catholic Charities facilities and programs, 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., 358-4250
 • **"Mississippi Queen,"** Eastern Washington University Women's Center Lecture, 207 Monroe Hall, EWU, Cheney, noon, 359-2898
 • **"Gaza: Still in the Shadows,"** Bill Dienst, All Saint's Lutheran Church, 314 S. Spruce St., 7 p.m., 838-7870
- Jan 27 • **"The Most Famous Woman in Islam,"** Sherry Jones, Eastern Washington University Women's Center Lecture, 207 Monroe Hall, EWU, Cheney, noon, 359-2898
- Jan 28 • **Brown Bag Lunch Lecture**, "First Generation College Students and the Influence of their Cultural Background," College of Nursing Building, Washington State University Spokane, 412 E. Spokane Falls Blvd., noon, 358-7554
- Jan 28-Feb 7 • **Spokane International Film Festival**, AMC Theatres, River Park Square and The Magic Lantern, 25 W. Main St., 720-7743
- Jan 29-Feb 7 • **"Weaving Our Sisters' Voices,"** Gonzaga University Magnuson Theatre, 7:30 p.m. Fridays, 2 p.m. Sundays, 313-6553
- Jan 29 • **Opening Night Benefit** at "Weaving Our Sisters' Voices," for Our Place Community Ministries, reception and silent auction, 6:30 p.m., 313-6553
- Jan 30 • **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference**, St. John's Cathedral, 127 E. 12th Ave., 12:30 to 5 p.m., 535-1813 or 358-4273
- Feb 3 • **Fig Tree Distribution**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 9 a.m.
- Feb 4 • **Fig Tree Board**, Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 1 p.m.
- 2nd/4th Fris • **Pax Christi**, St. Ann's parish house, 2021 E. First, 12:30 p.m.

AIDS CareTeam training planned

Catholic Charities of Spokane, the Spokane AIDS Network and the Spokane Regional Health District are offering Volunteer Orientation and Training for Spokane Multifaith AIDS CareTeams from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 9, at the Catholic Charities Family Services Center, 12 E. 5th Ave.

It is for persons of any tradition interested in volunteering as members of faith-based AIDS CareTeams, sharing their compassion and values through practical, emotional and spiritual support to an individual or family living with HIV/AIDS.

For information, call 358-4273 or email scooper@ccspokane.org.

La Casa Hogar offers parenting class

An "Incredible Years" parenting class will be offered by La Casa Hogar in partnership with the Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic from 5:30 to 8 p.m., Mondays, for 14 weeks beginning Jan. 11. There will be child care for children two to eight years old.

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Gail Jennings reflects on changes, growth in 26 years at Gonzaga

Working from the years of electric typewriters with a correction key into the computer age, Gail Jennings has seen changes on campus and in students in her 26 years of working in the office of Gonzaga University's Religious Studies Department.



Gail Jennings retires from work in Religious Studies office.

Along with increased student enrollment and new buildings, she has observed growth in the students' openness and understanding of diverse people.

"If these young people remain in churches as they grow, any discrimination or bias will be gone," she said.

Her days have been filled with interaction with students.

Because all students are required to take three courses in religious studies—Scriptures, systematic theology and applied theology—many students, along with the 20 religious studies majors, have come to apply for classes, change classes or turn in papers and tests.

In her role at Gonzaga's Religious Studies Department, she has also overseen administrative tasks for the master of arts in religious studies, the master of pastoral ministries, the spiritual directors training and religious studies requirements for undergraduates.

She has become close to some who have been work-study students with her. Befriending some African women studying at Gonzaga, she has also learned about their struggles at home and on campus.

Many students come to her as they would to a mother or grandmother, confiding in informal conversations about problems with roommates, relationships, parents or home situations.

She retired at the end of December, but will be available to help a new person serve in the role of senior faculty assistant.

Gail, who grew up Catholic in Butte, Mont., came to Spokane and studied two years at Gonzaga University because she had

relatives here. She returned to Montana and worked 23 years in administrative and secretarial work while rearing two children, Tom and Molly. She met her husband, Jack, when he was campus pastor at Montana State University in Bozeman.

They moved here in 1983 with no jobs. In three weeks, she had the job at Gonzaga Religious Studies. Soon Jack began working part-time pastor at Mission Community Presbyterian Church along with having a full-time secular job. He later served as an adjunct instructor in religious studies. They now attend Manito Presbyterian Church.

With the encouragement of faculty, she finished her bachelor's degree in history in 1989 and earned her Washington state teachers certificate in 1990.

Gail has seen the religious studies program expand and offer new courses as the university has grown from an entering class of nearly 600 when she started to an entering class of 1,240 in 2009.

With the popularity of basketball, Zag fans Gail and Jack now prefer to watch games on TV rather than stand in line at 3 a.m. for tickets.

"Basketball has put Gonzaga on the map," she said. "So has

interest in Bing Crosby. Many people come to the Crosbyana Room at the Crosby Center to see memorabilia of the alum."

There has been extensive building on campus, expanding to the East and West with classroom buildings and new apartments.

"There have been amazing changes, and it has been fun to be a part of it," Gail said. "It has been quite a journey."

Course offerings have changed to meet new interests.

In tune with a freshman emphasis on healthy eating, Pat McCormick offered a course on "The Ethics of Eating." Ron Large's class on "The Morality of the Vietnam War" is consistently full.

The core curriculum requirements for all students remains at one 100 class in Scriptures, a 200-level course in systematic theology and a 300-level class in applied theology, like the eating and Vietnam options and Christian morality and Christian marriage.

Gail appreciates the quality of education the department offers and its publishing of many scholarly books.

Joy Milos' class on Christian Diversity brings speakers from other faith traditions and encourages students to attend services of

other churches or faiths.

"Students today are more understanding of the world. They are more aware of and more accepting of people of other cultures, religious traditions and sexual orientations. Their eyes are opened in courses. They meet people and hear speakers from other countries," she said.

Her participation in formal and informal discussions and lectures has also broadened her faith and perspectives.

"With the information age, students are wiser and have more technological knowledge," she said. "With doing more on the computer and less on paper, however, we have lost the personal touch of phone calls or visits, but we may be in touch more often."

Gail believes the service-learning courses that require students to spend 20 hours in the community, have opened their commitment to volunteering.

"It instills a sense of volunteerism in students," she said.

Gail has also been involved in the community and on campus.

In the community, Gonzaga gave her time to work six years on the city's Human Services Board.

On campus in 1995, she was one of the founding members of Gonzaga's Staff Assembly, where 700 staff meet to voice their concerns—as students do through the Student Body Assembly and faculty do through the Faculty Senate. It has been a channel for staff to make such changes as instilling ways to recognize

staff members and selecting a liaison to meet regularly with the president.

Staff members hold lunches, breakfasts and a summer picnic; hear speakers, and work to improve working conditions, so they can live Gonzaga's mission to offer higher education within the Jesuit tradition that engages the entire university community.

She has also served as a staff representative to the Board of Regents and on the Staff Assembly Executive Council.

Gail enters retirement seeing it as a new journey of faith, open to what is next in volunteer work or part time jobs. She'll be helping orient the new staff person. She will begin by reading one of the books written by faculty, Introduction to the Bible by Patrick Hardin and Rob Kugler.

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