

41ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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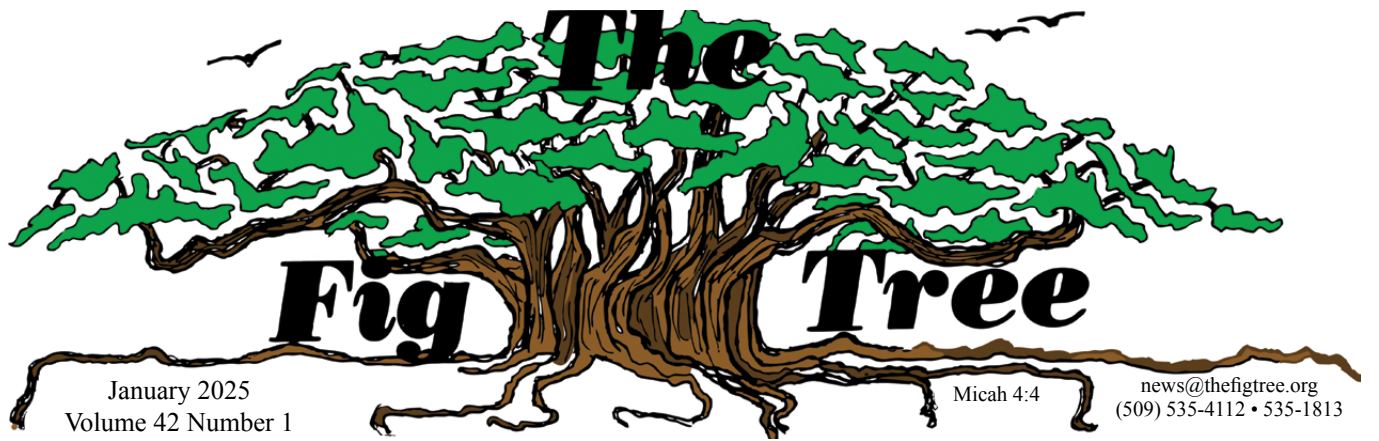
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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Rita Waldref plans to keep serving

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

As Rita Amberg Waldref retires at the end of January after 26 years as charity and social justice coordinator of St. Aloysius Catholic Parish, she expects to continue to find ways as a volunteer to work for social justice.

“I have loved parish ministry since the beginning. Being with the parish is where the people are. We meet, pray and serve together. It is where we are grounded,” she said.

When her work as charity and social justice coordinator became full-time in the early 2000s, she found her niche in parish life.

Rita’s work has focused on five areas: racial justice, environment, homelessness, immigration and the relationship with St. Aloysius’ Sister Community in the Bajo Lempa region of El Salvador.

Because of her leadership, St. Aloysius has one of the most active social justice parish programs in the Spokane Diocese. A vital aspect of her work is the many volunteers who have built the programs and the ways she has seen them grow in their faith and personally.

In each of the last four years, Rita and her husband, George,



Rita Waldref prepares to volunteer doing what she has done professionally.

have led a delegation to the Mexico-Arizona border. They have learned that reality differs from what is portrayed on the news. When they return, Rita asks each delegation member to write a short reflection on the trip for the parish bulletin so that the entire parish can benefit from their experiences.

She shared some quotes from Jim Andrews, one member of this year’s delegation.

• “Proximity changes everything.”

• “This trip humanized what political rhetoric, the news and social media can so easily dehumanize.”

• “As we met those immigrating and heard their stories, it was clear we would make the same decisions they have made. Immigrants are no different from us.”

• “The most significant impact our ‘tougher’ border policies have had is to effectively dehumanize and criminalize good people, and in turn actually empower and enrich the cartels.”

Through Rita’s efforts, St. Aloysius has also sent delegations annually to visit the Sister Community in El Salvador since

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Cup of Cool water welcomes youth downtown into community, family

By Mary Stamp

At Cup of Cool Water (CCW) at 1106 W. Second, Daniel Lufiyele finds joy in helping youth and young adults on the streets change the narratives of their lives.

“Seeing lives change is where I discover God,” said Daniel, who became executive director there in June 2024, after serving two years as associate director.

One young man who walked into the drop-in center had not come for a year because he had

been in jail. Daniel welcomed him home with a big smile and heartfelt warmth.

“To see the joy on his face realizing I had missed him and cared made my day,” he said. “To see their hope that life can be better makes my life worth living.”

There are more than second chances for the youth and young adults ages 14 to 24 who drop in at Cup of Cool Water for lunch Monday to Thursday, for dinner Tuesday and Thursday or to do

laundry, find clothes, get an ID, pick up mail, have a shower, learn life skills, find a job or converse with someone.

Cup of Cool Water has served marginalized youth downtown since 1995, “offering youth compassion without judging how they have carried their burdens,” he said.

Daniel started a conversation with a youth one day, asking, “What is a human being?” When the youth turned the question back to him, Daniel replied, “A human being may be vulnerable, mad, limited or broken but is also a gifted image-bearer of God, created by God and in God’s image.

“That can’t be taken away. Even if traumatized, a human being is gifted, capable of singing, playing sports, working and loving,” said Daniel.

“We are here as a community to learn from one another. There is nothing more fulfilling than to see a life transformed,” he said.

“Cup of Cool Water, which was founded in 1995, is a community... continued on page 6

‘What Does It Mean to Be Prophetic?’ is event theme

For the 2025 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference (ELC), speakers and workshops will address the theme, “What Does It Mean to Be Prophetic?” for presentations in person and on Zoom from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 25, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond Rd.

An opening interfaith prayer is being coordinated by Anastasia Wendlinder and Emily Clark of the Religious Studies Department at Gonzaga University with Karen Stromgren of Muslims for Community Action and Support.

A keynote plenary panel will explore the theme related to the generation-to-generation wisdom passed down by Indigenous people of the region working to restore salmon runs, address ecosystem functions, clean up uranium mines, restore language and culture to heal tribal people and all people of the region.

The panelists are Caj Matheson of the Coeur d’Alene Tribe Natural Resources Department, Margo Hill of the Spokane Tribe and Eastern Washington University American Indian Studies and Missing Murdered and Indigenous Women; DR Michel, of Upper Columbia United Tribes, and Bishop Gretchen Rehberg of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane.

Faith Action Network organizer Brianna Dilts will facilitate a panel of youth advocates—Tevita Fakasiieiki of the Pacific Islander Cultural Association, and two others to be confirmed.

Then lobbyists of faith agencies will present their organization’s priorities and issues coming before the state legislature in 2025. They are Kristin Ang of the Faith Action Network (FAN), Jean Welch Hill and Donna Christensen with the Washington State Catholic Conference and AC Churchill of Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power and Light (WA IPL).

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Religion News Briefs

Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111
Fax: +41-22 788 7244 www.woikoumene.org

Week of Prayer worship resources available

For the 2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Jan. 18 to 25, the World Council of Churches (WCC) helped prepare resources in seven languages—English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Arabic—and a child-friendly version, “Praying for Togetherness to a God of Togetherness.” It is for households, schools and churches to pray together. The prayers and reflections were prepared by the brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy. Published by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the WCC, materials are sent to WCC member churches and Roman Catholic episcopal conferences globally.

The 2025 resources recognize the 1,700th anniversary of the first Christian Ecumenical Council in Nicaea near Constantinople in 325 CE. The Week of Prayer offers a time to reflect on and celebrate the common faith of Christians, as expressed in the Nicene Creed, which bishops and other church leaders adopted to express the common faith of Christians.

The text for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025 is from John 11:17-27. The theme, “Do you believe this?” (v. 26), comes from the dialogue between Jesus and Martha when Jesus visited Mary and Martha’s home in Bethany after their brother Lazarus died.

Southern hemisphere churches often celebrate the week of Pentecost, a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

WCC says gender justice is essential journey

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Gender Justice Reference Group met Dec. 7 to 12 in Harare, Zimbabwe, gathering 10 church leaders, theologians and gender justice advocates. Participants came from Europe, Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean, North America, Asia and the Middle East to reflect on gender justice in the church’s life and mission. Their theme came from 1 Cor. 12:26–27 reminded that “if one part suffers, every part suffers with it.”

Co-convenor **Tandi Soko-De Jong** of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands said the group’s work is both new and deeply rooted in those who came before. A draft report said, “The scripture challenges us to recognize that for the church to flourish requires full participation and inclusion of women and men. When one gender is marginalized or excluded, the entire community is weakened, much like a body that cannot function properly when even one part is in pain.”

Co-convenor **Rastko Jovic** of the Serbian Orthodox Church urged people to have courage, saying, “There will be times when it seems like nothing is changing, but we must remain patient and work step by step, listening to one another as women and men. Progress comes when we journey together to build ecumenical cooperation, not when we rush ahead.”

Participants said gender justice is not an optional endeavor but essential to a shared journey to fulfill God’s will for the world. They said it is a theological imperative rooted in the Gospel’s call to build a just, inclusive community where women and men reflect the fullness of God’s image.

Women are the majority in churches, yet their contributions are often overlooked, said Kenneth Mtata, WCC program director of Public Witness and Diakonia. “We must prioritize and share research on theology, women’s health and leadership roles to empower women and amplify their voices. Solidarity across diverse contexts is crucial for women’s economic and educational empowerment. Gender justice demands collaboration, in the church and with the wider society.”

The group affirmed the 2025 strategic plans for Just Community of Women and Men and prepared recommendations for WCC governance program, theological education, advocacy and communications.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

EWLC features choice of seven workshops

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During lunch, participants will have time to visit display tables with more information from organizations on issues.

Participants will then attend workshops from a choice six offered in each of two sessions.

1) “Carla, The Rescuer,” a documentary on Carla Peperzak and on human rights challenges with discussion led by Kristine Hoover of Gonzaga’s Leadership Studies;

2) “Racial Equity in Education” with April Eberhardt, chair of the Education Committee of NAACP Spokane;

3) “Refugee and Immigration Issues” with Karen Stromgren of

Refugee and Immigrant Coalition of Spokane;

4) “Food Security Issues” with Eric Williams of Second Harvest;

5) “Rent Stabilization and Affordable Housing” with Joe Ader of Family Promise, Ami Manning of the Spokane Low-Income Housing Consortium, and Terri Anderson of the Tenants Union;

6) “Faithful Advocacy: How to Advocate during the State Legislative Session” with AC of Earth Ministry WA IPL, Brianna of FAN and Jean of WSCC.

In the second workshop session, two other workshops will replace 5 and 6.

• “Resident Action Project” with Duaa-Rahemaah Hunter of the Washington Low Income Housing Association.

• The “Washington Recycling and Packaging Act and other Environmental Issues” with AC of Earth Ministry/WA IPL.

Organizers and sponsors include The Fig Tree, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, FAN, Earth Ministry/WA IPL, American Civil Liberties Union Washington, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, NAACP Spokane and Thrive International.

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

Fig Tree 2025 Benefits are March 8, 12

The Fig Tree’s 2025 Benefit Events on March 8 and 12 will be focused the theme, “Sharing Wisdom: Connecting the Generations.”

The in-person Benefit Lunch will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, March 8, at Hemmingson Center at Gonzaga University, because it reached capacity in 2024 at Cataldo Hall.

“With it being International Women’s Day, it’s appropriate to recognize the role women have played in its founding, leadership

and production, in the spirit of the Just Community of Women and Men program of the World Council of Churches. It’s also fitting recognition of our mission to give voice to women along with men, whose voices predominate in most media,” said editor Mary Stamp.

She added the emphasis to uplift the voices of women and men elders in sharing values across the generations.

The Breakfast-Time Benefit will be held from 7:30 to 9 a.m.,

Wednesday, March 12, on Zoom.

The Fig Tree is recruiting hosts for 50 tables for the lunch in Hemmingson, which has more space than the 30-table limit at Cataldo. The suggested donations for those hosting a table of eight is \$175 or for hosting a corporate or organizational table is \$750. Those interested in hosting may email development@thefigtree.org or call 535-4112.

“Having celebrated our 40th in 2024, we will have just the benefits,” said Mary.

Directory editor seeks updates for 2025

Recruitment of community partners and advertisers is underway for the 2025-26 Resource Directory, which will go to the printer in June.

Directory editor Malcolm Haworth has the 2024-25 listings online at thefigtree.org and is beginning to do the research to update the listings.

“It’s an ongoing process. We

receive updates after publishing and through the year. We will be mailing a request for congregations and agencies to send their updated information in late January,” he said.

Most of the 25,000 copies printed in July 2024 have been distributed, but there are still copies to fill requests are coming in.

“We anticipate publishing the same number in 2025,” Malcolm commented, “but will still be reviewing that.”

Congregations and organizations can send their updated information any time by emailing resource directory@thefigtree.org.

For information, call 216-6090.

Whitworth has program to upskill workers

Whitworth LEARN is offering two workforce development programs in 2025.

Business-to-business (B2B) partnerships are becoming the norm with demand for companies to “upskill”—improve the skills of—their workforce as it grows.

Universities and colleges are increasingly relied upon by companies to collaborate on education pathways to assist in developing and retaining employees, said Trisha Coder, associate director of media relations. Whitworth LEARN is partner-

ing with Wagstaff and Innovia to offer the new workforce programs for participants in the wider community, beginning January 2025.

For information, call 777-1000 or visit learn.whitworth.edu.

MLK Day events are Jan. 19 and 20

Spokane’s annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Rally and March will begin at 10 a.m., Monday, Jan. 20, at the Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

A Resource Fair with information on nonprofit organizations will follow the march.

From 3 to 5 p.m., Sunday, Jan 19, the Spokane Ministers’ Al-

liance holds the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Service at Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 806 W. Indiana. The preacher is Bishop Gary Tyson, president of the General Baptist Conference Northwest from Seattle.

For information, call 868-0856 or visit mlkspokane.org or ywcasokane.org.

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KSPS PBS
Future Day
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PBS KIDS

Point-in-Time Count seeks volunteers

The 2025 Point-in-Time Count needs volunteers for several days in January. The annual event counts homeless people throughout the city, so the City of Spokane has an accurate number on the record for funding its services for homeless residents.

For information, visit spokanecity.wufoo.com/forms/volunteer-for-the-2025-pointintime-count.

Women+s Rally will be held Jan. 18

Freelance writer Pia Hallenberg, who recently announced a Spokane Women's Rally on Jan. 18, is teaming up with Women+s March on Spokane for a march and rally for women's and LGBTQIA+ rights from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 18, by the Big Red Wagon in Riverfront Park.

The Spokane march coincides with the People's March, organized by the national Women's March organization, on the same day in Washington, D.C., to demonstrate the "resilience of resistance" through the generations.

"We are not going to stand by quietly while a new administration takes us back to a dystopian Handmaid's Tale scenario," asserted Pia. "We stand for bodily autonomy for all—including trans and LGBTQIA+ people—and for equal access to health care, birth control and abortion."

Women+s March on Spokane seeks to harness the power of diverse women in the community for transformative social change to advance justice, equity, freedom and inclusion.

For information, visit facebook.com/@MarchOnSpokane.

Event prepares people for deportation response

"Defending Against Deportation Community Listening and Mobilization" will be held with Spanish interpretation from noon to 4 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 11, at the Filipino Community Hall, 211 W. 2nd St. in Wapato.

With the threat of mass deportation by the incoming administration, Between the Ridges: Alliance for the Common Good, Yakima Immigrant Response Network, Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, ELLA and Poder Latinx are co-sponsoring this event to learn community concerns and begin to mobilize community response. The goal is to reactivate networks and resources used in the past, identify needs and new strategies that will shape common work and give commitments for action in 2025.

For information, email yakimaresponsenetwork@gmail.com.

WAISN creates resource for deportation defense

Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN) has created a resource, "Four Deportation Defense Actions You Can Take Today," that highlights steps to take now to protect and advance immigrant rights in light of the new administration.

The flier—at waisn.org/deportation-defense-hotline-flyer—may be shared with congregations and agencies, along with "Know Your Rights with ICE" at waisn.org/kyrice in English, Spanish, French, Lingala, Portuguese and Somali.

WAISN will offer Rapid Response online training from noon to 2 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 25, on Zoom. The next WAISN "Know Your Rights with ICE" training is from 6 to 8 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 8, on Zoom.

For information, visit waisn.org.

Spokane Eco-Anxiety Cafes continue in 2025

In Spokane Eco-Anxiety Cafes, continue on first Saturdays through April, are for those wanting to share worries, resources and ideas related to climate change. The next Eco-Anxiety Café is on-person, from 10 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Jan. 4, at Manito United Methodist Church, 3320 S. Grand Blvd.

For information, email adygertgearheart@hotmail.com.

Area Homeless Connect ventures merge

The 13th annual Homeless Connect will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 23, at the Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

This year Spokane Homeless Connect and Spokane Valley Connect have merged, so it will be the largest resource fair in Eastern Washington, said Kari Stevens, chair of the Spokane Homeless Connect Organizing Committee.

"We united our energy, our events and our fundraising," she said. "We are a new nonprofit,

Spokane Connect. It will allow us to serve more people in our community."

For 13 years, community volunteers of the Spokane Homeless Connect have been removing barriers and providing a safe space for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness to access resources easily.

This fair brings together community providers in one space for one day to offer direct services for individuals experiencing homelessness. It is also a venue for service providers to

collaborate with their partners to help those in need find solutions.

Sponsorships by businesses, nonprofits and individuals allow this event to be held at a venue large enough for all the services that are offered.

Renée Norris, sponsorship chair, invites businesses and nonprofits to provide support for the event by calling 280-7447 or visiting spokaneconnect.org/sponsors.

For information, call 459-2509 or email kari.stevens@dshs.wa.gov.

Jewish Film Festival supports services

Spokane Area Jewish Family Services will present the 21st annual Spokane Jewish Film Festival (SJFF 2025) Saturdays and Sundays, Jan. 25 and 26, and Feb. 1 and 2 in person, and online Jan. 26 to Feb. 1.

The festival will screen several premieres, including the Washington premiere of Michael Winterbottom's historical romance, "Shoshana," the Pacific Northwest premieres of the short films, "Just the Tip" and "We Should Eat," and the West Coast premiere of the made-in-Spokane documentary, "Carla the Rescuer."

The documentary is about local Holocaust survivor, Carla Peperzak, her heroic efforts as a

member of the Dutch resistance during World War II, and the work she continues today as a Holocaust educator.

Carla will participate in a live Zoom Q&A on before the Saturday, Jan. 25, screening.

The in-person Saturday evening screenings will be preceded by a catered reception with appetizers from Saranac Public House and wine and beer from the Magic Lantern Theatre, where all in-person events will take place.

Since 2004, SJFF has showcased international films that share Jewish life and culture with the community. The festival is designed to enhance the cultural life of the local Jewish commu-

nity and the region as a whole.

"It's much more than a cultural event, because festival proceeds support the human services work of the Spokane Area Jewish Family Services. The agency uplifts seniors, low-income households and people with disabilities through advocacy, consultations, resource referrals, home visits, rent and utility assistance, transportation services, a caregiver support group, fall-prevention classes, a food bank, a medical lending closet and more," said SAJFS director Neal Schindler.

For information, call 413-8254, email director@sajfs.org or learn about the films at sjff2025.eventive.org.

Faith Action Network trains on advocacy

Faith Action Network of Washington is offering events on "Transforming Our Future through Advocacy" to sharpen advocacy skills and learn its policy priorities.

Advocacy 101 will be at 4 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 5, on Zoom.

Legislative Previews are offered at noon, Thursday, Jan. 9, and 4 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 12, both on Zoom.

FAN's All Liaison Meeting: Organizing Your Faith Community for Advocacy will be held at noon, Wednesday, Jan. 15, on Zoom.

For information, visit fanwa.org.

FAN also invites participants to the Eastern Washington Leg-

islative Conference from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 25, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 15 N. Raymond.

FAN collaborates on the planning team with The Fig Tree,

Spokane NAACP, Earth Ministry/WAIPL and Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington. This year's theme is "What does it mean to be prophetic?"

Information is in ad below.

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2025 Benefit Events

**Benefit Lunch
Saturday, March 8**

Buffet Opens at 11 a.m. • Program is 12 to 1 p.m.
Hemmingson Auditorium at Gonzaga University

**Breakfast-Time
Wednesday, March 12**

Gather at 7:30 a.m. to chat • Program: 8 to 9 a.m. - Zoom
There is no charge to attend. Guests are asked to donate

To RSVP email event@thefigtree.org
CALL 509-535-1813

Join us in Person or on Zoom

2025 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference

'What Does It Mean To Be Prophetic?'

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025

8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

Spokane Valley United Methodist - 115 N. Raymond

KEYNOTE PLENARY PANEL

Indigenous Wisdom - River Health - Ecosystem Insights, Salmon Runs, Beyond Assimilation - Everyone Benefits

YOUTH ADVOCACY PANEL

BRIEFING ON ISSUES

WORKSHOPS: Human rights ("Carla, The Rescuer"), food security, rent stabilization, resident action, racial equity in education, refugees & immigrants, recycling & environment, advocacy how-to

For information, contact

The Fig Tree - 509-535-1813 • Catholic Charities - 509-358-4273

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Group of 5+ - \$30 in person, \$20 online/per person scholarships on request

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secure.givelively.org/event/the-fig-tree/2025-legislative-conference

Event Planning Team and Sponsors:



Lay parish leader has encouraged parish to work for social justice

Continued from page 1
2005, except when COVID made it impossible to go.

“So many people have told me that coming to know the people and the reality in El Salvador was a life-changing experience for them,” Rita said.

In the past, a Gonzaga Prep donor provided funding for students to participate. During his visit, one student, Logan, became sick with parasites, as did Rita’s husband George. At the drugstore, he told Rita, “No matter that I got parasites, this has been the best experience of my life.”

When Rita met Logan again as a young adult, he told her that it was still the best experience of his life.

Other opportunities Rita has facilitated are through programs in the Just Faith ministries series that provide small group programs to advance peace, racial equity and a sustainable world.

“I facilitate a program first to see what it is like. By now we must have done 14 or 15 eight-week sessions,” Rita explained. “The most recent was called ‘This Land Is Not Our Own: Seeking Repair Alongside Indigenous Communities.’ I was particularly moved by the program and participants told me it was an eye-opener for them.”

Rita chose to retire at the end of January so she can lead a final delegation to El Salvador.

“I don’t know if the visits will continue once I retire, because I have been told they won’t hire for my position until summer,” said Rita, pointing out that the role is crucial because this is a time of so many needs.”

Rita’s more than 50-year history of working for the Catholic Church as a religious educator or doing parish ministry has paralleled the expanding number of ministries open to lay women and men since the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965.

In 1969, she graduated from Mount Marty University in Yankton, S.D., with a teaching credential and spent one year teaching American literature in a public high school there.

After her experience the first year, she did not like teaching or want to be a teacher.

“Whenever I reach a point in my life when I don’t know the next step, God always steps in,” Rita explained.

From reading the National

Catholic Reporter, she learned about summer school at Gonzaga University.

“I came here by bus and called a friend of a friend. The call went to the wrong person, but,” Rita said, “not the wrong person as far as God was concerned.”

The person on the line directed her to Father Severyn Westbrook, then the associate pastor at St. Patrick’s in Walla Walla. He said, “I have a job, and you would be just perfect for it.”

Rita came to Walla Walla in the early 1970s, probably as one of the first lay woman in the Catholic Church to take on the ministry of religious education coordinator for the city.

“**I think my only** real qualification for it was enthusiasm,” she said.

For about three years, Rita worked with the priests and people of Walla Walla, creating a religious education program for elementary school children of three parishes. As time went on, she also worked on a program for the high school students and for adult education.

“During that time,” she said, “I saw myself as one who has been gifted with faith. As a Christian, I had been asked to share this faith in a unique capacity by coordinating an overall religious education program in Walla Walla and as a coordinator, I hoped that this program deepened the faith commitment of those who participated.”

She also developed an appreciation for the volunteers needed to carry out a successful program and an understanding of the need for training them with the skills to succeed. This learning deepened over time and marked her current ministry at St. Aloysius.

Rita had planned to stay in Walla Walla a fourth year, but a priest friend said, “You will never find a man to marry in Walla Walla. I know a parish in Spokane who is looking for someone just like you.”

Rita arranged to meet Father Joe Showalter, then the pastor at St. Aloysius, at a liturgical music concert at Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral. He hired her for religious education. She came to Spokane, met and married George, and three years later was working at the Family Life Office for the Spokane Diocese.

She then began as a part-time parish minister at St. Anthony’s in Spokane, but she said, “God

was always at work in my life.”

A priest friend told her she was needed at St. Patrick’s parish in Spokane, so she interviewed with the parish council and, even though she told them she was looking to have a second child, they hired her.

Rita found the people at St. Patrick’s warm and friendly. The pastor and staff were committed to becoming an inclusive Vatican II parish. People were excited about the new liturgy and new openness in the church.

Eventually having two little children and a full-time parish job became too much, she left active ministry for a time but continued doing short workshops on religious education.

When she was ready for full-time work, a position opened at St. Patrick’s, and she worked more than 10 years in the community she loved, doing various kinds of parish administration, including liturgy and religious education.

When the situation changed, she resigned.

“**Once again God stepped** into my life and within a month, Don Weber, the parish administrator at St. Aloysius, called and hired me for a part-time job. I was to improve the chaotic Sunday evening Mass, attended mostly by students. They needed regular liturgical ministers.”

From there, her position gradually morphed to full-time with varied responsibilities. She also decided to get a master’s degree in pastoral ministry at Gonzaga in 2002 just before her oldest

daughter earned her own.

After she leaves St. Aloysius, Rita will travel with George. She is looking forward to again walking the Camino de Santiago, or the Way of St. James, a pilgrimage in northern Spain that leads to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It has been a Christian tradition for more than 1,000 years.

“I love the Camino. This is our sixth time doing it. I feel grounded when I am walking it. We meet so many people, some faith-filled, some searching and some who have just come,” Rita explained, adding, “We still keep contact with some we have met

on the way.”

Rita also wants to see Notre Dame, which burned on her birthday in 2019.

“I loved the old cathedral and felt blessed to be there,” she said.

Regardless, Rita’s journey continues, and God may step into her life in an unexpected way once again.

For information, email ritaambergwaldref@gmail.com.

Your donations to The Fig Tree support articles like these.

Let’s talk about our human race
Baha’i Faith table at
Monday January 20, 2025
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day Resource Fair
Spokane Convention Center
11 a.m. -1 p.m., Thursdays at SCC Lair
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Spokesman recognizes eight women for contributions to community

The Fig Tree editor Mary Stamp was among eight women The Spokesman-Review chose as Inland Northwest Women of the Year for 2024.

The Spokesman has partnered each year since 2019 with Bank of America to honor women in business, the arts, education, social services, politics, philanthropy or activism who make their communities better in Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

Along with Mary, those honored in 2024 were Brooke Wood with Lake City Playhouse in Coeur d'Alene; Susan McDonald Osborn, founder and executive director of Spokane Helpers Network; Marlene Murphy Sullivan, a retired veteran who volunteers at the veterans hospital regularly; Margo Hill-Ferguson, a member of the Spokane Tribe of Indians and professor at Eastern Washington University (EWU); Barbara Miller, founder of the Silver Valley Community Resource Center; April Eberhardt, a career counselor at Shadle Park High School and interim editor of The Black Lens, and Amy Knapton-Vega, executive director of Vanessa Behan, a center for vulnerable children and families.

The women were honored at a reception at the Spokesman-Review. At that gathering, editor Rob Curley shared that The Spokesman-Review values the opportunity to honor women and gave a few comments about the women's contributions.

Describing Mary, he told how she conceived of and launched The Fig Tree 40 years ago.

"This monthly paper shares stories about the good work being undertaken in the region by faith communities and by nonprofit organizations," he said. "The Fig Tree lifts up those who are continuously working for the common good by featuring their efforts. It unites communities of faith through an unbiased approach that is inclusive. It introduces the wider community to lesser-known faith communities by featuring their work and focus."

He described Mary as "a passionate and dedicated reporter whose reporting comes from a 'solutions based' perspective. This means that Mary, other staff and volunteers report on stories of people making a positive difference in the Inland Northwest."

Brooke rebuilt and reopened Lake City Playhouse, raising money and in-kind donations to do major repairs to reopen the playhouse in summer 2024. After it shut down in the pandemic, a flood destroyed much of the building and the costumes.

"Brooke didn't give up. She sought people who shared her passion to get the playhouse running again," said Rob, describing her effort as a "labor of love."

"Brooke's passion seeps into the lives of those she comes in



Women of the Year were from left, Margo Hill-Ferguson, Amy Knapton-Vega, Mary Stamp, Marlene Murphy Sullivan, Barbara Miller, Susan McDonald Osborn and April Eberhardt.

Photo by Frances Fakasiieiki

contact with," he said, noting that her passion and love of theatre has "fueled a community to support Lake City Playhouse."

Susan started the volunteer Spokane Helpers Network to help people in the community temporarily experiencing food and personal care insecurity, unable to access other resources because of their disabilities, lack of transportation, temporary job loss or hard times.

"Susan organizes her volunteers to deliver food items, hygiene packages, bus passes, financial assistance with rent or utilities and so much more. Where there is a need, she aims to fulfill it," Rob said.

Marlene volunteers several days a week at the Veterans Hospital, where social service assistant Rich Baker says, "she has a magic about her" and simply serves "the person in front of her." He told of her visiting a vet who needed surgery and whose wife was inconsolable—concerned about him and her own well-being while he was in the hospital. Marlene listened to the wife who didn't qualify for any services, found resources for her and stayed in touch to be sure she was okay.

Marlene retired from her massage therapy practice when she learned she had advanced breast cancer. It returned as Stage 4 a few years ago and she was given three months to live, Rob said.

"She applied the best practices she knew, doubled down on her commitment to living to serve her mother and others, and now there is no evidence of cancer in her body," he quoted from Bonnie Barnard who nominated her.

"Margo is a woman whose leadership, dedication and tireless commitment to the Inland Northwest and Native communities sets her apart as a truly inspiring figure," said Rob, describing her as a scholar, environmentalist, lawyer, judge and educator.

"She was influential in renaming Fort George Wright Dr. to

Whistalks Way. She serves as a professor of urban and regional planning and the director of EWU's American Indian Education Program," he said. "Her influence spans many fields, from policy and planning to advocacy and education, with her work focused on improving life for others, especially Native/Tribal communities."

"In just one weekend earlier this spring, Margo participated in a powwow at the Pauline Flett Middle School, attended and served at the opening ceremony of the Expo '74 50th Anniversary Celebration and returned to EWU to host an impactful Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) program," he said.

Since the mid-1980s, Barbara has been "an unrelenting advocate for her Silver Valley community in cleaning up mining pollution—notably the toxic metal and lead—and protecting the children who live there," said Rob.

Barbara grew up at the Cataldo

Mission, Idaho's oldest building, where her father was caretaker.

Since founding the Silver Valley Community Resource Center, Barbara has brought medical experts together to help with health issues and education in the Silver Valley.

"Through her tireless and dedicated investment with Children Run Better Unleaded, the community has rallied around the health of the children in the Bunker Hill Superfund site.

"It is holding polluters accountable and being steadfast in thinking of the next generation," Rob pointed out. "She has unapologetically advocated for clean air, soil and water to protect the welfare of hundreds of thousands of Silver Valley residents over her career."

At Shadle Park High School, April "often mentors and supports students of color in their ambitions and dreams," said Rob.

She also supports students as the chair of the NAACP Spo-

kane's Education Committee.

April is also interim editor of The Black Lens, "where she shares her amazing writing and editing skills with the world," said Rob, adding that when she arrived at a North Spokane Starbucks for an interview with Spokesman reporter Elena Perry, April put the interview on pause when a student called her saying she and some others were just called racist insults while waiting at a nearby bus stop. April left to make sure they were okay and get them to a community center to report the incident. A half-hour later, she returned to her interview.

"A Black educator in a city where they're a stark racial minority, April feels compelled to stand up for her kids when they need a champion," Rob said.

For more than 28 years, Amy has been "a champion of Spokane's most vulnerable children" through Vanessa Behan, which serves not only children, but also mothers, recognizing that keeping children safe begins at home.

Amy's journey at Vanessa Behan began as a graveyard-shift house parent. She rose through the ranks, eventually becoming program director and leading Vanessa Behan's program services for emergency respite care of children from stressed and struggling families, he said.

She has been executive director for 18 years.

"There is no job too small nor too large for Amy at Vanessa Behan. If there's a baby within her vicinity or a mom who has walked in seeking help in some way, she will stop and engage with them. If a pipe has burst and no one is around, Amy will attempt to fix it," Rob described.

For information and to read the full stories, visit spokesman.com/honors/women-of-the-year/2024.



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Cup of Cool Water outreach teaches youth of values in word and deed

Continued from page 1
 munity committed to following Jesus' teachings by caring for and serving marginalized youths and young adults without a space of their own to call home," says the website. "We do this by creating safe spaces where youths can build healthy relationships based on compassion, unconditional love and respect for each other."

CCW also provides services to meet daily needs and programs to help clients set and achieve goals.

Daniel understands what it is to be vulnerable. He grew up "an underdog" in a poor family in Harare, Zimbabwe, a poor country.

Attending a Church of Christ, he became involved with Youth for a Mission in Southern Africa, discipling and mentoring young people for missions. Wanting to do mission work, in 2002 he came to the U.S. to the University of the Nations in Kona, Hawaii, to do a four-month module on intercultural studies. In September 2024, he completed a master's degree in team-based communication.

After the first program in 2002, he went to Shanghai, China, as a missionary, teaching English and working with young Koreans, Japanese and Chinese as a personal tutor, helping them realize they were all created in God's image.

"From that common ground, we helped them overcome differences in the past and work toward reconciliation," he said.

In 2005, Daniel came to Coeur d'Alene as an intern preacher at Destiny Faith Church.

While in Coeur d'Alene he met his wife, Amber, at a school barbeque in 2007. She was also interested in doing mission work. They were married in 2008 and went to Zimbabwe and then to Atlanta, Ga., to be near her family. While there, Daniel received his green card.

In 2012, they went to Harare to start Pillar of Legacy, a program he still helps run. It provides community development, serves widows and orphans, empowers communities, and provides seeds



Daniel Lufiyele sits on stairs that remind guests of values of Cup of Cool Water programs on second floor.

and technology.

When he returned to the U.S., a friend connected him with the Hillside Discipleship Church in Lapeer, Mich., where he served as youth minister and director of family discipleship from 2017 to 2019.

After briefly returning to Africa, Daniel moved with his family to Coeur d'Alene where he saw an ad for the executive director of Cup of Cool Water. He was drawn by its mission to help youth.

CCW is less about youth who are struggling and more about youth who are succeeding, said Daniel, who posts pictures on the wall of CCW youth who are now thriving.

Soon after he came, COVID hit, reducing attendance. He prepared lunch and served it downstairs, but volunteers couldn't come as a group to help. One volunteer helped by making peanut butter sandwiches.

"We draw youth who come to have basic needs met, but we

offer a community that cares," he said.

Some are in shelters. Others have apartments, are from dysfunctional homes, live in group homes, are couch surfing, aged out of foster homes or live under bridges.

They may be drawn by their need for clothes and food, but they want more. Daniel likens CCW to the father welcoming the prodigal

son home. The son, who was given everything, lost it all and became chronically homeless. He needed more than to have his basic needs met. He needed to be welcomed back into the family and community.

When the prodigal son returned, he did not ask his father for food but to be part of the family and community so he could find a job and provide food for himself.

CCW is more than a caring community. It is part of a wider community, partnering with Feed Spokane and Women and Children's Free Restaurant, which provide food. It also partners with Volunteers of America to help with housing in a shelter or apartments, with SNAP to help with job skills, and with Frontier Behavioral Health to help with mental health and drug treatment.

"We connect youth to resources in the wider community," Daniel said.

While CCW provides food, clothing, sleeping bags and

backpacks, the seven staff—including his wife, Amber—and volunteers help youth build resumes, apply for jobs and practice interviewing skills.

Until recently, Cool Water Painters offered stipend-based summer training to help young adults develop job skills such as punctuality, teamwork and consistency.

CCW's plan has been to move its on-the-job program to a year-round program. When the painting program coordinator left, they began to focus on that.

Daniel decided to partner with organizations to provide training all year. These jobs include grounds maintenance, snow removal, leaf removal, gardening or lawn care.

Daniel, staff and volunteers engage youth in conversations, listen to their life experiences and ask them how they want to change the narrative of their lives, so they are ready for jobs.

For information, visit cupof-coolwater.org.

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Daniel likens CCW to the father welcoming the prodigal

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Photo (left to right): Luther Allison by John Sturino, Quianna Lynell, Milton Suggs by Jacob Blickenstaff

Book, film assure Holocaust survivor's presentations can continue

At 101, Holocaust educator Carla Olman Peperzak continues to believe that “respect is the most important word in our vocabulary” and to believe as Anne Frank did in the goodness of humanity.

When Carla has given presentations for middle schools, high schools, faith groups and community organizations, she has taught people what her parents taught her and what she taught her four children—to be good people, good neighbors and open-minded people who accept and respect people with different viewpoints and faiths.

Carla was involved in the Dutch resistance as an 18-year-old when she helped 40 family members and friends hide from Nazis during World War II in Amsterdam.

Even though Carla has given many talks to classes and other groups since 2011, it is still difficult each time for her to share her experiences because she thinks of aunts, uncles, friends and all the others who were killed.

By the end of the war, she had lost three-quarters of her extended family.

“I give presentations in their memory,” said Carla. “It’s important for people, especially youth—but also adults—to know what happened in the Holocaust and to know that the Holocaust was real. So I put my feelings aside.

“Giving presentations has become more routine over the years, but it is never really routine, just easier to do,” she said.

While she can now read books about the Holocaust, she still cannot watch a stage play such as “The Diary of Anne Frank,” who was a neighbor.

Carla is attuned to who is in an audience, because it makes a difference in what she says.

“With some high school students, I know they are lost before I begin, but I know some are very interested. I want them to know that the Holocaust really happened,” she said, repeating that she encourages them to do good things and respect people.

“Respect” is the key message she wants to convey.

Even though Carla still feels



Carla Olman Peperzak inspired by parents' helping others.

uncomfortable talking about the Holocaust, she wants to have the message continue.

Her first book, *Keys to My Life*, written over 12 years and published five years ago, tells her whole life story.

Recently, she published a 134-page book with 107 photos, *My Journey*, through an educational book publisher Gonzaga University uses. That book is the content of her presentations. The book will be available for purchase on amazon.com and at Barnes and Noble.

In addition, a new 90-minute documentary film, “Carla, The Rescuer,” focuses on her experiences and the Holocaust.

The Pacific Northwest premiere of the documentary will be on the opening night of the Spokane Area Jewish Family Services’ Jewish Film Festival at 7 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 25, at The Magic Lantern, 25 W. Main.

In that documentary produced by Gonzaga University’s Kristine Hoover and Clement Lye, Carla, her family, Rabbi Tamar Malino and Holocaust educators present and discuss her story.

As part of the film, her daughters, Marian Cummings, Yvonne Peperzak-Blake and Joan Conner, her son, Marc Peperzak, her granddaughter Megan Knowles and her great-granddaughter Aubrey Knowles share what she has taught them about the Holocaust and life.

Carla realizes that, even though her husband, Paul, told their children not to ask her about the Holocaust, they learned about it from her over the

in recent years in the U.S.

“Hate is so ruthless, so awful. We need to get rid of hate. A person does not need to love everyone, but we need to respect people. Genocide should not happen again,” she repeated.

“How do we learn respect? How do we teach respect?” Carla asked, convinced that even three-year-olds can learn respect in their homes. “Children can learn not to be selfish, learn they are not more important than those around them and learn that everyone is important.”

Carla knows that the political parties have long disagreed with each other, but today it seems that they are more divided, and some do not like each other.

She is concerned that as hate in the U.S. has grown more intense than it was 20 years ago, there are more threats.

While Carla was scared of the Dutch Nazis after the German Nazis invaded the Netherlands in World War II, she was not afraid of them before the invasion.

“In Amsterdam before that, Jews—who were 15 to 20 percent of the population—experienced little discrimination. The Netherlands was an open society. Schools closed during the Jewish high holy days,” she said.

When asked where her courage to be part of the resistance came from, Carla said her parents always helped other people, so helping people was simply an expected part of her life.

After her father arranged that she would not have to wear a star or have J in her ID papers because her mother was not born Jewish, Carla helped people hide as her way of “helping other people” and fighting the Germans.

“I could help, so I did. It’s as simple as that,” she explained.

“If we respect other people, we think about what makes them

tick. We put ourselves in their place and treat them as we want to be treated,” she explained.

Carla is honored and grateful to have a school named after her, Carla Olman Peperzak Middle School in Spokane. The school promotes five principles she values—Holocaust education, civic engagement, inclusive community, collaboration and a “house system” to build community beyond instruction. The school also has a library section with Holocaust resources.

The school’s design also supports a sense of belonging and equity in learning. The school motto is “All day. Every day. Becoming my best self.”

Along with schools setting such an atmosphere for learning and with parents modeling behavior and respect, Carla believes that leaders and media also should model respect.

She knows there is an impact from news media that report primarily on the negative, on conflicts and on what’s wrong, rather than on positive stories about people.

Aware that it’s really just a handful of people doing bad things and they tend to get the attention, Carla shares Anne Frank’s optimistic outlook that most people are good.

To reinforce that, she tells students to be good and to be the best they can be. Carla wants that message of hope to continue as part of telling about the Holocaust so the world can be more tolerant and peaceful.

In honor of her impact as an educator, Carla has received two honorary doctoral degrees, one from Gonzaga University in 2023 and one from Washington State University in 2024, and numerous other human rights awards.

For information, visit carlatherecruer.org.

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Role of all the staff is to engage with and bond with the residents

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Michael Schleigh may be the new chief operating officer for Riverview Retirement Community, but he also knows from working there eight years that his role is about more than facilities, construction and management.

It includes engaging and bonding with residents.

That's the role of all staff.

"We expect staff to slow down and interact with residents every day—all staff in all departments—dining, clinical and maintenance. Everybody knows our residents by name and knows that giving them time is the most rewarding part about working here," said Mike.

Most people work there because they care about seniors.

"It's about having positive interactions with people who are aging and creating a home and caring for them," Mike said. "Some families may not be able to visit often, so we make sure residents know they have a family here."

Mike sees connection between his faith and the practical experiences of working in this close-knit retirement community.

Riverview started in its current location in 1959. Before that in another location, it was a Lutheran group home for women and children. Recognizing the need for elderly housing, along with a donation of the land, it transitioned to Riverview Lutheran of Spokane.

The idea was that many Lutheran churches would be involved in Riverview. They are among board members today, but Mike said the board now includes people of many faiths.

Christianity plays a role in that the leadership team starts every day in prayer.

"Sometimes we also start with a positive affirmation, but for the most part from the first day I was here, we started in prayer," said Mike. "That helps us as leaders. It grounds us and reminds us we are here to serve our residents and staff."

"Servitude, putting other people before ourselves and treating people like we would want to be treated, ultimately is rooted in faith," he said.

Mike's role grew from director of plant operations to chief operating officer in March 2024. The main change is having a voice and more interaction with the board.

"I'm into strategic planning and interested in hearing and adding to the board's vision from my experience having boots on the ground and a real grasp of



Mike Schleigh heads operations at Riverview Retirement.

Riverview," he said.

As director of plant operations, he was in charge of capital improvements, construction, operations, maintenance, security, emergency services, IT and transportation. The chief operating officer role absorbed several more departments, freeing CEO Danie Monaghan to focus on Riverview's mission, resident care, industry changes and growth.

"Strategic planning is ongoing. A board committee is constantly tweaking it as the industry changes and as Riverview adapts," Mike said.

"We are a life-plan community, which means residents join our family and live on our campus at any level once they reach the age of 55," he said.

Typically, residents join Riverview when they are independent, recently retired, looking for more social opportunities and not wanting to spend time doing things like mowing a lawn or keeping up a home.

As the years progress, their care needs may change, and they may move to another layer of care within Riverview but still on the same campus in the same community with the same friends and neighbors.

For example, if one spouse is taking care of the other and finds the care unmanageable, the spouse needing more care can live in the assisted living facility and the spouse who is

more independent can still be with their loved one, but without the burden of care.

Riverview also has a stand-alone dementia and Alzheimer's building capable of serving 32 residents.

Its programming allows for interaction between staff and residents.

Riverview offers in-home care to residents on campus, as well as in the larger Spokane community. It is also hiring staff to provide a higher level of care to clients in their homes on campus. In six months, they plan to expand to include home health, a higher level of care that allows nursing services in the home, said Mike.

Before coming to Riverview, Mike worked in a similar role for eight years at another health care facility, running capital improvement, operations, contracted services and security departments for 12 building sites from Spokane to Pullman and around the state. Before that, he served at another assisted living facility.

After high school, Mike did crab fishing in Alaska, owned a construction business and did

commercial maintenance. He's a certified building operator with most of his education in that field.

With construction seasonal in some places, he did commercial maintenance at Itron for six years. Then he was a real estate appraiser in Central Oregon for several years. When he returned to Spokane, he started to work at a retirement community.

"I've always had a passion to serve. My mother was an in-home caregiver for many years. I grew up in a fairly poor household. We had to support each other," said Mike.

Faith played a role in his formation. As a child, he attended a Baptist church on his block. When he and his wife had young children, they started attending a Presbyterian church.

Mike discussed interacting with residents.

"Riverview has several centenarians. Some are quite mobile. I hope I can walk as well when I'm 60," he said.

One man he interacts with daily in the Alzheimer's facility is a sports enthusiast.

"I make it a point every time I walk through that facility to talk with him about sports. His eyes light up, and he's able to have a conversation. For someone suffering with Alzheimer's, that's rewarding for me," Mike said.

Through the years, Riverview's mission has been to provide care to both the senior population and the staff.

COVID was the biggest crisis they faced in decades. Now post-COVID, the community has recovered from being in hyper-protection mode to keep residents safe, following stringent state compliance rules, which were hard on its residents.

Neighbors of an independent resident in one of the village

homes became concerned when she seemed to be isolating herself and not often leaving her home. Her family did not live close by.

"We reached out to engage with her. She was initially against moving into assisted living, but in time it was clear that was where she needed to be. Since she moved to assisted living, she has been thriving, realizing she could attend activities that she couldn't before because she was not driving.

"It can be too far for some residents to walk to an event in the activities building. No longer concerned with cooking meals, she has improved cognitively. She loves attending church services, art clubs, movies and other social activities. She has become a social butterfly," Mike said.

Some operations staff, like maintenance or groundskeeping, see independent residents more than clinical staff, who are focused on assisted living and memory care.

Daily activities on campus vary. Residents are also transported by shuttle to the symphony, local restaurants or the grocery store. Artists and musicians visit and there are movies in a theater built on campus four years ago. Riverview also hosts birthday parties, holiday events, barbecues, a car show, craft fairs and other events.

A remodel of the lobby created a communal space for residents and staff to spend time together and converse.

"Riverview's mission is to care about our residents at all levels, to engage them spiritually, physically and mentally," Mike affirmed. "Engagement gives staff opportunities to connect and form bonds with residents."

For information, call 483-6483 or visit riverviewretirement.org.



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Member helps inform church of context of its founding story

For several years, Mary Rupert has invited members of her church, Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) in Spokane, to join her in reflecting on their own history and legacy of colonization.

Five joined a “Wrestling with the Truth of Colonization” class with the Spokane Alliance’s Truth and Transformation Team last fall and winter.

More than three years ago, Mary was curious about the church’s founding story.

A 20-year member, she did research and wrote a report examining the context of the story that the church—Spokane’s oldest—was founded by missionaries, Henry and Abigail Cowley, and Spokane Chief Enoch Siliquowya and his wife, Anna.

“We were proud that the two couples were friends, that Henry learned their language and helped them,” said Mary, who began to wonder what happened to Chief Enoch and Anna, and why the church today has no Indigenous members.

She wanted to know more. Why did the Indigenous Spokane people invite the Rev. Cowley to come, given the terrible things that had happened, such as Col. George Wright hanging Indians and slaughtering their horses?

Mary, who grew up in the Anglican Church in Ottawa, Canada, had an interest in Indigenous people. While studying dance at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, she researched dance at the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario.

After earning a certificate in information processing, she moved to Spokane in 1986 to be a software engineer for ISC Systems Corporation at Liberty Lake.

While studying in the 1990s for a master’s degree in conflict resolution at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., she interviewed a mediator and wrote several papers on a conflict in Oka, Quebec, that escalated into violence when developers wanted to make a golf course on top of an Indigenous burial site.

“A lifelong pacifist, I seek to move the world to be peaceable,” said Mary, who returned to Spokane where she taught conflict resolution in Catholic schools and Gonzaga University, and taught two semesters at the Spokane Tribal College in Wellpinit.

“Our church seeks more intentionally to create relationships with members of the Spokane Tribe. Last year, we attended Spokane Alliance events with tribal historian Warren Seyler,” she said.

Mary included insights from him and other research in her paper on the church’s history.

Warren knew that Cowley had assisted Chief Three Mountain and his band related to a settlement at Deep Creek. That band was one of five bands deciding



Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ pastor, Bob Feeny, and member, Mary Rupert, stand by a 1968 painting depicting the church’s founding by a missionary and members of one of the Spokane bands of Indians.

whether to move to the reservation or homestead. They were later pushed off by settlers and moved to the Coeur d’Alene or Spokane reservations.

Mary’s report summarized relevant information about the historical context.

- Geological records and mythology confirm the Spokane Tribe were river people who lived in the area 10,000 to 16,000 years, sustained on salmon, roots and berries.

- European influence came before Europeans arrived. Horses from conquistadors in Mexico came in 1730 and allowed area tribes to hunt buffalo. Before white people came, smallpox and other epidemics spread from the plains Indians and reduced the Spokane numbers from 3,000 to 500.

- Fur traders encouraged tribes to hunt for beaver pelts to trade for beads, blankets, guns, pots and pans. As the tribes turned from hunting, gathering and fishing for food, they became dependent on the traders.

- When Christianity came, Hudson’s Bay Company sent Spokane Garry to Winnipeg for religious education. He returned to preach.

- Here as elsewhere the military massacred Indigenous people and took their land. Then Lincoln’s 1852 Homestead Act gave land to settlers.

When Cowley arrived in 1874, there were only two white families in Spokane. By 1890, there were 30,000, as trains brought settlers.

Cowley’s biography states that he received letters from the Spokane Tribe, inviting him to start a school. Warren told Mary that the Spokane and Coeur d’Alene tribes had prophecies. The Coeur d’Alene prophecy said white men in black robes would come carrying crossed sticks. The Spokane prophecy said white men would come with talking leaves—the Bible. Both tribes were told to listen and learn from the people who would come. When they met missionar-

ies, they welcomed them.

“While missionaries came to serve Indigenous people, churches they started grew with white settlers as Indians went to reservations,” she said.

In newspaper archives and history books, Mary found little about Chief Enoch or Anna beyond mention on a plaque in Riverfront Park. One newspaper story said Chief Enoch refused to go to the reservation and was living near town making a living as he could. By 1896, he went to the Spokane reservation with his band of 188 and received a government annuity of \$100.

Cowley started a newspaper and began selling real estate, which were “white colonial jobs,” she said. There was also a court case about land Cowley said the church bought from Enoch, but the railroad claimed to own.

“Given that land ownership was not an Indigenous concept, I doubt Cowley paid Enoch,” she commented.

Part of Mary’s motivation for learning history and sharing it with others comes from the Irish

poet Pádraig Ó Tuama who said, “The capacity for a community to tell the truth about their past is a test for how their future will be enacted.”

“I felt we needed to understand a fuller history of the story and keep our hearts open to go forward,” she said.

For her, hearing the broader story and the context calls for humility.

“Often white people want to fix things but may fix things in ways that are unjust. We need to fix our own systems,” she said.

Working with the Spokane Alliance Truth and Reconciliation Team, Mary also learned more about the complex history of relationships with Indigenous neighbors.

“I appreciate the amazing graciousness of the Indigenous people I have met,” she said.

When former tribal chair Carol Evans visited for Westminster’s 140th anniversary, she offered a blessing to the church and said, “We need to work together.”

Mary found a similar openness with Warren, the Salish School and American Indian Community Center.

“I sense an openness, which surprises me given the history,” she said.

Warren affirmed that the Spokane Tribe of Indians were and are a giving people. They welcomed people to fish on the banks of the Spokane River.

In the fall and winter of 2023, the Spokane Alliance held a “Wrestling with the Truth of Colonization” class series on Zoom. At a spring 2024 town hall with state elected officials, the alliance “used its people power,” Mary said, to support funding a new American Indian Community Center building.

Last spring, some church members met to discuss the name of

the church’s Mayflower Room.

Mary wondered if some Indigenous people might be offended by the name, but realized others might say, “Don’t focus on the name of a room, fix the justice system, the school system, the foster care system, the Missing Murdered Indigenous Women system and other systems that are affecting us.”


As another way to follow up, Mary and the Rev. Bob Feeny, Westminster’s pastor, will co-lead an eight-week study series called “The Land Is Not Our Own: Seeking Repair Alongside Indigenous Communities” for their church’s Tuesday Night Talks from Jan. 7 to March 7.

The program by JustFaith Ministries in collaboration with the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery is designed “to equip people to stand beside Native communities to work for justice and repair,” said Mary, anticipating that the process will lay a foundation for trust and relationships so participants can acknowledge injustice and honor the interconnection of Creation.

The series presents how the Doctrine of Discovery generated power and wealth for some settlers and permeated U.S. laws and church policies. Sessions also invite hope, healing and learning how to partner with Native leaders for justice.

“People say we aren’t responsible for what happened back then. That’s true, but we need to take responsibility for what is happening now, and we can see, own and understand what happened,” Mary pointed out. “Genocide has happened around the world, and we need to understand our own place in it, so we don’t continue to do that forever.”

For information, call 624-1366 or visit spokanealliance.org.



4-Day Ignatian Retreat

Fr. Michael Maher, SJ


Start: January 23, 4:30pm
End: January 26, 1 pm

While recuperating from an injury he received in battle, St. Ignatius of Loyola formulated a set of meditations that focused on a method of prayer to move closer to God. Fr. Michael Maher will take retreatants through some of the steps recognized for centuries to remove those things that draw us away from our relationship with God and provide insight into how we can move towards God. This silent retreat will allow retreatants to develop those skills that were designed by St. Ignatius and provide a means to advance their spiritual lives in a peaceful environment away from the noise of everyday life.

Some scholarships in memory of Fr. Nigro, SJ are available from the Ministry Institute. Please call office for more info.


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Gonzaga hosts speaker on Howard Thurman

Gonzaga's Institute for Climate, Water, and the Environment hosts a lecture on "Lessons from Howard Thurman's Life" with Darian Spearman, assistant professor of philosophy, at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 29, at Hemmingson Auditorium.

Darian, who also has done research in the areas of African philosophy, eco-philosophy, philosophy of myth and philosophy of religion, has been published in Philosophy and Global Affairs and the American Philosophical Association's Black Issues in Philosophy Blog.

He will share about the work of Thurman, who is most known for his spiritual and intellectual significance to the Civil Rights

Movement and his influence on Martin Luther King Jr. Only recently has his work in the area of ecological issues begun to be explored.

Darian explores how Thurman articulated his view that life is a process, which best actualizes itself through communion as written in *The Search for Common Ground*, a book where Thurman sought to ground the Civil Rights Movement in a vision of life's unity responding to the challenge of Black nationalism beginning in the late 1960s.

He will discuss the core themes of community, potential and unity as Thurman sees them in the biological processes of individual organisms and interspe-

cies communion and will apply these insights to dimensions of the contemporary climate crises such as eco-anxiety.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/climate-institute/events#January29.

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Whooping Cough (Pertussis) Fact Sheet

Monthly cultural calendar preparer passes on role to The Fig Tree

Community cultural calendar curator Yvonne Montoya Zamora has retired after she compiled the calendar for December 2024. Her calendars list monthly cultural events, highlighting hidden diversity in the Inland Northwest.

In 16 years of sending the calendar to more than 100 groups and individuals, she has seen the area's population grow more diverse.

The calendar helps people not only learn about cultural traditions, events and foods but also attend events to meet people and build community.

Yvonne grew up in a close-knit Hispanic Catholic community in Albuquerque, N. Mex., where faith, community and family were important.

"That led me to be curious about the world," she said.

The idea of the cultural calendar arose in 2007, when she served on the Chamber of Commerce Workforce Diversity Committee and the Task Force on Race Relations. Those groups thought it would be good to have a calendar with events from diverse communities.

Yvonne, who was diversity initiatives coordinator, asked her supervisor at Washington State University (WSU) Spokane if she could do a calendar. She agreed.

In March 2008, Yvonne started the calendar, sending it to WSU employees, who forwarded it to friends.

After retiring from WSU in 2017, Yvonne continued the calendar, except during COVID when events were cancelled.

"I continued, because I liked doing it, but it grew longer, was time consuming, and I sent it later and later because of my other activities," she said.

When she told people in September that December would be the last one, they wanted it to continue.

Yvonne decided to pass on responsibility for the Community Cultural Calendar to The Fig Tree, which could integrate it with their in-print and online calendar with faith and nonprofit events.

"Since 2020, I've partnered with Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate, who does their calendar," said Yvonne.

"I'm grateful The Fig Tree will continue it, because their calendar is valued. So, people will still be able to know about cultural events," she commented.

The Fig Tree is discussing expanding its online calendar to add more descriptions and links.

When Yvonne started, she pri-



Yvonne Montoya Zamora did cultural calendar for 16 years.

oritized people of color, women and children and LGBTQIA+ groups. The calendar has also included national and international cultural and religious holidays and cultural group lists.

She found events through her higher education jobs and volunteering with such organizations as the YWCA, Hispanic Business and Professional Association (HBPA), AHANA (African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American) - Multi-Ethnic Business Association (MEBA), the Salish School of Spokane, Unity in the Community, NAACP, Camp Fire, Inland Northwest's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, the local and state organizations of the Society for Human Resource Management, the Task Force on Race Relations and the Expo 74 50th Anniversary Arts and Culture Pillar Committee.

"Using the Fig Tree Resource Directory also ensured I had a complete list of diverse groups," Yvonne added. "I added Hispanic churches with Spanish masses and books so people could learn about cultures during heritage months."

Yvonne has provided details on events, including speakers, cost and web links for more information.

"Cultural groups are trying to keep traditions alive for their community's and their children's futures. They also want to showcase their traditions for the public," she said.

Yvonne has not only gathered the information but also attended events she has included. She highlighted several of them.

- The in-person and online programs offered by Humanities

Washington;

- A state-wide Hmong Celebration;

- Twenty plus years of Unity in the Community always on the third Saturday of August;

- The HBPA graduation recognition which also grants Hispanic scholarships to high school and college graduates;

- Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) honoring relatives who have passed away;

- The Native American Graduation Ceremony, which invited her daughter to speak when she earned her doctoral degree and when her eldest grandson was a high school graduate, and

- The Salmon Tales fundraiser that supports the Salish School,



is proud to support the local journalism of The Fig Tree

where three of her grandchildren currently attend and learn by immersion.

Yvonne noted that some organizations that performed in the Arts and Culture pillar at last spring's 50th anniversary of the Expo '74 had also performed at Expo '74.

"That speaks to their longevity and to Expo '74 helping us be more open to different cultures," she said.

While attending a three-week Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in 2006, Yvonne learned that to be effective in intercultural communication she needed to understand her own family cultural heritage.

So, she learned more about her heritage. A recent DNA test showed she is Native American (Mescalero Apache and Pueblo), Portuguese and Spanish.

Her ancestors and relatives lived in New Mexico in the late 1600s and early 1700s when the territory was called New Spain.

She went to schools and a church where the majority who attended were Hispanic.

"Vatican II also gave me a different perspective of my world," Yvonne said. "After that, I realized the many churches and faiths needed to reconcile. We can't isolate ourselves. It's important to recognize the dignity of all people."

In 1976, she earned a bachelor's degree in criminology at the University of Albuquerque, a Catholic University, where she met her husband, John Murphy, who is Irish-German. There, she took a world religions class, learning about Judaism, Buddhism and Islam.

Yvonne and John moved to Pullman, where he completed a master's degree in criminal justice, and they worked for the WSU police department. Later they moved to Cheney, where he worked with the EWU police department, and they were members of St. Rose of Lima parish.

At Eastern Washington University, she earned a bachelor's degree in business administration while working in human resources at EWU.

Yvonne earned a master's in public administration at EWU. She worked in human resources at EWU, Community Colleges of Spokane and WSU Spokane.

"I am retiring from all boards and commissions, so I have time to work on genealogy, read, attend my grandchildren's activities, but I will continue to attend community activities and cultural events."

For information and to post cultural events for February, email development@thefigtree.org. The online calendar will be at thefigtree.org/calendar.html.



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Holy Cross Cemetery places urns with unclaimed remains in a crypt

Holy Cross Funeral and Cemetery Services committed 41 urns with remains of unclaimed deceased persons to the Crypt of the Holy Angels one day this fall.

Staff from the Spokane County Medical Examiner's office and Holy Cross Cemetery, and seminarians of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane's Bishop White Seminary attended. The seminarians assisted with the corporal work of mercy to bury the dead with seminary rector Fr. Daniel Barnett officiating.

Holy Cross and the Medical Examiner's Office partner to provide a dignified Christian burial for people whose remains are unclaimed. Once a year, the Medical Examiner's Office brings 30 to 60 urns of unclaimed remains to Holy Cross.

In the committal, the name of the decedent is announced as each urn is placed in the crypt and included in prayers for the dead.

Holy Cross also offers this service to families who cannot afford to bury loved ones.

"We place a single urn or a collection of urns a family has," said Lisa Barber of Holy Cross.

Names of unclaimed remains in the Crypt of the Holy Angels are published in the Holy Cross system.

"Occasionally, family members contact us, not knowing their loved one had passed," she said. "When they learn of their loved one's final resting place, most are comforted to know they received a dignified burial and leave the urn in the crypt."

Holy Cross staff facilitates arrangements for those who wish to rebury their loved one elsewhere or have their name added, for a fee, to the cenotaph at the crypt.

More than 500 urns have been placed in the crypt over the years. Only a few have been reclaimed and moved, and a few

added their loved one's name.

Cremated remains are placed at no charge in the crypt, either at Holy Cross Cemetery in north Spokane or at St. Joseph Cemetery in Spokane Valley. Donations support this service.

For information, call 467-5496 or email info@holycrossofspokane.org.

New curator at the MAC will uplift Native art

Rachel Allen, who is Nimiipuu (Nez Perce), is the new curator of modern and contemporary art at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, a role funded by a grant from M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust of Vancouver, Wash.

She co-curated its current exhibition, "Joe Feddersen: Earth, Water, Sky," a retrospective of the 40-year career of the Okanagan Arrow Lakes artist in the Colville Confederated Tribes.

As a curator and doctoral

candidate at the University of Delaware, Rachel aims to uplift contemporary Native art and culture—particularly from the Columbia Plateau.

Previously, she was assistant curator at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass., and worked at the Portland, Maine, Museum of Art, the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University and the Missoula, Mont., Art Museum.

Rachel has a bachelor of fine

arts degree in printmaking from the Cleveland Institute of Art, and master's degrees from Michigan State University in studio art and arts and in cultural management and museum studies.

The Murdock Trust provides three years of salary for her position, giving the museum time to raise an endowment to permanently fund it.

For information, call 801-450-32344 or email marit.fischer@northwestmuseum.org.

Family of seven moves into their new Habitat home

On Dec. 11, Habitat for Humanity-Spokane welcomed a family of seven into their newly built, safe, energy-efficient, affordable home in the Highland Village neighborhood of Airway Heights. It is one of 420 homes Habitat-Spokane has built since 1987—31 in 2024.

Majok and Nyibol have been

in the homeownership program for a few years, completing their partnership requirements of helping build their house and taking financial classes, saving for closing costs and opening a future of possibilities.

Through the Habitat Homeownership Program, homes are built and sold at cost, with a

monthly mortgage payment no more than 30 percent of the buyer's income, said Michelle Girardot, CEO of Habitat-Spokane.

Their home is one of 16 single-family homes and 51 apartments units planned in the Highland Village Development.

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

Pullman church seeks new thrift shop operator

After four years, Cooper's Legacy's thrift shop, housed in the basement of Community Congregational United Church of Christ in Pullman, closed in December. It raised funds for Cooper's Legacy, a nonprofit started in 2013 to support animals needing life-saving medical treatments.

When COVID hit, the church was selling its thrift shop merchandise, so the nonprofit took over the inventory and fixtures, and expanded the selling area and hours of operation.

Coopers Legacy helped more than 20 families, by raising about \$60,000 to offset medical treatments for pets.

Community Congregational UCC, which previously ran a thrift shop in the space, is seeking someone else to take it over.

For information, email office@ccucc.org.

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DESCRIPTION

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February 23
March 30
April 27
May 18 (a week early because of Memorial Day)



Immaculate Heart Retreat Center
A Peaceful Place to Pray and Ponder

Partners Inland NW receives 40,000 pounds of food from Salt Lake

Partners Inland Northwest is seeing a higher demand for food in the Spokane Valley.

“It takes many people and organizations working together to help those in need in our region,” said Cal Coblentz, CEO of Partners INW.

Local leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints responded to that need by sending about 40,000 pounds of shelf-stable food, arriving on Dec. 17 in a 53-foot semi-truck from Welfare Square in Salt Lake City.

“The gift is vital when food insecurity and hunger are hitting all-time highs in the region. On

average, Partners INW serves more than 220 households a day and has experienced a 400 percent increase in demand since 2019,” said Cal.

“We are grateful to the church for partnering with us to support our community’s most vulnerable who struggle to meet their basic needs,” he said.

Partners INW assists more than 11,000 families every month with food.

“This donation came at a critical time for us as we never want to turn anyone away for a lack of food. Inflation is taking a toll not only on our most poor and

vulnerable neighbors but also on working families. Both groups turn to Partners,” said Justin Carlile, director of operations, “We are fortunate to benefit from the church’s Humanitarian Fund and their efforts worldwide to help feed the hungry. We are grateful to call them our allies in this work.”

This is the fourth truckload of food to arrive at Partners through the Welfare Square program.

In addition, church members in the region and world donate to the food program. The church has more than 52,000 members in the Inland Northwest.

Church members facing food

insecurity are served by their local ecclesiastical leaders and sent to the church-run Bishop’s Storehouse in Spokane Valley for food supplies. They do not have to draw on local food banks, said Brent Byers, president of the

stake, a group of congregations in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

For information, visit partnersinw.org or newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org or call 270-4950.

State lands are potential sites for affordable housing

Hilary Franz, Washington state commissioner of public lands, recently visited the site of a future Habitat for Humanity development in Pasco and discussed solutions to the affordable housing crisis with Tri-Cities leaders.

Habitat will partner with the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR), entering a land use agreement to build 100 affordable housing units on 16 acres of state land and using revenue from it to fund K-12

education and libraries.

“This partnership is an example of how state lands can be used to meet housing needs,” said Hilary. “We need to use every tool to ensure everyone in Washington has a roof over their heads. State lands are one solution to this crisis.”

The DNR has more than 3,000 acres of state land classed as “residential transition” land—empty lots and open lands—in and around cities—that do not generate revenue for DNR’s trust

beneficiaries because they are surrounded by developed land.

In the 2024 legislative session, she worked on legislation to give incentives for developers to build housing for low- to moderate-income homeowners on public lands.

“Washington is the nation’s fifth most unaffordable state for housing. Addressing the crisis requires bold solutions, like the Habitat project,” said Hilary.

For information, call 360-584-3916 or email ryan.rodruick@

Lands Council raises funds for urban forest

In October, vandalism destroyed 18 red oak trees, worth \$9,000, planted as part of The Lands Council’s Cool Canopy program along the Appleway Trail in Spokane Valley.

They were part of the council’s urban forestry program, a five-year effort to reforest the county with 2,000 trees.

“In addition to greenery, the trees provide wildlife habitat, cleaner air and summer cooling, tangible ways to counter climate change,” said Amanda Parrish, executive director.

“The program is nurtured by children, teachers and community members, as we bring schools, children and volunteers

into our mission to plant trees, reconnect with nature and learn about nature,” she said.

The council seeks support, not only to replace the lost trees, but also to continue building a greener, healthier future for Spokane.

For information, visit thelandscouncil.org.

Growing Neighbors recruits volunteers for projects

Growing Neighbors, a community initiative of Shadle Park Presbyterian Church, is expanding and needs more volunteers to help with new projects.

Some of its upcoming projects include planting native edible plants on two acres, developing sustainable housing villages/farms, developing community composting systems with schools and managing a large

greenhouse.

Other projects include starting new community dinner sites, hosting art workshops and using repurposed and naturally found materials.

Growing Neighbors also plans to build raised beds, compost bins, chicken coops, little free pantries and yard signs with pallet wood and other repurposed materials.

For information, email growingneighbors509@gmail.com.

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What if forgiving as an act of faith can have an impact on society?

What if? We often hear what ifs from a political perspective.

Media frequently offer “what if” options as if giving people in office ideas for what extent they might stretch a protocol, law or precedent. That’s not news. That’s opinion that borrows trouble in that we see it gives folks ideas they might not have considered.

So what about another scenario?

What if political leaders forgive each other and begin to work together to assure the common good, setting aside politics? What if we forgive others, too?

What if instead of creating fear we create solutions for those in the country illegally by giving them a legal channel to citizenship so they can continue to contribute to the economy and benefit from being here, rather than living in fear?

What if that spirit extends to people being assured they will be paid livable, just wages so they can afford education,

housing, healthcare and food without depending on the government.

What if those who have accumulated billions don’t ask the government to reduce their taxes but allow their funds to flow through government or give back through nonprofits to the society that made them wealthy?

What if communities have the will to create affordable, safe, decent housing so no one is on the streets in the cold or drizzle of winter or the sizzle of summer?

What if everyone has assurance they will have enough food to eat each day?

What if people of faith, who may forgive misdeeds of some who break one or more of the 10 commandments, extend that forgiveness to others who have different emphases in their faith?

What if some who espouse being welcoming to all welcome those they disagree with and see as a threat to the diverse folks they welcome?

What if? Just pause to ponder about the power of possibilities for the new year and how the power of pardoning, forgiving and loving our neighbors and even our enemies might make a difference in our lives.

Ah! Some may say forgiveness can’t overcome the block to a relationship and the possibilities of working with someone who cheats, steals, lies, hates or with someone who is stuck in their opinions, on the streets, in poverty or in being a victim.

That may be true in the political—power based—realm, but what if we allow God’s will to work in us and with us?

We assume that loving, forgiving or pardoning won’t make a difference.

What if a pardon is what is needed?

What if that’s not naive, stupid or letting down our guard?

We see efforts in Fig Tree stories of people trusting, risking, rising above their fears to live their lives in behalf of others.

It’s about trying God’s way or letting

God have God’s way, because our self-serving, power-seeking ways don’t work.

What can letting go and letting God mean? We see evil and point fingers as if that protects us, but it may disempower us and further our victimization.

What if those who fear name-callers, hate-mongers and threat-makers forgive those who try to isolate, demean, bully or control them? It may disempower them.

We want restoration and justice. What will empower us? What risk does it take?

What do we risk losing by dropping our anxiety and fear? How do we rise above being a victim of hate?

We need to know forgiveness and reconciliation require truth, accountability, remembering history and sharing stories—and a willingness to work together for the wellbeing of everyone.

Is it just dreaming a ridiculous, improbable, impossible dream? What if?

Mary Stamp - editor

Social Media

Sounding Board

Comments

Congratulations shared online are recognition for whole Fig Tree team

Many thanks to the many people who have made the work with The Fig Tree possible for these wonderful 40 years .

Thanks to folks who voted to say yes to start it, folks who persevered through years of limited income, folks who served on the teams advising us along the way.

Thanks to folks who helped with mailings and deliveries, folks who have advertised and been sponsors and partners.

Thanks to folks who joined as we added the resource directory and legislative conference.

Thanks to the folks who have shared their stories and the folks who read them.

They are all the true partners who have motivated us to continue

In the Spokesman article, I said, “Wow!” about each of the stories I have heard and shared, and about the people who have connected with each other. I love doing this “work” which is a work of love.

So we begin the New Year of 2025, our 41st year, with notes of celebration and recognition.

We share comments many wrote on Facebook on reading about my being among the Women of the Year.

I include the names and comments of some who posted because yours are among the many names of folks who I celebrate for the reasons listed above.

Many thanks to all who make The Fig Tree media possible.

These are but a few of the comments shared on Facebook.

So wonderful and deserved! The Fig Tree is an awesome paper which uplifts anyone who receives it. It gives hope and joy.
Sheri Barnard

This is so wonderful and well deserved.
Lori Vega

Congratulations on being named a Woman of the Year. You deserve the honor. I am proud to know you and appreciate your Good News in and around Spokane.
Rita Waldref

I was so pleased to read about your well-deserved recognition. You are so deserving. Keep up the great work.
Dick Boysen

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed reading the article about you and the Fig Tree in this past Sunday’s newspaper. This article was long overdue and very

well deserved. You do so much good in our community; and while I know you don’t do it for the recognition, it’s always nice to know that others recognize your hard work and dedication to sharing positive stories and giving voice to what oftentimes is never heard. Thank you, Mary, for all you do
Joan Poirer

So deserving! I can’t get over how lucky we are to have this publication because of you Mary Stamp! I have the latest copy on my desk right now. Reading! The Fig Tree is peace journalism on a world that needs peace.
Sheila Fritts

Congratulations on being a Woman of the Year! I was so excited to read that in the Spokesman Review.
Petra Hoy

Well deserved! Mary Stamp has dedicated her life and career to sharing the stories of all the goodness faith communities and individuals are doing to support vulnerable people in the Spokane area. It is ecumenical and including all faiths! That’s wonderful and well deserved! Love/faith in action is what we need!!!
Sandi Thompson-Royer

Such a lovely article! A deserving tribute to Mary’s passion! Congratulations!!!
Sharon Smith

Congratulations Mary for your work connecting people and communities!
Elise DeGooyer

So happy to see your face on the front page of the paper this morning! You are so very deserving of the nomination.
Judy Havill Boone

This is so fantastic! I am so very proud of you Mary and so inspired by all that you do! Thank you for your incredible work and dedication to bringing hope to the world! This is so well deserved!

A true trail blazer! Thank you! Mary Stamp gets the woman of the year award every year in my heart! She is such a wonderful advocate for positive change in the world!
Denise Attwood

Congratulations, Mary. An honor well-earned and deserved. There were some amazing women nominated this year.
Phyllis Jean Kardos

Congratulations Mary Stamp on being

named one of The Spokesman-Review Women of the Year! Thank you for your dedication to grassroots journalism, stories of hope and faith, and elevating the voices of those are often overlooked or marginalized in our community. We are better because of you and your service to Spokane!
Mark Finney

Now this is a fitting honor. Congratulations Mary!
Kiantha Duncan

It was a wonderful article, and she is very deserving.
Judy Havill Boone

Mary, congratulations on the recognition for all the years of wonderful work.
Holy Cross Funeral & Cemetery

Congratulations to Mary Stamp! I had the privilege of being interviewed by Mary my first day at Family Promise of Spokane in 2016.
Joe Ader

I just saw the wonderful article on Mary in today’s Spokesman-Review, and I smiled broadly! Congratulations, Mary. It could have happened earlier than this year, and still be well deserved!
Paul Graves

This is so amazing! Congratulations to all of you for your hard and amazing work! We are sharing this in our newsletter and making a social media post to congratulate her and the Fig Tree. So cool!
Christi Ortiz

Congratulations! You don’t do any of this for recognition but it’s great that others realized the amazing gift you have been giving to Eastern Washington and beyond.
Lynn Swedberg

Thank you for all your brilliant work and dedication to vital information we get through, The Fig Tree!
Mercy Aguilar

It was an honor to sit at the table at the Human Rights Spokane Banquet with Mary and her son! Fig Tree is a labor of love.
Connie Pittman

Pure Admiration.
Cheryl McDaniel

So well deserved! Congratulations to Mary!
Stacy Taninchev

Congratulations Mary.
Regan Watkins

Well deserved.
Adie Goldberg

She definitely deserves this!
Linda Lawrence Hunt

Well deserved my friend. God bless!
Lonnie Mitchell

Yay!!! Congratulations!!! Well deserved indeed!
Amy Skinder Meredith

Very appropriate honor!
Ladd Bjerneby

Bravo!!!!!!!
Ildikó Kalapács

Congratulations
Dennis Mitchell

She certainly is deserving! Congratulations Mary! We love you!!!
Kim Harmson

She is such a treasure!
Trending Northwest

Congratulations!
Anne Martin

Well-deserved tribute!
Jan Shannon

Bravo! So deserved.
Mollie Dalpae

Congratulations, Mary!
Immaculate Heart Retreat Center

Congratulations and thank you, Mary!
Mary Ann McCurdy

Congratulations Mary Stamp!
Debbie Rae DuPey

Congratulations! Well deserved !!
Golie Jansen

Truly a treasure!
SharonSmith

Well deserved Mary.
Phyllis Andersen

Congratulations Mary Stamp! An honor well deserved.
Jeannette Solimine

I say, “Yay!” to all of you and so many more who commented for being part of The Fig Tree, part of my life, among the area’s difference makers. Each of you are women and men of the year in your own right—making a difference in the lives of people!
Mary Stamp

Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed

Submit events to development@thefigtree.org by 3rd Thursday

To Jan 26 • It Happened Here: Expo '74 Fifty Years Later, Northwest MAC, 2316 W. 1st, Tues to Sat 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 456-3931, nwmac.org

To Jan 31 • Saranac Art Projects Friends Show, 25 W. Main, Fr-Sat 12 to 8 p.m., saranacartprojects@gmail.com, sappgallery.com

Jan 1 • Monthly Bird Walk on Saltese Flats, Doris Morrison Learning Center, 1330 S. Henry, Greenacres, 8 a.m. to 12 noon, spokanecounty.org/5360/Doris-Morrison-Learning-Center-DMLC

• Dementia: Warning Signs & Early Diagnosis, South Hill Library, 3324 S. Perry, 10:30 a.m., 444-5300, spokanelibrary.org

Jan 2 • The Fig Tree Benefit and Board Meeting, 12 to 3 p.m. 535-4112, mary@thefigtree.org

Jan 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 • Taizé Prayer, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartlettsgonzaga.edu

Jan 3 • The Fig Tree Distribution and Mailing, St. Mark's Lutheran, 24th & Grand, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., kaye@thefigtree.org

Jan 4 • Eco-Anxiety Café, Manito UMC, 3320 W. Grand, 10 a.m. to noon, adygertgearteart@hotmail.com

Jan 5 • Intentional Community Gathering, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 1 to 4 p.m., 993-2968, harmonywoods.org

• Joy to the World – Festival of Carols, The Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, 1115 W. Riverside, 2:30 to 4 p.m., 358-04290, spokanecathedral.com/sacred-music-concert-series

Jan 5, 12, 19, 26 • Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR) Coffee, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, 9 a.m., scarspokane.org

Jan 6 • Free Wills and Estate Planning Clinic, Spectrum Center and Volunteer Lawyer Program, for individuals and families under 200% of the federal poverty line by referral, 1614 N. Monroe, 4 to 6 p.m., register at spokanevlp.org/apply

Jan 7 • Eastern Washington Legislative Conference planning team, Zoom, 2 p.m., 535-4112, kaye@thefigtree.org

• The Right to Read, Northwest Passages, NAACP and The Black Lens, documentary and discussion, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7 p.m., 313-2787

Jan 7, 14, 21, 28 • Tuesday Gallery Talks, 20-minute discussion on current exhibits, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, 11 a.m., 456-3931, northwestmuseum.org

• Heartistry: Artistic Wellbeing, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit Pkwy, 3 to 5 p.m., 279-0299

Jan 8, 15, 29 • Spokane Folklore Society Contra Dance, Woman's Club of Spokane, 1428 W. 9th, 7:15 to 9:30 p.m., 838-2160, spokanefolklore.org

Jan 8, 15, 22, 29 • SCAR Meeting, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, noon, scarspokane.org

Jan 9 • Free Immigration Clinic, Latinos En Spokane, 1502 N. Monroe, 5 to 7 p.m., latinosenspokane.org

• Make Fabric Dolls for Kids in Need with the Kiwanis Club of Spokane, Liberty Park Library, 402 S. Pittsburgh, 5:30 to 6:45 p.m., spokanelibrary.org

• Thursday Night Dances, senior-friendly, Southside Community Center, 3151 E. 27th, 7 to 9:30 p.m., 535-0803, southsidesccc.org

Jan 10 • Second Friday Artwalk, Sherman Ave., Downtown Coeur d'Alene, 5 to 8 p.m., (208) 415-0116, artsandculturecda.org

• Gradiance, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7 to 9 p.m., 443-7800

Jan 10, 13 • Genealogy Drop-In Session, Eastern Washington Genealogical Society, Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., 893-8400; 13th - North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., 893-8350, scl.d.org

Jan 10-24 • Winnie The Pooh, local playwright Cynda Weitz, Spokane Children's Theatre, 2727 N. Madelia, Fri 7 to 10 p.m., Sat 2 to 5 p.m., 328-4886, spokanechildrenstheatre.org

Jan 11 • Spokane Mending Circle, Art Salvage Spokane, 620 E. North Foothills Dr., 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., 798-9039

• Step Into Your Power: A Confidence-Building Experience, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 10 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., 216-1535, scl.d.org

• Journaling Toward Your Authentic Self, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 10:30 a.m., (208) 769-2315

• Traditional Games in Spanish, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 2:30 p.m., must register, 893-8350, scl.d.org

• Wild & Scenic Film Festival, Sierra Club Idaho Chapter, The Kenworthy, 508 S. Main, Moscow, 6 p.m., (208) 882-4127, kenworthy.org/events

Jan 13 • Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) Steering Committee, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., slichty@pjals.org

Jan 16 • NAACP Monthly Meeting, Spokane Central Library, 3rd Fl, 906 W. Main, 6:30 to 8 p.m., spkncpr@gmail.com, facebook.com/spokane.naacp

Jan 18 • Spokane Women's Rally, for women's and LGBTQIA+ Rights, Big Red Wagon, 11 a.m., bit.ly/4iBZYeh

• Saturday with the Coeur d'Alene Symphony, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 11 a.m., (208) 769-2315, cdalibrary.org

• Podcast Publishing, Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald, 4 to 5:30 p.m., 893-8400, scl.d.org

Jan 18, 19 • Spokane Symphony Masterworks 4: Beethoven vs Al, Beethoven's 10th Symphony, 3rd movement completed by Al, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat 7:30 p.m., Sun, 3 p.m., 624-1200

Jan 19 • Martin Luther King Jr Worship, Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 806 W. Indiana, 3 to 5 p.m.

Jan 20 • Martin Luther King Jr Day Celebration, Annual Unity March and Resource Fair, 10 a.m. Rally and March, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Resource Fair, Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 868-0856, mlkspokane.org

• MLK Teach-In, Following MLK March, Unity Multicultural Education Center, Gonzaga University, discussion on King's impact and what it's like to build on a "beloved community for all," Spokane Convention Center, 12 to 2 p.m., 313-6368 grahamt@gonzaga.edu

• Children's Program Celebrating the 30th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a national holiday, 9:30 a.m., Schuler Performing Arts Center, North Idaho College, Coeur d'Alene, (208) 765-3932, and 11:30 a.m., Post Falls, (208) 773-3511

• Dementia Basics and Community Support, Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 5:30 p.m., 444-5300

Jan 21 • We Who Wrestle with God, Dr. Jordan Peterson, First Interstate Center for the Arts, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd, 7:30 to 9 p.m., 279-7000

Jan 22 • World Cooking: Filipino Food with Chefs Jackie and Fee, Filipino American Northwest Association Filipino dish online, 6:30 p.m., scl.d.org

• Jazz at Lincoln Center Presents: New Orleans Songbook, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, ages 6 and up, 7:30 p.m., 313-2787

Jan 23 • Spokane Homeless Connect, "Connecting for Change," 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Spokane Convention Center, 202 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

Jan 23-26 • 4-Day Silent Retreat, with Fr. Michael Maher, on Ignatius of Loyola, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 448-1224, ihrc.net

Jan 24 • "Art U.S.A.: One Hundred Works on Paper, 1925-1950" Opening Reception, Jundt Art Museum, Gonzaga University, 4 to 7 p.m., 313-6611, manoguerra@gonzaga.edu

Jan 24-26 • Free Book Fair, Page 42 Bookstore at Mayhem Supply, 6401 E. Sprague, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.,

Jan 25 • "What Does It Mean to Be Prophetic?" Eastern Washington Legislative Conference, Spokane Valley United Methodist Church 115 N. Raymond, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., 535-1813, kaye@thefigtree.org

• El Mercado, West Central Community Center, 1603 N. Belt, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

• Breath of Bliss Ceremony, Stefani VanDeest, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., harmonywoods.org

• Celebrating Family, North Idaho Youth Symphony Concert, Schuler Performing Arts Center, 880 W. Garden, Coeur d'Alene, 7 p.m., (208) 769-7780

• Musical Theatre Dance Revue, Gonzaga University Dance program, Magnuson Theatre, College Hall, 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., 313-6508, dance@gonzaga.edu

• Saul and Ruby's Holocaust Survivor Band, documentary on two survivors who start a klezmer band, Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 12:30 to 2 p.m., free, 444-5300, spokanelibrary.org

Jan 25-Feb 2 • Spokane Jewish Film Festival, Magic Lantern and online, spokanejewishfilm.org

Jan 26 • Taizé Prayer Service, IHRC, 6910 S. Ben Burr, 6:30 p.m., 448-1224, ihrc@ihrc.net

Jan 29 • Lessons from Howard Thurman's Philosophy of Life, Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, Hemmingson at Gonzaga and livestreamed, 6 p.m., register, Gonzaga.edu/events

• Backcountry Film Festival, 20 years of winter sports films, The Kenworthy, 508 S. Main, Moscow, 7 p.m., 882-4127, #12, (208) 882-4127, kenworthy.pac.square.site

Jan 30 • The Lowdown, Spokane Symphony Music Director James Lowe, preview of Masterworks he conducts, NW MAC, 2316 W. First, noon, 456-3931, nwmac.org

Jan 31 • San Francisco's ODC Dance: Mixed Repertory, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, ages 6+, 7:30 p.m., 313-2787

Jan 31-Feb 1 • 24 Hour Retreat on Psalm 23, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 4:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., ihrc.net

To Feb 4 • When the River Becomes a Cloud, EWU Gallery of Art, Cheney, free, M-F 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., ewu.edu/events

Feb 5 • The Fig Tree Distribution and Mailing, St. Mark's Lutheran, 24th & Grand, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., kaye@thefigtree.org

Feb 6 • The Fig Tree Benefit Meeting, noon, **Board Meeting** 1 to 3 p.m., Zoom, 535-1813

To Mar 9 • Woman, Artist, Catalyst: Art from the Permanent Collection, NWMAC, Tues to Sat 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 456-3931

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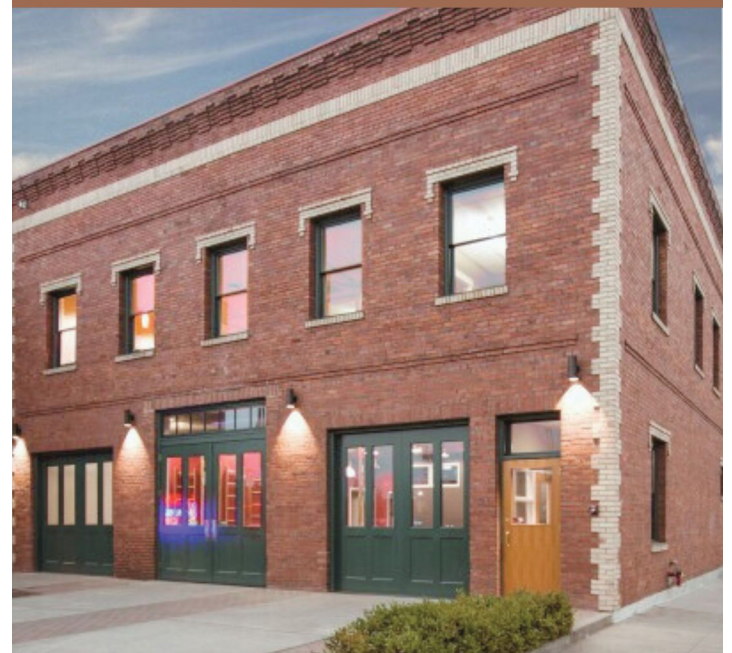
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Tia Moua empowers Spokane's Asian-American people and herself

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

As political organizer for Asians for Collective Liberation in Spokane (ACLS), Tia Moua integrates culture with engagement, empowering Spokane's Asian-American community to advocate for diverse history to be taught in Washington schools, to increase language access in court documents, schools and healthcare, and to reduce voting barriers.

As a Hmong American U.S. citizen and native English speaker, born and raised in Spokane, she recognizes her privileged identities, working in solidarity with others, focusing on their needs.

She attended Rogers High School and graduated from Gonzaga University in 2023, double-majoring in communications and sociology, double-minoring in solidarity and social justice.

Tia spent 10 months in Asia in 2023, studying four months in Thailand and six weeks in South Korea. She solo-traveled to Laos, Vietnam, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, learning about Hmong culture, meeting relatives and studying Buddhism.

Staying just two nights in each place, she connected to her nomadic Hmong ancestors who lived in Thailand, Vietnam, China, Myanmar and Laos.

"In Thailand, people assumed I was Thai and talked quickly. When people saw my face, it confused them when I said in Thai, 'I don't speak Thai.' It was comforting to be mistaken as Thai."

She felt she fit in, belonged and wasn't judged for her appearance, unlike in the U.S., where she is often treated as a foreigner. In Spokane, where Asians are 2.6 percent of the population, she is often the only Asian woman in a room.

Teachers discouraged her and other immigrant children from speaking any language but English. Public schools taught students to assimilate to white American culture. Her older brother's preschool teacher told her parents he must stop speaking Hmong and could only speak English at preschool so they could understand him. Then her parents believed they had to teach them to think, dream and act in English to succeed.

Tia advocates for language accessibility for Asian and Asian-American communities, which are the fastest-growing U.S. cultural groups.

"**The Spokane Asian** community is a rich tapestry of ethnicities with more than 15 languages," said Tia, who helps people imagine a society where they are accepted, instead of being forced to assimilate. "It damages a person's self-worth. Growing up, I felt self-hatred as diverse cultures weren't welcome. It's slightly better now."

Colorism seeped into Hmong culture. Some Hmong advised



Tia Moua points out a historic reminder of Trent Alley.

her not to go out in the sun, because lighter skin is more beautiful than darker skin. Seeing only white, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Barbie dolls, white women in magazines and movies, and few Asians in the media, she didn't embrace her brown skin.

"In my late teens, I learned about colorism and white beauty norms of colonialism," Tia said.

While some relatives internalized colonialism, her mother helped her embrace her identity as a Hmong American woman with dark skin, saying: "This makes you beautiful and unique."

Tia was crowned Miss Spokane's Outstanding Teen in 2015 and 2017, and Miss Washington's Outstanding Teen in 2017. She was the first Hmong American state title holder in the Miss America Organization.

Confronting her insecurities and struggles with self-image through therapy, journaling, walks, meditation and reflections on self-love, she slowly accepted and loved her body.

"My role models, mentors and mom taught me to be myself, proud of who I am, and not to change to fit someone else's box," said Tia, who is grateful to the people who encouraged her to see her worth and remind her that beauty shines from within.

Tia attended Gonzaga on an Act Six leadership scholarship. Its mission is to educate, empower and build strong leaders, inspired by Acts 6 in the Bible where communities most impacted by discrimination chose disciples who understood their community's needs to be trained as leaders and return equipped to improve life in their community.

As a junior at GU, Tia created the Asian American Activist group because of the scapegoating Asians experienced from COVID. People spat on, attacked, harassed and killed Asians because political leaders blamed them for the virus. She was scared and expected more turmoil.

Tia investigated Asian exclusion that contributed to discrimination, racism and othering, learning what she was not taught in school. Her culture's stories, contributions, perspectives, leaders and achievements—such as

Spokane's downtown Chinatown and international district—are not in history books.

In a communications class, she learned about collective memory. Omitting communities' histories says some people are valued and included, while others are erased. History focused on white males and said little about Indigenous people, Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. This knowledge inspired her to challenge dominant narratives and work with Make Us Visible to advocate teaching Asian American and Pacific Islander history in Washington K-12 schools.

Tia appreciates that the first Asian American monument on Gonzaga's campus was dedicated in April 2024. It is a bench honoring GU graduate and Filipino-American labor rights activist Philip Vera Cruz.

She urged the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition (APIC) to change its name to Asians for Collective Liberation, then Asians for Collective Action, so people see interconnections between Asians/Asian Americans "to create the community we envision and deserve to be our authentic selves," she said.

In 2020, Tia worked on the 2020 U.S. Census to ensure that Asians were accurately counted, because funding is based on groups' unique needs. Data was skewed, she said, because Hmong were counted as East Asians, not Southeast Asians.

Tia also combats the "model minority" myth that Asians are "rich, successful, intelligent, educated, good at math, apolitical and obedient." These seemingly "positive" stereotypes impact Asian communities negatively, limiting resources and increasing stigma when Asians seek help for mental health.

"The myth makes people think Asians do not experience racism or speak up for justice. They set expectations of perfectionism, high achievement and intelligence," she said.

Asian students who struggle may feel they are failures, triggering mental health issues. ACLS teaches destigmatizing to improve students' mental health.

As a political organizer, Tia challenges false ideas that Asians are apolitical.

- A Vietnamese Buddhist temple offered an event to increase civic engagement and voter turnout.

- ReImagine Spokane holds workshops on intersectionality, environment, refugees and immigrants, health equity, housing and homelessness.

- ACLS creates community, collaborates on solutions and builds hope with voter education, social justice policies and actions.

Tia advocates for compensating multicultural leaders who offer their expertise on panels.

"We are overburdened by 'racial labor' as others expect us to educate them," she said. "Sometimes being part of marginalized communities is heavy, but by living in the present and

realizing everything is interconnected spiritually, we can be our healthiest selves."

In the 1970s, Tia's parents fled Laos to Thailand. Her mother, a child in a family of 10, hired a Lao shopkeeper with a produce transport boat. They hid under a tarp covered with corn. The first night they tried to cross the Mekong River, but they turned back when they saw Viet Cong soldiers and Pathet Lao communist forces.

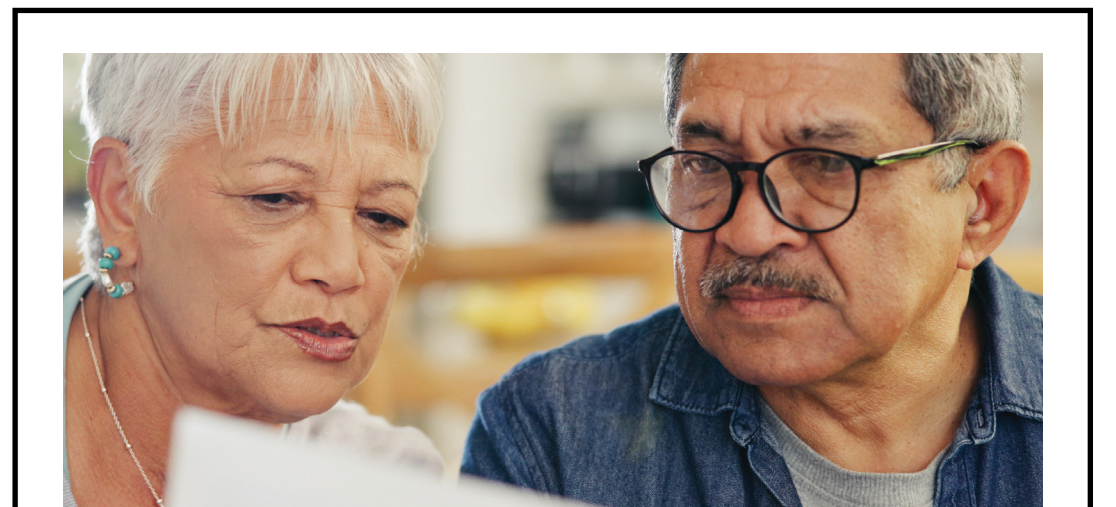
The next night, they crossed, arriving at Thai refugee camps considered safer for Hmong, but the Thai government didn't want them and tried to push them out. After settling in the camp, they celebrated Hmong New Year with music, dancing, a courtship ritual and the game 'pov pob.' Women sewed 'paj ntaub,' story or flower cloths, to sell to U.N. workers.

"**Often we hear tragic** refugee stories, but do not hear about their human pain, grief and joy," Tia said. "I love Hmong resilience, keeping our culture alive in songs, music, folktales, dancing and traditional instruments like the 'qeej.' We lovingly welcome guests to Hmong New Year and other events. We say, 'Come, learn who we are. Watch our dances and eat with us.'"

Tia, who grew up Catholic, is discovering ancestral wisdom from her paternal grandmother, Thia, a shaman who guides her to connect with ancestors and on a self-discovery journey to help her and her family heal intergenerational trauma.

Thinking of her ancestors, her current and future family, Tia considers connections of past, present and future. "I appreciate my ancestors' strength, resilience and bravery as refugees coming to survive."

For information, email tmoua@aclspokane.org or follow her on Instagram @tinytia88.



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Avista partners with community agencies to provide financial assistance, plus we offer other services to help you manage and pay your bill.

- **Energy Bill Assistance** is available for income-qualified residential customers. We support grants and programs available through local agencies.
- **Comfort Level Billing** divides yearly energy costs into 12 equal and predictable monthly payments.
- **Preferred Due Date** helps align your bill's due date with payday.
- **Payment Arrangements** can be made on an individual basis.
- **My Energy Discount** offers ongoing monthly energy bill discounts to income-qualified Oregon and Washington customers.

Learn more at myavista.com/assistance or call (800) 227-9187.



Have a Conflict?

We can help you work it out. **Book a mediation today!**



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Mediation is for everyone. We can mediate many types of disputes.

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- Parenting
- Neighbor
- Tenant-Landlord
- Business
- and many more