

43RD YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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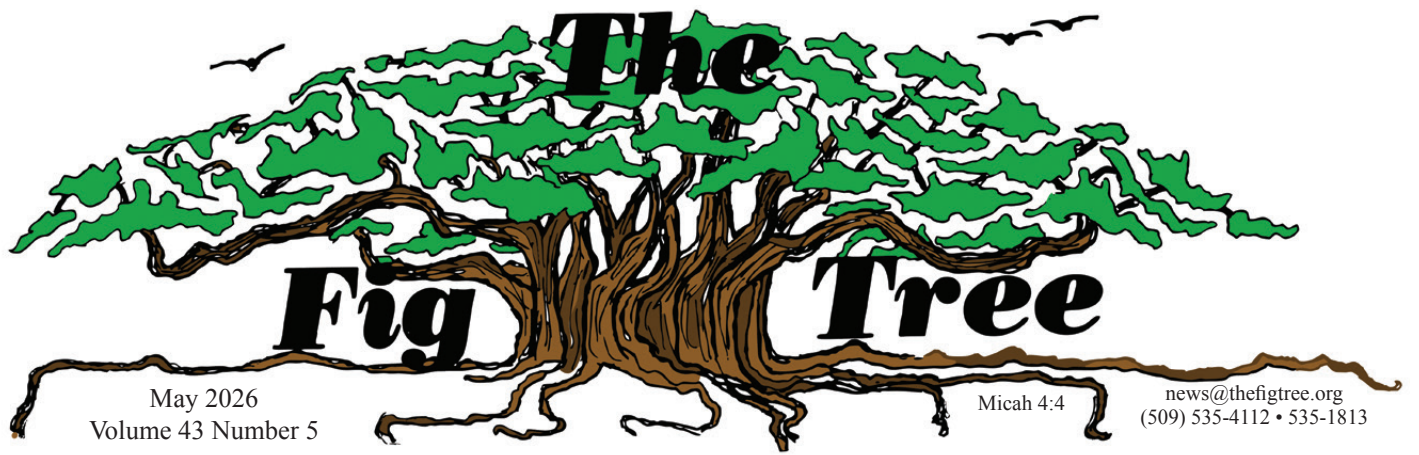
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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Play stimulates brain development

By Mary Stamp

Colors and curves, tot-sized sinks, touchable-washable wall art and a therapist happily greeting a two-year-old coming through the doors to play are among the ways Joya Child and Family Development expresses joy and welcome to children.

“For children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth to age three, play is more than fun. Play is how they learn and grow, stimulating brain development and building age-level skills,” said Colleen Fuchs, executive director.

“Our approach is play-based,” she explained. “Children learn best when we capitalize on their enthusiasm and interest. Play is their work. For staff, play is intentional.”

Joya served more than 59 years as the Spokane Guilds’ School and Neuromuscular Center. The early-intervention provider was outgrowing the school building on West Garland they had leased from Spokane Public Schools (SPS) since 1982.

“Wanting to double the number of families we serve, we envisioned having our own building,” Colleen said.



Colleen stands by the touchable, washable mural on a wall in the hall of Joya Child and Family Development Center. The mural was created by Ben Joyce, whose daughter received services at the Guild’s School and is now a student at Gonzaga

Knowing its lease with SPS was ending, Joya purchased the property and five buildings that previously housed the St. Joseph Orphanage and then St. Joseph Family Center at 1016 N. Superior beside the Spokane River.

In designing the new facility, staff and board consulted with therapists, teachers, parents, medical professionals and community leaders.

“We wanted the space to make people feel they belonged when they walked in the door,” Colleen said.

Joya moved into the 42,000-square-foot building in May 2022. The facility was 75 percent completed at that time. In June 2025, after receiving \$3 million in congressionally directed funds for training and research, the remainder of the building was completed. That new space enables them to host community events like a recent presentation by a neonatal intensive care specialist.

In addition, Joya is expanding research by partnering with Washington State University College of Medicine.

“We serve children with unique
Continued on page 4

Black leaders’ journey to South Africa draws insights on U.S. Civil Rights era

What difference does it make for four Black leaders from Spokane to step out of their busy lives and join a 16-day journey—from Feb. 16 to March 4—to South Africa with 26 other Black leaders from Seattle, Tacoma, Snohomish and Tri-Cities?

In previous years, the Black Future Co-op Fund, a Seattle philanthropy advancing Black-led solutions to strengthen Black generational wealth, health and wellbeing, has taken groups to Ghana. This was their first jour-

ney to South Africa, introducing leaders to African historical roots, giving them a chance to learn about the culture and providing time away from their routines to rest and reflect in order to reinvigorate their leadership.

What did they experience as they went to the continent where Black ancestors were enslaved? What were their reflections as they visited another setting in which Black people experienced political, social and economic injustice? What did they find

in people who told about their treatment and trauma as political prisoners? What did they experience with the indigenous African spiritual traditions?

The Spokane participants, Lisa Gardner, Anna Franklin, Kitara Johnson-Jones and Michael Bethley, are still processing such questions and the implications of their experiences on their lives and work.

Lisa is NAACP Spokane’s president and works as director of communication and community engagement with the City of Spokane.

She went to learn about her role as a community leader as part of the global African diaspora and to understand parallels between the leadership of Nelson Mandela, a political dissident and political prisoner who became the first Black president of South Africa, and U.S. civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.

Anna, who has worked 34 years in health care data to understand inequities, has traveled

Continued on page 6

Resource Directory helps shelter, nourish, humanize

The impact of The Fig Tree and its annual Resource Directory comes in its use day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year “to shelter, nourish and humanize each other,” as Laurel Fish, organizer with the Spokane Alliance, said at the Spring Benefit Lunch. She knows, because that’s also what she and the Spokane Alliance do in “bringing institutions together to live out their values and figuring out what people want to do about pressures in our community.”

The Fig Tree’s goal is for the Resource Directory to be a tool to connect individuals and organizations to resources and motivate them to give back to the community.

As Fig Tree Board member David Gortner commented, the newspaper and directory “lay out before us a menu of possibilities, but it’s up to us to take the next step—to reach out and connect with others we haven’t met yet, to encourage each other and explore ways we can strengthen our impact together.”

As preparations are underway for the 2026-27 edition of the Resource Directory, community partners, advertisers and donors are stepping up to help underwrite the costs of producing 18,000 to 22,000 copies—depending on the support level. About half of the community partners have been secured, and about 75 percent of the advertisers are committed.

“**We continue to ask, invite and recruit,**” said directory editor Malcolm Haworth, as the deadline of May 31 approaches for confirmations to be in and allow time for designing and placing the ads. “We hope individual donors will also step up to fill any gaps, so we can continue to provide copies at the same level as in previous years.”

For information on being a partner, advertiser or donor, call 535-1813 or email development@thefigtree.org.

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Religion News Briefs Around the World

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Coalition calls for formal treaty on fossil fuels

When the United Nations climate conference COP30 in November at Belém, Brazil, ended without any direct reference to fossil fuels in its final text, advocates said the obvious had been avoided: the primary driver of the climate crisis had not been named, let alone addressed.

On April 24, the World Council of Churches (WCC) joined a coalition of governments, faith communities and civil society organizations in Santa Marta, Colombia, to do what COP30 could not: launch a formal treaty to end coal, oil and gas production, with faith voices at the table from the start.

The first International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels, convened by governments of Colombia and the Netherlands, responded to the Belém Declaration on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels, which 24 countries now back. It aligns with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target and follows the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which confirmed that states carry a legal obligation to manage how much coal, oil and gas they extract.

The WCC is one of the principal faith organizations to help draft a multi-faith call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty ahead of the gathering, because "the transition away from fossil fuels is not a matter of ideology. It is a matter of survival, of justice, of fidelity to the very ground of our being."

"One of the greatest challenges of our time is the transition away from fossil fuels," said the Rev. Vilma Yanez from the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, and a member of the WCC central committee. "This conference encourages us to build an ethical, pastoral, contextual, committed and hopeful response to God's call to promote justice in creation."

The WCC's position has been years in the making. The 11th Assembly in 2022 said that "use of fossil fuel sources must be phased out without delay" and that "no new fossil fuel or nuclear energy projects can be developed." In 2023, its central committee voted to endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

A November 2025 WCC executive committee statement called governments to: "Accelerate a just transition to 100 percent renewable energy, phase out all fossil fuel subsidies that artificially sustain the fossil fuel industry, commit to reducing and exiting fossil fuel production, adopt the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, ensure decent jobs for all and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups throughout the transition process."

WCC program convenes global conversation

On May 26, the World Council of Churches program on Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia and Related Discrimination will convene a global webinar on how colonial ideology continues to shape today's economic systems through international investor treaties, especially the Investor-State Dispute Settlement system. The webinar seeks to expose how legal and financial frameworks during and after colonial rule continue to constrain the sovereignty of nations in the Global South—often at the expense of human dignity, environmental protection and intergenerational justice.

From its 1st Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the WCC warned against dangers of unchecked power—capitalist or communist—recognizing how vast economic and political concentrations of power give rise to greed, cruelty and systemic injustice. Those warnings remain relevant.

The webinar will explore how churches can engage morally, ethically and legally to challenge unjust treaties. At stake is the future of communities disproportionately affected by the climate emergency. The webinar will explore strategies for interventions by churches and ecumenical bodies to dismantle unjust and discriminatory economic frameworks and stand by marginalized people and work toward a future that guarantees justice.

For information, visit us02web.zoom.us/j/79161116111 or www.oikoumene.org

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Circulating funds keeps nonprofits strong

The Fig Tree has raised \$48,000 toward its June 30 goal of \$60,000 in support from sponsors, leaving \$20,000 more to raise for the rest of the year, reported Mary Stamp, editor.

"Our mailing at the first of April went to folks who previously donated \$20,000 at the 2025 Benefit Lunch, and they are responding," she said. "We will continue sending appeals to reach our goal in these interesting times for many nonprofits."

Mary described the economic practice she learned while living

in Tekoa, a rural farm community 45 miles south of Spokane, before coming to Spokane to start The Fig Tree.

"Local retailers and businesses encouraged town residents and farmers to spend as much as they could locally, so that the funds circulated as many times as possible in the town, improving the local economy," Mary said.

Similarly, she encourages nonprofits to support each other by attending fundraisers, sending donations and sponsoring

events—and for The Fig Tree and Resource Directory advertising.

"The more funds circulate among nonprofits and nonprofit supporters, the stronger and more resilient nonprofit entities will be," she said, adding that she practices that commitment in her personal giving.

"I value the creative ways faith and nonprofit communities improve the lives of people in this region," she affirmed.

For information, call 535-1813 or visit thefigtree.org.

Partners breaks ground on new facility

Partners Inland Northwest will break ground on a new facility that expands its ability to serve individuals and families across the region. It will be at the site of the former Ziggy's on Sprague Ave. in Spokane Valley.

"More than a construction milestone, this groundbreaking represents the collective effort of a community that believes access to basic needs matters," said Susan Henderson, development director. "Public investment, pri-

vate philanthropy and countless volunteer hours have helped this effort come to fruition."

In recent years, the need for basic essentials, such as food, clothing and diapers has grown significantly. This project is a direct response to that need.

The new building will allow Partners INW to increase capacity, improve accessibility and better serve Spokane Valley and the broader community.

With roots in Spokane Valley,

this expansion ensures Partners Inland Northwest can meet local needs and support surrounding areas when resources allow.

"We are grateful to those who have supported this vision over the years and those who are continuing to walk alongside us. Together, we are building something that will serve our neighbors not just today, but for years to come," said Susan.

For information, visit partnersinw.org.

Conservancy groups discuss merging

Discussions are underway between Inland Northwest Land Conservancy and Dishman Hills Conservancy to explore a merger that would broaden and strengthen their collective impact.

"Both organizations, with their dedicated members and volunteers, look forward to building a resilient network of healthy and

protected ecosystems, connecting people to nature and securing lasting conservation in our beloved shared home for people and wildlife," said Toni Pessemier, board president of the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy.

With 35 years of regional conservation work, staying focused on values of a love of nature,

perpetuity, discernment and relationships is more important than ever, she explained.

The perspectives and questions of members and community are being considered as they explore this opportunity and provide updates on progress.

For information, visit inlandnwland.org.

AICC secures funds for its forever home

The American Indian Community Center has secured an additional \$2 million in state funding for its Forever Home Project along the Spokane River.

"This achievement reflects the strength of partnerships and community. We extend

deep gratitude to Governor Bob Ferguson, local and west-side legislators, for their encouragement, support and advocacy on our behalf," said Linda Lauch, executive director.

"As we move into spring, a season of renewal and possibil-

ity, may we carry forward the spirit of service, dignity and compassion that guides our work," she added. "Together, we will continue building a stronger future for all of our community."

For information, visit aiccinc.org.

Fall Folk Festival musicians may apply

For musicians, dance groups and storytellers who wish to participate in the 31st Annual Spo-

kane Fall Folk Festival Nov. 14 and 15 at Spokane Community College, applications are available now through July 1 on the Spokane Folk Festival website.

The Fall Folk Festival is an opportunity each year for individuals and groups to share their culture and ethnic traditions in this multicultural performance event in the Inland Northwest. It

was voted third place in the 2026 Inlander Best Arts and Cultural Event contest.

Applications submitted after July 1 will go on a waitlist for potential inclusion in the festival.

For information, call 828-3685, email director@spokanefolkfestival.org or visit spokanefolkfestival.org/application.html.

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Highland Park serves 75th Sukiyaki Dinner

Highland Park United Methodist Church will serve its 75th annual Sukiyaki Dinner from noon to 4 p.m., Saturday, May 9, at the church, 611 S. Garfield St.

The meal will include rice, sukiyaki, coleslaw and a fortune cookie. There will also be a sale of baked goods and inari sushi.

For information, call 535-2687 or email hpadcouncil@gmail.com.

LCSNW hosts Foster Care Day fair

Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW) is hosting its third annual Foster Care Day event from 4 to 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 5, at Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley.

The event will include a resource fair and opportunity to build connections. Foster care can be a difficult experience for foster parents and youth, so it is helpful to know who is available to help.

It is open to the public and helpful for any foster parents, potential foster parents or anyone who would like to learn more about how they can support foster and homeless youth.

For information, visit lcsnw.org.

Groups gather people to write cards

FailSafe for Life and Heart and Homes Northwest are gathering from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Thursday, May 28, at 6718 N. Pittsburg St. for MAYlers for Mental Health to create cards with messages of hope to help people with mental health struggles or thoughts of suicide.

Persons interested in writing cards may come to the event, drop them off or mail cards to organizers to be delivered to local hospitals for patients receiving mental health care, youth, elders, service members, veterans or domestic violence survivors.

Envelopes should not be sealed so organizers can ensure the message is appropriate for the recipient. Those mailing or dropping off cards should indicate the type of person/struggle for whom the card is intended.

For information, visit zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/maylers-for-mental-health.

Annual Ministry Summit will be June 23 to 26

Whitworth University is hosting its annual Ministry Summit from June 23 to 26 on the theme, "What does it mean to nurture faith communities that restore hope and peace?"

The summit will include worship experiences, processing today's cultural moment with other pastors. Pastors will have space to nurture their spiritual health, and for rest and opportunity to discern where God is calling them.

Speakers include Inés Velásquez-McBryde, pastor of The Church We Hope For; Shane Claiborne, speaker, activist and author, and Reggie Williams, theologian and author.

Worship will be led by Taylor Leonhardt, solo recording artist and member of Mission House.

Mindy Smith, director of the Office of Church Engagement at Whitworth University, and Mary Hulst, preaching expert and cohort leader for the Compelling Preaching Initiative at Whitworth, will lead a pre-conference gathering for preachers from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday, June 23.

There will be opportunity to spend time in community with other faith leaders to discern God's calling for the church in this time and place.

For information, visit whitworth.edu/summit.

Film festival explores water, land issues

Spokane Riverkeeper and Roots of Resilience will co-host a two-day Wild and Scenic Film Festival to celebrate clean water and sustainable agriculture by showing films that explore people's relationship with land and water, community connection and collective action.

Films offer stories that inform, motivate and ignite solutions on the festival's theme, "Mobilize," said Katy Scott, Spokane Riverkeeper's water protector.

The screenings are at 7 p.m., Thursday and Friday, May 14 and 15, at The Garland, 924 W. Garland. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.

The evenings include conversations on connections between healthy rivers, resilient agriculture and strong communities.

Rooted in a commitment to protecting and strengthening local ecosystems, the two organizations are highlighting the connections between water, land and community wellbeing, she said, explaining that Spokane Riverkeeper advances clean water and river health through advocacy and community engagement, while Roots of Resilience supports regenerative agriculture and farmer-led stewardship.

"The partnership reflects the reality that healthy rivers and healthy farms are connected,"

Katy said. "By coming together, we can tell a more complete story about how we care for the landscapes that sustain us."

The first evening's focus is on water with films about rivers, oceans and communities around the world. The films explore water scarcity, sea-based cultures, microplastic pollution, native fish conservation, Indigenous river restoration, kelp research and human stakes in water management in a changing climate.

The second evening focuses on land, looking at the ways people care for, learn from and restore landscapes they depend on. Exploring regenerative grazing and soil health to Indigenous fire stewardship, biodiversity recovery, foraging traditions and hidden networks of fungi, the films highlight the resilience of land and the communities working to heal it.

There will be opportunities for attendees to engage in discussion and connect with local groups working for a sustainable future.

"Storytelling is a powerful tool for change," said Tim Copeland of Roots of Resilience. "The films illuminate the challenges and solutions emerging from our communities."

The Wild and Scenic Film Festival is part of a national effort us-

ing film to inspire environmental awareness and action.

Spokane Riverkeeper is offering other events in May.

• With 350 Spokane, it plans an easy, educational, seven-mile roll on the Centennial Trail with a bike, roller skates, scooters or other human-powered wheels, from the Riverwalk Overflow Parking Lot on N. Superior to No-Li Brewing, 1003 E. Trent. It will go from 1 to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, May 9, and offers stops to see impacts of climate change on the river, its habitats and people.

• From 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., Sunday, May 17, Spokane Riverkeeper and scientists from the Society for Freshwater Sciences will offer a workshop, "Exploring Streams Together," to explore macroinvertebrates (aquatic bugs) at Finch Arboretum, 3404 W. Woodland Blvd. Macroinvertebrates indicate water quality.

Participants will work with scientists using kick nets, sorting trays and microscopes to collect and identify invertebrates. There will be discussion and opportunity to see what they collect under a microscope. The workshop will be in English and Spanish.

For information, call 464-7614, email katie2spokaneriverkeeper.org or visit spokaneriverkeeper.org.

Erin Brockovich speaks for fundraiser

Women Helping Women Fund hosts Erin Brockovich, environmental activist and justice advocate for its annual Give Like a Woman Fundraiser, 3 to 5 p.m., Tuesday, May 19, at the Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

Erin spreads positive messages of personal empowerment

and encourages others to make a difference.

Her investigation uncovered that Pacific Gas & Electric was poisoning the water of the small town of Hinkley, Calif., for 30 years, affecting the health of residents. In 1996, as a result of the largest direct-action lawsuit of its kind, spearheaded by Erin

and Ed Masry, PG&E was forced to pay out the largest toxic tort injury settlement in U.S. history. The story and film made "Erin Brockovich" a household name.

From 2:30 to 4 p.m., guests will mingle and meet grantees, and the program is from 4 to 5 p.m.

For information, visit whwf-spokane.org/events.

Kalispel Tribe sponsors walks for MMIP

During May, which is Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Awareness Month, there are two MMIP Awareness Walks to uplift Indigenous voices, honor loved ones and support families.

One was at 11:30 a.m., Friday,

May 1, at Northern Quest Resort and Casino in Airway Heights. It included a Red Dress Dance and honor song performance.

The second starts at 11:30 a.m., Thursday, May 14, at the Camas Center for Community Wellness in Usk and finishes at

the Pow-Wow Grounds at Usk and Cusick.

Both are sponsored by the Kalispel Tribe of Indians Victim Services.

For information, call 445-1147 or visit kalispeltribe.com/blog/mmip-awareness-walks.

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Name 'Joya' conveys joy and seeing children they serve as 'jewels'

Continued from page 1
needs and diagnoses. As we provide resources for them and their families, it can open areas for research by physical and occupational therapists in doctoral programs," said Colleen. "Our families have a wealth of information to help shape the future for professionals.

"For example, while Joya is seeing more infants with prenatal substance exposure, staff individualize their response for each child and family. Research now allows them to examine patterns in how children with similar needs can best be supported," she said.

During April, Joya served about 440 families with children from birth to three years old.

Its new Joya Jump Start program serves children from the ages of three to five.

"We focus on the early years, but we know older children have nowhere to go, so we offer bridge services, such as continued feeding support," Colleen said.

During the July 2025 to June 2026 fiscal year, Jump Start is serving 80 children, while the birth-to-three program serves between 1,000 to 1,500 annually. Children cycle in and out of the program as their needs change.

Joya's staff of 74, which has doubled in size since moving into the new facility, includes physical, occupational and speech therapists, special education teachers, developmental specialists, a dietitian, a nurse, a medical director and family resource coordinators who connect families to additional supports.

Colleen's connection to the organization began in 1990 as a student teacher at the Guilds' School. A decade later, she returned as a parent and later served on the board. She began working with Joya about 10 years ago and has been executive director for seven years.

The youngest of her four sons had a cerebral hemorrhage shortly after birth and was not expected to survive. When he did, doctors said he was unlikely to walk or talk. Colleen said that today, he is 25, works at a bank and is getting

married at the end of May.

"He is social, capable and independent," she said. "I believe that is because of early intervention. At three, he still had struggles, but the work we did to support his brain development in those first three years allowed him to keep growing and progressing.

"It's why I'm here," she said. "We are fortunate in Spokane to have this center that can change the trajectory of the lives of children and their families."

Colleen attended St. Aloysius (St. Al's) Gonzaga and Gonzaga Preparatory School before earning a bachelor's degree in early childhood special education in 1991. She later worked as a nurse's aide with medically fragile children at St. Anne's Children's Home, a Catholic Charities program. She taught for 14 years at St. Al's school and was the childcare director there while her children were growing up.

"I live in the same block near Gonzaga as my childhood home and still attend St. Al's," said Colleen.

While her faith influences her commitment, she said "divine providence" shaped her career path, beginning with babysitting a boy with Down syndrome and hydrocephalus during Mass at St. Al's. His father served on the board when she was hired at the Guild's School.

Colleen emphasized that Joya is not religiously affiliated and serves families of any faith and no faith.

"Every day, I feel life in this building," she said. "I can have a difficult day and then walk down the hall and see a child who is in the image of God, walking with a walker or sitting in a wheelchair, working hard to gain new skills and full of life. In that, I see God."

As plans began for the capital campaign, the board and

staff recognized that the former name—Spokane Guilds' School and Neuromuscular Center—felt long and intimidating. The word "school" was often misunderstood as a K-12 program and limited funding opportunities.

"So we looked at what families associate with us," Colleen said. "It is joy, hope, positivity and potential."

They chose the name "Joya" after discovering that *joya* means gem or jewel in both French and Spanish and is a true reflection of how families and staff view the children they serve.

"We work with families who have just received devastating diagnoses and may have been told not to expect anything," said Colleen. "We want to be realistic, while also helping parents see their children's strengths and potential. That shift creates hope for the future."

About 65 percent of children leave the program at or before age three with age-appropriate skills, she said.

For those with ongoing needs, families continue parent coaching and have access to a lifelong network of support.

Staff coach families to embed intentional play into everyday routines, helping them recognize teachable moments dur-

ing meals, bath time and daily activities.

Staff provide many services in homes, childcare and community spaces, and transition groups to prepare children for preschool.

In 2025, Joya launched seven free community playgroups for infants and toddlers, supported by community grants. These include Storytime, Family Playtime, Mini Minglers, Mini Movers, Wednesday Waddlers, Playful Beginnings and Creative Curriculum. They help families learn about child development.

Colleen reported that 857 families—1,700 people—visited groups in February, March and

April, and 679 came more than once. The groups often serve as a first point of connection for families with developmental concerns.

Two-thirds of Joya funding is from state Early Support for Infants and Toddlers. About 20 percent comes from other government sources, grants, donors and annual events such as the Spring Gala, Telethon and Hearts of Joya. The remaining 17 percent is from insurance billing.

Colleen summarized: "Joya seeks to ignite hope, empower children and families, and establish lifelong skills."

For information, call 326-1651 or visit joya.org.

The Fig Tree's ongoing goal is "to break through divisions among people of faith to build understanding, and promote unity and action for the common good,"

said Fig Tree Board member Erica Salkin at the Benefit Lunch

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MLK Community Center grows into its space, adds resiliency hub

The Martin Luther King Jr. Family Center programs for preschoolers, before and after school and a summer program for children and teens have doubled in size since they moved in 2018 from the former firehouse on Sherman into the former East Central Community Center (ECCC) at 500 S. Stone.

Since becoming the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, it has built a 5,000 square foot addition to house Early Head Start, remodeled an empty space into be a teen tech center, remodeled an old garage into two preschool classrooms, remodeled and expanded the food bank and taken on the ECCC's program that provides seniors with breakfast, lunch and activities.

"We serve 1,500 to 2,000 people a year. The food bank serves 500 families a month—with about 1,400 members. We track them by age," said Freda Gandy, executive director.

The preschool added 20 slots with Early Head Start, and they added 40 more slots for infants and toddlers.

"By partnering with Community Colleges of Spokane (Spokane Colleges), we give families one more service under this roof. Families with a one- or two-year-old can bring that child. We receive three-to-five-year-olds in the preschool, plus school-aged kids before and after school," she said. "So, parents don't have to drop off their children of different ages at different locations."

While the center on Sherman has been vacant, Freda has been working with the city and an architect, using \$100,000 from American Rescue Plan Act funds to do a community needs assessment. They identified a need for childcare and affordable housing.

Freda and the board are proposing to replace the old fire station with a 20,000-square-foot building with 16 units of affordable housing on two floors and a ground floor for childcare and community gatherings.

"We bought the building in 2017," she said. "The city gave us credit for 20 years of improvements we had made and sold it to us for \$10,000."

The MLK Community Center leases the buildings at 500 S. Stone for \$1 a year from the City of Spokane.

"When we had the opportunity to manage and operate the community center, we realized we could house more services and have a larger impact," Freda said.

Staff doubled from eight to 15 with the expanded programs and additional programs, like the food



Freda Gandy stands beside mural of Martin Luther King Jr. at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center.

bank, which is run by staff and volunteers from 1 to 3 p.m., Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. In addition to food from Northwest Harvest and Second Harvest, companies, social services and churches do food drives.

"We ask for foods that homeless people can readily use—fruit, perishables, canned goods with pull tabs, breads, cereal and milk for those on special diets," she said. "We also seek foods culturally relevant to neighborhood families and refugee families—especially Ukrainian and Afghan families—from around Spokane."

Each month the food bank gives out 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of food. People from any zip code can visit the food bank once a week.

The center serves 100 to 125 kids a year in the preschool, before and after school and summer teen programs.

It partners with other organizations to house services and use the gym for cultural events like Juneteenth and Black Earth Day. It also rents the space for gatherings of the Nigerian Association and Filipino Association, for first birthday parties for the Marshallese community, weddings and other events.

"The gym is a gathering place for the community and people of diverse backgrounds to access resources and gather to connect," Freda added.

Other center spaces are used by groups like Take up the Cause, which works to increase the number of Black homeowners by addressing barriers to homeownership.

The Carl Maxey Center oc-

asionally uses the larger space, such as for its Black Business Expo, which will take place in September this year.

On May 12, there will be a ribbon cutting for another new program as the MLK Jr. Community Center becomes Spokane's and Eastern Washington's first resiliency hub.

As a resiliency hub, with solar back up and a natural gas generator, the center will provide resources to families during emergencies and natural disasters—such as windstorms, wildfires—that lead to power outages.

"Families come here for day-to-day services, so it's a natural place to come in a disaster," Freds said.

There will be first aid and emergency supplies, electrical power, water and food. While the power is out, people can come to charge medical devices and phones for people who stay at home.

This project has developed over two years in partnership with the Washington State Department of Commerce, Avista and the City of Spokane.

In a disaster in housing across the street can continue to come as they do from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Mondays to Fridays for breakfast, lunch, a fitness program, health workshops, medication management and STA paratransit to medical appointments. About 30 come each day.

Since expanding beyond early learning and youth empowerment programs, Freda has seen a major increase in food insecurity, especially since the

government shutdown and cut in food stamps last October.

With seniors whose families live elsewhere, she has seen their community family step in to fill their need to connect and access resources to improve their lives.

"We grow and step up to challenges to meet needs," said Freda, noting how her leadership has expanded.

In East Central Spokane, she sees health care as a big issue, especially for people of color, who do not feel heard when visiting health care providers. Other issues are affordable housing.

"People want to feel connected and safe and to be able to access resources in the neighborhood," she said.

Funding for the MLK Community Center's \$1.5 million annual budget comes from the state, city, foundation grants, Avista and donations.

With the new freeway connection to North Spokane coming closer, Freda hopes developers remember what happened when I-90 split East Central Spokane and displaced families.

"We want to continue the neighborhood's African American and multicultural identity, and the legacy and connectivity of seniors and families who have lived here from 40 to 60 years," said Freda. "This is one of Spokane's most culturally and racially diverse neighborhoods."

"In a multicultural community, children grow up in school beside children of diverse backgrounds. Regularly seeing others who do not look like them, they are not afraid of people who are different," pointed out Freda, who grew up in West Point, Miss.

"I moved here in the summer

1995 to attend Eastern Washington University to be a school counselor. As a single mom, I looked for services to help me be the best parent," she said. "I stumbled into the MLK Center with my preschool son. I volunteered and after graduating from EWU, I worked at the center as a social worker in the preschool, a kindergarten teacher and the director of children's and youth services before becoming executive director.

"Who would have thought that when I came looking for free childcare, I would develop a passion for this nonprofit work," she said, appreciative of the support she has had from other staff and community leaders like Happy Watkins, pastor of New Hope Baptist, and Ivan Bush, her predecessor, "who saw in me things I did not see."

With Happy and Ivan, she helped build the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Rally, March and Resource Fair that has grown from 500 gathering at the Performing Arts Center steps in 2011 to 3,000, filling three ballrooms at the Spokane Convention Center.

"I am committed to engage in this community, listen to people and their needs and address them with resources at the center, staying true to our mission when the MLK center started more than 50 years ago," she said.

"MLK Day celebrates the life and legacy of one of the greatest civil rights leaders. He left a blueprint, so we know what we need to do and know there is more to do," she said. "Dr. King's words resonate with what is going on in our world today."

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"There's a place for you here."

Four leaders return to Spokane with insights for their future actions

Continued from page 1
for seven years to consult with Providence Health Systems. She has founded Maji Rising to address the healthcare desert of East Central Spokane by building a 72-unit garden-style, mixed use, affordable inclusive housing community focused on meeting health care, early learning, financial and other needs of families. It will open in 2028.

She sought connections to learn about indigenous and modern ways of healing there. She expects to incorporate ideas from South African indigenous healing, including music, drums and singing, and the power of healing touch, smells and sounds.

Kitara is a community systems strategist and the founder of Gabriel's Challenge, a community-driven initiative focused on closing gaps across behavioral health, substance use, and youth and young adults systems of care.

She has held executive leadership roles in behavioral health—including as chief resources/people officer at Excelsior Wellness—and has contributed to state and national efforts focused on workforce strategy, organizational culture and inclusion.

After her 24-year-old son died of a fentanyl overdose in March 2025, she founded Gabriel's Challenge Community Coalition to honor him by strengthening coordinated care for youth and young adults with substance use and behavioral health challenges.

Kitara pointed out that during the Civil Rights movement, the Black church was not just comfort but brought opportunities for organizing, strategizing, meeting, planning and resisting. In South Africa, as in the U.S., she saw that faith is not passive but is "an active infrastructure for change."

Michael, who has worked for local TV, now runs B & B Pro Video to create digital video commercials, vignettes, testimonials, stories and documentaries for nonprofits. He serves on the boards of The Black Lens, Spokane Word, Holy Temple Church of God in Christ Trustees, the Juneteenth Coalition and Step Back Bobby Jack Foundation.

He saw similarities with how Black people were treated under apartheid in South Africa and how they were treated from slavery through the Jim Crow era, as well as today in the U.S.

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation and discrimination under white minority rule in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. It restricted the rights of non-white citizens with pass laws—to control movement, employment and housing—homelands and social inequality. It ended when President F.W. de Klerk repealed apartheid laws in the early 1990s because of global pressure and boycotts. Nelson



Lisa Gardner, Michael Bethley, Anna Franklin and Kitara Johnson-Jones.

Mandela was released from prison in 1990 after 27 years and was elected president in 1994.

Lisa observed that 30 years after apartheid, social, economic, educational and healthcare inequities continue.

"The civil rights movement happened before I was born. My generation experienced access to education, employment and opportunities, not segregation," Lisa said. "In South Africa, people still struggle for access."

Michael wrestled with seeing that in South Africa, as in the U.S., "some humans have the audacity to disregard other humans, in some cases in the name of Christianity or with the assumption of superiority," he said.

"In the U.S., how the majority tries to suppress minorities seems similar to how the minority in South Africa suppressed the majority," he said, concerned by the spread of hate in America.

"Coming to understand what happened there opened my eyes to know we have a long way to go," Michael added. "From my perspective, it's about money. People have power because of how much money they have. How do we stop them?"

He learned what South Africa, with the world's solidarity, did to help end apartheid by boycotting oil companies.

Kitara also recognized how religion through history has been misused by people in power.

"Many traditions, including Christianity, have been distorted at times, but that distortion is not doctrine. Misuse of Scriptures is not Scripture. Abuse in God's name is not God," she said, affirming her faith that Jesus is the Messiah does not dishonor her respect of the Jewish faith or any other faith.

At times, when invited to participate in an African spiritual ritual, she declined, "aware that Black history is layered and spiritually diverse. When I stood in my faith, I was not rejecting my African heritage but affirming the conviction that formed me."

For Kitara, being in South Africa was a reminder of the powerful role that faith played in the resistance there and here.

"Clergy stood with the oppressed. Leaders like Archbishop Desmond Tutu modeled courage rooted in conviction," she said. "He said, 'It's only one race, the human race.'"

That led her to affirm that her faith is not abstract.

"It sustained my mother, my grandmother and my great grandmother. It carried generations of Black Americans through injustice and oppression," she said.

When the group visited Robben Island, where Mandela was imprisoned, Lisa said she was angry at "the oppressive, unjust treatment of Black people across the world just because of the color of our skin."

Michael, who was two years old 40 years ago, said their guide, Mr. Bishop, had been a political prisoner there.

"He took us through the prison cells and spaces where he had been traumatized, done hard

work and endured discomforts. What a gesture of resilience and recovery," said Michael who felt the weight of history as Mr. Bishop handed him a key to hold.

When they visited the women's side of Constitution Hill, another prison, Mama Lillian took them to her cell. Michael said, "It took courage for her to share her story and relive her experiences."

"Mandela risked his life to end apartheid. He lost his freedom to gain freedom," said Lisa. "We who are leaders must continue to push in the face of adversity. Leaders often sacrifice to improve the lives of those they serve."

Lisa remembers watching TV

with her grandfather when Mandela walked out of prison, and she remembers when he became president. She has a photo on her wall of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Mandela.

"Having seen what Mandela meant to South Africa and the world, to be in his country was indescribable," she said. "To see injustice in another country gives me perspective on experiences of racism and discrimination in the U.S. Both countries still have disparities in education and poverty."

Anna experienced Robben Island as a sacred site where Mandela endured trauma but persevered. She shared in prayer, song and music there. She felt healing power from the traumatic energy there, because of Mandela's spiritual and mental wellbeing.

"As leaders, we must put the good of the community first," said Lisa, whose leadership is empowered by leaders who came before her in Spokane—Carl Maxey, Happy Watkins, Sandy Williams and her own grandmother Sarah Gardner.

"We need to be mindful of their leadership as we move the community forward into the future," Lisa said. "History shows that if we come together, we will be more powerful than those who try to tear us apart."

For information, email president@spokanenaacp.org, maji1619@outlook.com, kitarajohnson@gabrielschallenge.org or michael@bbpvideo.com.



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Students explore their place in U.S. religious, racial, political diversity

With a grant from Interfaith America, Gonzaga University's Religious Studies Department teachers have developed core curriculum courses centering on the reality of civic pluralism.

"We invite undergraduate students to reflect on their unique place in a religiously, racially, politically and economically diverse America," said Emily Clark, who has spent years researching and teaching American religious history.

Emily Clark joined colleagues Shannon Dunn and Daniel Pschaida to encourage students to reflect on their relationships with other people in the community.

Interfaith America invites university professors to develop new courses on civic pluralism and offers them resources on cultural and social bridge-building, on interfaith dialogue and work, and on how to relate with people in community.

"The grant requires that we use their resources, which has made developing courses easy," Emily said.

The three imagined a course in which each could incorporate their specialties. Shannon is an ethicist. Dan focuses on interfaith studies. Emily is a historian.

"We discussed how religious pluralism is part of civic pluralism," Emily said.

While there has been pressure to change teaching about diversity, she pointed out that it is a fact of life in U.S. history and the current situation in America.

"We live in a diverse society," she said. "In that pluralist American society where we have diverse opportunities, we need to see economic, religious and racial diversity as a strength if we focus on dialogue and building bridges over social, political and religious gaps."

Teaching the class from a historical perspective in the fall, Emily brought examples of tense moments, religious challenges and bridge building skills reflected in the Civil Rights movement and in Martin Luther King Jr's letter from the Birmingham jail, inviting people to engage differences grounded in shared values.

"The goal is to teach skills to the next generation to productively engage in their community," Emily explained.

Fall students told Emily that their goal is to live and see not only the effects of social polarization, but also solutions, so they do not just intersect with



Emily Clark encourages students to focus on relationships.

the world given to them. They want to productively change it.

In the fall, there were 23 students in the course geared as a first-year seminar class, not a lecture class.

Students worked in groups on a final project. One planned a campus event to involve students in a university-wide learning seminar that would engage students. They turned in a grant application to a fake Gonzaga office for bridge-building.

They proposed an obstacle course with partners handcuffed together and paired with people who are different. They needed to use teamwork and work with each other to solve problems, listening fully to a person they disagreed with.

Emily expects Daniel's version in the spring will be different.

"One student came back after Thanksgiving, having spent time with family members who have different political beliefs. Family members asked about the class. The student used the course as a natural way to have different political conversations with her parents, rather than thinking their dad was a racist. The student asked her father where he grew up that shaped his views to open conversation."

Skills from the class were a mix of interpersonal skills with skills from sociology and anthropology.

"It was like a lab moment to be in the family," Emily said.

"Most in the class were not too distinctive politically. Some were more liberal and some moderate, but they were of different religious backgrounds—atheist, Catholic, Mormon, Buddhist and Jewish," said Emily.

"When they focused on how to find shared values across differences, their values transcended religious, social and political differences," she said.

For example, despite different religious backgrounds, they valued family.

"They had diverse skills at meeting people in the community with different views on issues," she said. "How do we reach out and ask questions to find values in common?"

"Since I was a little kid, American culture has had impact on how people interact," explained Emily, who stepped away from church for about 15 years and became involved three years ago with St. Ann's parish, bringing her back into the church as she valued its focus on outreach and bridge-building in East Central Spokane.

"We offer a dignified way to help people experiencing homelessness find work," she said, telling of chatting with one man as he sanded church pews. He now lives in an apartment rather

than a van.

"Such bridge-building does not change the polarization of America, but it changes people involved in building bridges," said Emily, who grew up Catholic in San Antonio.

She entered college intending to be an orthopedic doctor because of injuries from playing soccer, but in her sophomore year, she failed an organic chemistry exam, a subject required for medical school.

Emily realized she loved the classes in religion and cultural anthropology, so she earned a degree in religion and anthropology in 2007 at Austin College in Texas, a master's degree in philosophy and religion at the University of Missouri in 2009 and a doctoral degree in 2014 at the State University of Tallahassee before coming to Gonzaga.

"While in graduate school, I was cynical and left a traditional congregation. It took Christianity deeply rooted in a community to bring me back," she said.

She was inspired to be a university professor by a professor who prompted her to think of the world and interact with it in new ways.

At Gonzaga, she teaches African American religions, an upper division seminar on Bad Religion—looking at why some religions like cults are categorized as bad—a class on the African diaspora and a class on American Christianities.

"I'm interested in how religions that are not mainstream are seen by the mainstream, often because of racial gender or economic issues.

The American Christianities course deals with the history of different churches and their interactions with native tribes, the role of religious intolerance and Gonzaga's focus on social justice.

"We look at the history of Americans afraid of religions they did not understand and how religions connect with broader American culture," she said.

In the African American class, students watched the popular film, "Sinners," a spoof on religion, vampires and racism in 1930s in Mississippi, building understanding of gospel music and blues. They saw it both in theaters and class.

Every class fulfills some graduation requirement. Some students are religion majors or minors, but most take classes because they fulfill the religion requirement, whether they are a major in business, biology, nursing or sociology.

"I value that at Gonzaga, the university's mission statement is taken seriously by most of the campus—faculty members and students," said Emily. "Those values are a commitment to social justice, to knowledge in culture, to make the world a better place and to build leaders for tomorrow."

"On the GU campus, we can ground conversation in the university mission of being people for others and everyone is on board," she said.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/news-events/stories/2025/3/26/cas-reli-fys-course-grant.

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More Than a Market

Habitat secures \$6.5 million for affordable housing, hosts benefit

Habitat for Humanity-Spokane secured more than \$6.5 million in state support to expand affordable homeownership in Spokane County. It is for investments in infrastructure, home construction and down payments to remove barriers keeping working families from purchasing a home.

Awards include \$2.3 million through the Connecting Housing and Infrastructure Program and \$4.2 million through the Washington State Housing Trust Fund. Together, these resources support more than 100 permanently affordable units in Spokane County and move Habitat projects closer to construction.

Infrastructure awards cover site improvements such as roads and utilities. Habitat received \$1 million for the Carnahan and 1st development in Spokane Valley, \$1 million for Highland Village

in Airway Heights and \$336,432 for the five-lot project at 3028 E. South Riverton in Spokane.

Housing Trust Fund support for Habitat construction and homebuyer access includes \$800,000 for the Carnahan site, \$1.2 million for the next phase of Highland Village and \$2.26 million in down payment assistance for Habitat homebuyers.

Together, these investments strengthen Habitat's ability to build affordable homes and walk with qualified buyers as they move toward purchase, reported Michelle Girardot, chief executive officer of Habitat-Spokane.

Despite a constrained budget, the state legislature approved a re-

cord \$55 million investment in the Housing Trust Fund, preserving a tool for affordable ownership and housing development, she added. Lawmakers also advanced policies to address cost and land barriers that slow or prevent affordable housing projects.

Among those actions, HB 1974 established land banking authorities that can acquire, stabilize and prepare hard-to-develop land for affordable housing. HB 1859 expanded affordable housing development on land owned by religious organizations by allowing increased density bonuses. Those changes improve conditions for building homes in communities where

they are needed most.

In the session, Habitat-Spokane's Government Affairs team engaged with state and federal policymakers on its commitment to build homes and shape public investments and policies that make affordable homeownership possible, said Michelle.

"Affordable homeownership takes land, infrastructure, public investment and partnerships along with construction," she said. "These awards and policy wins help us create more opportunities for families to build stability, equity and hope."

Habitat-Spokane's Hope Builders Luncheon will be held on Thursday, May 7, at the

Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., to raise funds to support affordable home ownership. Michelle said the aim is to raise funds to serve 25 families this year.

From 11 a.m. to noon is an interactive exhibit highlighting Habitat's programs, followed by a one-hour program with stories and calls to action.

For information, visit habitat-spokane.org/hbl.



Battlegrounds Market features Native artists

Battlegrounds Native Arts Market, a new retail space showcasing Native artists and creatives, opened May 2 in Airway Heights as a cultural space supporting Indigenous art in the Spokane region.

The market features Native-made artwork, including hand-crafted goods, visual art and unique pieces created by Indigenous artists from the region and beyond. It provides a platform for Native artists to share their work while fostering community connection, cultural expression and economic opportunity.

"This space is about uplifting Native voices and creating opportunities for artists to share their work," said Jeff Ferguson, executive director of Elk Soup.

The Native Arts Market is an initiative of Elk Soup, a Spokane-area nonprofit that empowers Native youth and strengthens community through cultural programs, education and art.

For information, Call 218-1929 or visit elksoup.org.



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Jadrian Tarver sees music as soundtrack for justice movements

When he moved in 2021 from Michigan to Spokane, Jadrian Tarver joined Gonzaga University as a postdoctoral lecturer in applied voice. After two years, he was appointed in fall 2024 to a tenure-track position as assistant professor of voice—the first Black faculty member in that role. In fall 2025, he became the first Black director of vocal studies.

He teaches applied voice, vocal arts ensemble, vocal pedagogy and Gospel Song literature for composition students who are creating music.

Soon after he came to Spokane, he became music director of Manito United Methodist Church.

In 2024, he co-founded and began directing United Black Voices of Spokane with 12 singers of Black descent from five historic Black churches—including Calvary Baptist, Morning Star Baptist and Holy Temple Church of God in Christ. They sing Gospel, spirituals, blues, classical and the gamut of Black American music.

In a recent concert, they joined Gonzaga’s Musea choir for students learning gospel, spirituals and Rhythm and Blues (RnB) music.

“Music is a catalyst and soundtrack for many social justice movements, like ‘We Shall Overcome’ and ‘This Little Light of Mine’ in the Civil Rights Movement,” said Jadrian, who teaches a first-year seminar, “Music and Social Justice,” which covers not just the Civil Rights Movement but also the way music influences artists to speak and use their voices—be it classical or folk.

“Music is there when we face adversity. Songs are quintessential to nurture community. Spirituals and music for the secular and the sacred are restorative and provide healing,” said Jadrian. “Like encoded imagery, freedom songs guide Black people to get from one point to the other.

“Music is always there. Even in its rests and silence, the heart is still beating and neurons are still firing. A pause is designed to reset and recalibrate us. Music also calls us to rest,” he said.

“I believe in adult learning—andragogy as well as pedagogy. In the solo-sung literature course that I offer for student composers, one 85-year-old man drives from Coeur d’Alene to work with 20-year-olds.

“He lived during the civil rights movement, heard Aretha Franklin’s ‘Respect’ when it came out and heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak,” said



Jadrian Tarver is music director at Manito United Methodist.

Jadrian. “I just see those on video.

“There is beauty in accessing learning from a cross-generation experience,” Jadrian said. “I learn from students of all ages in my classes, as I learned for many generations in my family.”

Jadrian grew up in Haines City, Fla., a small town in a singing, preaching and teaching family.

He was surrounded by and influenced by his sharecropper grandfather, who was born in 1912; his seamstress grandmother, born in 1920; his mother, who was a care professional, and his aunts, who were teachers, born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and many cousins.

The community knew and cared about each other—be it lending sugar or sharing use of a microwave.

“My grandfather said, ‘Charity begins at home and spreads abroad,’ which means we are to take love and kindness with us, so people feel at home and safe,” said Jadrian, who has done that in Atlanta, East Lansing and now Spokane.

As a youth, Jadrian was involved with the NAACP youth council, marches and work for community revitalization. Along with being involved in the community during high school, he was pianist and music director of New Beulah Missionary Baptist Church.

He described himself as *Bapticoastal*, because although he attended a Baptist church, his home worship experience was more spiritually expressive and rooted in Pentecostal traditions.

He studied music at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona, founded in 1904 by Mary McLeod Bethune, who paid \$1.50 to buy the property to start the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. She was an

educator, civil rights leader and advisor to U.S. presidents.

“She sold sweet potato pies to raise the money to start the girls’ school that grew to a university,” Jadrian said, reciting its mission “Enter to learn. Depart to serve.”

He studied there from 2006 to 2010, earning a degree in music education and serving as pianist and music director of St. John Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, working with the community and choir, and singing as cantor at the Catholic Church, which was active in community outreach.

Next, he studied vocal performance at Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he started a recital series, Sankofa, with friends who sang underrepresented and Black composers, including French, German and Caribbean composers.

“It was a pivotal moment for my interest in Black art songs and classical music for voice—like Beethoven, Schumann and Fauré. I also learned of the African American composer Robert Owens, who spent most of his adult life in Germany,” Jadrian said.

At Bethune-Cookman, his instructor, Curtis Rayan, a Black tenor, introduced him to Black composers and opera singers and Black contributors to classical music literature.

He knew of Gospel music, spirituals and freedom songs, but Curtis introduced him to classical Black artists.

Jadrian earned a master’s degree in 2012 and moved to Atlanta where he taught underprivileged students at the Atlanta

Music Program. He also was the music instructor, teaching beginning band and choir, at Brandon Hall Boarding School from 2015 to 2018.

“I learned that regardless of economic status, students want to be heard, listened to, valued, seen and loved,” he said.

He also kept “head-over-heels busy” teaching and performing for the Atlanta Opera, Peach State Opera and Capitol City Opera. In addition, he was staff singer and interim assistant music director for First United Methodist Church.

After he left Georgia University, he went to Michigan State University in East Lansing, where he earned a doctoral degree in vocal performance from 2018 to 2021.

There, he started Color Me Music to connect people in the musical world because so many music students are in silos based on their instruments.

To build ties, he worked with the dean of college curriculum and became project manager of Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB), working with the College of Music at Michigan State and its Wharton Performing Arts Center to create cultural opportunities for students and conversation on DEIB. He was also director of music at Eastminster Presbyterian Church.

After Jadrian graduated, a friend told him that Gonzaga was looking for someone to teach social justice music, voice lessons and voice education.

“The job fit what I do,” he said.

In his work directing the choir at Manito UMC, Jadrian said he appreciates being in-

involved in a community-focused church that serves more than 400 neighbors who use the building for AA groups, preschools, youth symphony and Comstock Neighborhood Council.

“Manito UMC lives what it preaches, and people live what they believe,” said Jadrian, who appreciates the sense of community he has found.

“In a profession like music, no matter where I go, I make my home,” he said, adding he is making Spokane home and his partner, nurse educator Carundlas Mathews, has recently joined him from Dallas.

Jadrian has also felt at home in different churches, finding fluidity moving from denomination to denomination and working with Blacks, whites and Latinos.

“From my faith experiences in many denominations, I see commonality. I believe that following Christ, loving God and loving our neighbors leads us into justice work with disenfranchised people,” he said.

“We are not all the same. We hold different beliefs, but can work together,” Jadrian affirmed.

He said his faith is influenced by the women in his life. His mother and aunts were not only devout but also charitable.

“I also saw them in a journey of faith feeding the hungry and clothing people,” he said.

His aunts, who were teachers, brought shoes, clothing and food for students who did not have those things. They did not want a student to feel left out. They might also take an unhoused child into their home.

“I credit them with my faith walk,” Jadrian said.

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Salish School of Spokane breaks ground, gains grants for new campus

Salish School of Spokane (SSOS) invites community members to its Golden Picha Groundbreaking, 2 to 3:30 p.m., Thursday, May 21, at 2720 W. Elliott Dr.

The ceremonial gathering includes prayers and blessings, student honor songs, the formal naming of the school and Golden Picha groundbreaking.

The Picha is the Salish people's traditional root digging tool.

Rooted in the language, culture and community, the ceremony is a step forward in creating the new SSOS campus dedicated to future generations of Salish learners and speakers.

Furthering progress toward the

new campus, in April, the Salish School of Spokane (SSOS) received two grants.

The Washington State Department of Commerce has awarded SSOS \$1,016,970.11 from the Early Learning Facilities fund toward construction of the early learning wing of its new Education Building that will double its capacity to serve young children with Salish immersion care and instruction.

"With this award, we have \$2.3 million left to raise for the first phase of our campus," said co-executive directors Kim Richards of the Mescalero Apache Tribe and Brea Desautel of the Colville Confederated Tribes.

"For 15 years, the founders, staff and families served have worked to revitalize Salish language, culture and community in limited facilities. Now we are ready for the next step in our journey: a permanent home for Salish School of Spokane surrounded by a 30-acre conservation forest and the Spokane River," they said.

In addition, Avista's Named Communities Investment Fund (NCIF) gave a \$724,000 Clean Energy Grant to support clean energy infrastructure at the new campus. It will fund designing and installing rooftop solar photovoltaic systems and battery energy storage for its education

building and Cultural and Recreational Community Center.

These solar systems will help prevent interruption of operations in power outages and fit the school's commitment to environmental responsibility and energy independence. They will strengthen long-term energy resilience and lower operating costs, increasing services for students, staff and the community.

"This investment represents a partnership grounded in shared values," said Kim. "By integrating solar power and battery storage into our campus, we are building a facility that supports educational excellence, cultural continuity and long-term resilience."

"This is the kind of partnership we hope for with our clean energy grant program," said Kristine Meyer, Avista NCIF program manager. "The Salish School envisions a campus that strengthens language, culture and community. Avista brings our energy expertise and grant resources to help make that vision a reality."

SSOS's new campus will expand Indigenous language education, community programming and cultural learning while incorporating sustainable, resilient infrastructure.

For information, call 325-2018 or visit salishschoolofspokane.org.

Mental Health Awareness Month

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Lecturer's thesis examines caste mindset under which he grew up

By Molly Ertel

Manoj Thirupal (Maa-noh Thih-roo-puhl), born in a slum in Chennai, India, is now a postdoctoral teaching fellow and lecturer at Gonzaga University's School of Leadership Studies. He received his doctor of philosophy degree there in 2025 by developing Caste Mindset Theory.

"This theory examines how caste hierarchy lives in beliefs, reflexes and bodily memory. It regenerates across generations. The law can address the bone, the visible structure, but the marrow, hidden inside it, does not change on its own," said Manoj of his research.

He teaches at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

The youngest of five children, Manoj said his uncle chose his name, a common practice in South India. The uncle, a cricket fanatic, chose Manoj Prabhakar, the name of his favorite cricket player. Manoj also plays cricket as a bowler, like a pitcher in baseball, the same position his uncle's idol played.

Manoj was born into the lowest caste, the Dalit caste, also referred to as "untouchables." His experiences have been the source of his research that asks the question: "How do we find healing from what hierarchy has deposited in us?"

"Dalit means broken, but I have reclaimed it to mean resilient. Now I am expanding the meaning to include healing," Manoj explained.

While the caste system was outlawed in India in 1950, in practice it still remains. A person born a Dalit must show a caste certificate whenever asked. This system has existed for about 3,000 years, said Manoj, pointing out that even now its foundational principles remain ingrained in Indian society.

"My body knows how to react as a low caste person," he said.

He gave the example of policemen forcing their way into his family's home in Chennai. They implied that Manoj and his father had committed a crime saying, "We know who you are." Manoj and his father knew rationally that they had not done anything wrong, but their bodies followed orders.

They climbed into the police van as generations of compliance had taught them. In a rare occurrence of solidarity, neighbors intervened on their behalf, and both were released.

Dalits are not only accused of crimes they did not commit but are also victims of caste-based hate crimes.

"When I was in 10th grade, my sister, Jessie, was assaulted by an unknown perpetrator. She lost two fingers on each hand and was stabbed in the head 22 times. We never thought she would live



Manoj and his wife Katherine Thirupal hold twins during a visit from his mother Mariammal from India.

but she survived it," he said.

This assault against his sister impacted Manoj at a deep level.

"I asked myself for the first time what my life was for," he said.

"Fill my hands so that I have something to share with others." This prayer came to Manoj shortly after Jessie's attack. Instead of being consumed by a desire for revenge, he prayed for wisdom, joy and healing. He understood that the way out of oppression was through education.

"I was not a great student," Manoj laughed, but with his new perspective he turned to books as a form of self-education outside of school. He read about the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a Dalit and a scholar who studied at Columbia University and the London School of Economics. On Christmas in 1927, he burned the Manusmriti, the ancient text that codified caste hierarchy. He later became the principal architect of India's constitution which came into force in 1950. Manoj took inspiration from his example that a Dalit person could go as far as he chose, regardless of caste.

He also focused on learning to speak English. Although taught in middle school, it was mostly memorization, not conversation. Manoj already spoke three South Indian languages—Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam—but understood that the way out of poverty was to become fluent in English.

"I started speaking English, not good English. I made a bunch of mistakes." His fearlessness served him well. It took some time but today his English is impeccable.

The first in his family to graduate high school, Manoj attended Loyola College in Chennai on a full scholarship, where he received a bachelor's in finance in 2012 and a master's in social work in 2014.

"I did not choose Gonzaga. Gonzaga came to me," he said.

As a college freshman, Manoj began working at the Janodayam Social Education Centre (JSEC); the name means "people arise." It is a nonprofit that serves

Dalits in 132 urban slums. This is where Gonzaga, in the person of Aaron Danowski, came to Manoj.

In 2014, Gonzaga was selected to host the Opus Prize, an annual, faith-based award for organizations aiding disadvantaged populations. Aaron, a Gonzaga freshman at the time, was serving as a juror on the team that traveled to Chennai to appraise JSEC as one of the finalists.

Aaron saw Manoj as a whole person, not a lesser being defined by his caste. They became close friends and corresponded online for 17 months. This was a challenge for Manoj who had to go to an internet café where he could access a computer and the internet.

Aaron was able to fundraise through the Gonzaga community and alumni donors. His family purchased Manoj's airplane ticket. Manoj stepped off the plane at the Spokane Airport on a chilly day in late October 2015 without even a sweater.

It was his first time on an airplane and out of his country. Janine Warrington, Aaron's friend and classmate whom Manoj had also become acquainted with in India, met him at the airport. Aaron's family provided Manoj with a home and a family. Gonzaga became his community.

The friendship between Manoj and Aaron has come full circle at Gonzaga with Manoj, a faculty member in the School of Leadership Studies, and Aaron, a training and development specialist in the Office of Mission Engagement, while also pursuing his doctoral degree.

Family is everything to Manoj. He expresses the greatest love

and respect for his mother, Mariammal. As a manual scavenger, cleaning the sewers and latrines of Chennai, she provided for her family with dignity.

She gave birth to five children, of which three survive today. Her oldest son died as a small child and the second, a daughter, died as a young adult from injuries at the hands of her husband. Mariammal, a widow, is raising her daughter's two boys as her own.

Of the remaining siblings, Jessie, who is two years older than Manoj, is married and, having finished her education with Manoj's help, is a social worker. His older brother, Vinoth, works in an exporting business and is a part-time Assembly of God pastor.

"I was raised Catholic by my mother who finds solace in prayer. I find comfort in the Jesuit tradition that cares for the whole person. I never experienced that growing up as a Dalit." The faith journey in Manoj's family from Hinduism to various Christian denominations shows how central faith is to the family.

Here in Spokane, Manoj now has his own family. His American-born wife, Katherine, is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Reardan.

"I worship and serve alongside my wife at the Presbyterian Church but remain deeply rooted in Jesuit values," said Manoj.

The couple has twins, Micah Douglas and Naomi Maria, who were born in February of 2025. They are the first in his family born free of caste labeling. Rounding out the Thirupal family is their dog, Samosa.

Manoj's mother, Mariammal, visited the Spokane branch of her family the summer of 2025. Though unable to remain on a permanent basis, she was able to meet her daughter-in-law and grandchildren. It was the first time she'd ever been out of the country or on an airplane, as was true for her son 10 years earlier.

"Fill my hands so that I might share with others has been my prayer since middle school. I think the prayer is starting to be answered now." Manoj is building a life of sharing based on what he has lived and learned. He hopes to earn tenure at Gonzaga when his fellowship ends in the summer of 2027 so that he can live the prayer through the Jesuit mission of love and service, and in so doing, continue to fill his hands.

For information, email thirupal@gonzaga.edu.

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Whitworth Online degree serves adults

Whitworth Online transitions all undergraduate programs for adult learners to accelerated 90 credit degrees to expand access to education for working adults and respond to workforce needs.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) approved the new paths to reduce time and cost of a degree by about 25 percent while preserving Whitworth's full general education curriculum and program, said Whitworth President Scott McQuilkin.

Whitworth has served adult learners for more than 100 years, with degree programs in formats accessible to working adults. Whitworth Online programs are for students ages 23 and older with professional experience.

The model strengthens the legacy while setting Whitworth as a leader in innovative online education in the Northwest, he said.

"Innovation grows out of our mission," Scott added. "Accelerated degree pathways allow us to remove unnecessary barriers while preserving the depth, formation and academic excellence that define Whitworth education. This honors adult learners' time, expands access and strengthens the communities we serve."

Beginning in August, Whitworth Online programs from business management and human services to teacher certification pathways and interdisciplinary studies will adopt the accelerated, 90 credit structure.

This new structure:

- Preserves Whitworth's core curriculum, retaining general education requirements.

- Cuts unnecessary credits of excess electives to streamline students' path to graduation.

- Maintains Title IV eligibility while advancing cost clarity to ensure that students have a transparent and affordable path forward.

"When working adults can complete a degree faster with less debt, the benefits ripple to families, employers and the community," said Brooke Kiener, dean of Whitworth Online.

The university encourages employers to expand or reinstate tuition assistance.

For information, visit whitworth.edu

Library ties in with national programs

With Spokane Public Library's aim to inspire a thriving city through cultural and educational opportunities, Andrew Chanse, executive director introduced two programs—One Book, One Coast and the Yiddish Book Center's Public Libraries program.

Spokane Public Library joins more than 140 library systems in Washington, Oregon and California to read and discuss one book, fostering connection, literacy and conversation.

It is also one of 40 libraries nationwide participating the Yiddish Book Center's program on "Between Two Worlds: Exploring Jewish Culture and Religion through Yiddish Literature."

For One Book, participants read actor, activist, author George Takei's memoir *They Called Us Enemy*, written with Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott and illustrator Harmony Becker. It recounts George's childhood in U.S. incarceration camps in World War II and explores patriotism, identity and civil rights.

People can check out a physical copy, read the eBook through the Libby app or access a no-wait digital edition on Comics Plus.

"*They Called Us Enemy* invites conversations on history, identity and justice," said Andrew.

In partnership with Asians for Collective Liberation, Spokane Public Library will host events on the book's themes.

- The first is an online reading and discussion with Colorado Book Award Winner Brandon Simoda, author of *The Afterlife Is Letting Go*, at 7 p.m., Thursday May 7, online. His work examines the impacts of Japanese American incarceration.

- The second is a community discussion of *They Called Us Enemy* with journalist Lisa Heyamoto and author Sharma Shields at 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 12, at Liberty Park Library, 402 S. Pittsburg. The book's themes are resilience, identity and history.

- The final One Book, One Coast event with Takei will be livestreamed from 2 to 4 p.m., Sunday, May 31, on YouTube.

The Yiddish program explores how the language—once prominent in Eastern Europe and now spoken by only 500,000 to 1 million people—dwindled after the Holocaust, when the world lost half of its Yiddish-speaking

people. The Yiddish Book Center seeks to revitalize the language and share the richness of Jewish life, religion and culture today.

Spokane Public Library received a grant to send a staff member, Becky Mace, to a three-day workshop in November 2025 at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass.

"I met librarians from around the country and learned about Yiddish and its vibrant culture," she said.

Of the grant, \$2,000 supports events and provides more than 50 Yiddish-translated materials for the library collection.

Events include 1) "Fiddler: A Miracle of Miracles," at 1 p.m., Sunday, May 17 at Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley Ave.; 2) a discussion of *Tevye the Dairyman* by Sholem Aleichem at 2:45 p.m., Sunday, May 17, at Shadle Park Library, and 3) "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Finding Personal Meaning in the Jewish Immigration Story," at 2 p.m., Sunday, May 31 at South Hill Library, 3324 S. Perry St.

For information visit spokan- elibrary.org

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Gonzaga Climate Center marks fifth year

The Fifth Anniversary Celebration of the Gonzaga Institute for Climate, Water, and the Environment will honor its transformative work advancing climate education, regional climate resilience, and deepening the community conversation around the rapidly changing climate.

The event will be held at 5 p.m., Saturday, May 23 at Bzarth Mansion, 2145 N. Fair-

wood Dr.

Speakers include Katia Passerini, the president of Gonzaga University.

The Institute was founded to respond to the most urgent environmental challenges of our time.

It embodies Gonzaga's Jesuit commitment to justice and care for the humans' common home. Its mission is guided by the

vision of thriving, equitable human societies within flourishing ecological communities.

It engages in scholarship, teaching, and capacity building to promote the well-being of Inland Northwest communities, waters, and lands in the face of a changing climate.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/climate-institute/events/5th-anniversary-celebration.

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Long-time Fig Tree volunteer editor continually amazed by stories

By Kaye Hult

Almost from the inception of The Fig Tree, Mary Mackay has been there to lend a helping hand. She is one of The Fig Tree's longest standing supporters and volunteers.

She joined the Advisory Committee, helping wherever needed, including with deliveries in the memorably hot summer of 1984, just after the first issue came out.

"I attended the Advisory Committee for three years," she said.

She backed away from volunteering to further her education.

"Even when I was not active, with The Fig Tree, it was always an interest," she said.

Since shortly before she retired in 2002, along with her husband, ophthalmologist Alan with whom she worked, Mary has been a mainstay among The Fig Tree's volunteers.

She continues to help out in a variety of ways, including with editing since before she retired, when she helped occasionally.

"I find it amazing every time we see articles for the first editing round," she reflected.

"The stories are so interesting! People we write about have been working quietly, getting things done, helping people, seeing where there's need," she continued. "Some people are courageous in taking on difficult jobs. Every month I discover things I didn't know."

Mary also participates on the Development and Benefit Planning Committee, where she helps with financial planning, organizing the annual Spring Benefit Lunch, the Breakfast-Time Benefit and other projects.

Once a month, she joins another group of volunteers for a morning to prepare the mailings.

"My passion for giving of my time to the community came from my parents and wider family," she said.

"I'm a first-generation immigrant. My dad was born in Scotland," Mary said. "My mother was good at making people see



Mary Mackay

on the other sides of things.

"I was born in Charleston, W.Va., where my dad worked for Union Carbide. From there, we moved to Willoughby, Ohio, where a neighbor took me to a Methodist church.

"When we moved to Scarsdale, N.Y.," Mary continued, "my family belonged to a nondenominational Congregational church. Dad taught Sunday school. My grandmother took us to a Presbyterian church in Yonkers. We'd take the trolley and then walk.

"From 1949 to 1955 we lived in Middlebury, Vt., where I attended high school at St. Mary's in the Mountains at Littleton, NH," she said. "I met students from other countries there."

My mother moved to Cambridge and went to Holland. In 1956, Mary and her sister met her mother, aunt and uncle for a bus trip to France, Holland and other European countries.

"I particularly remember Nancy, France. It was 11 years after the war had ended," she said. "That town had pretty well recovered. Some people we met on the bus took us to their homes and told us what happened in Holland where the land had been recovered from flooding. In Holland and France, we could still see marks of devastation from

the war. Seeing men who had been wounded in war and the destruction around the cathedral in Cologne brought home how devastating the war was.

"At home, we didn't see wounded people or scarred communities," she said, noting that those experiences widened her world view.

Mary attended Radcliffe for two years before transferring to the University of Vermont in Burlington to be near Alan. She began studying chemistry but transferred to biology and earned a bachelor of arts in 1959.

"While there I had a woman mentor," she said. "I worked with the University of Vermont pathology department for two years in blood coagulation studies, testing the accuracy of a new type of blood cell counting machine."

She and Alan moved to Rochester, N.Y., for his residency in ophthalmology. There she attended graduate school at the University of Rochester, earning a master of science in biology in 1963.

Then Alan was drafted into the Air Force for two years, and they moved to Missouri. They returned to Rochester, so Alan could continue his ophthalmology studies, and Mary worked in biochemistry research.

"In the winter of the record-breaking snow in January 1969, we moved to Spokane, and Alan started his practice," she said.

Mary began to find her way in this new community. She joined the League of Women Voters, becoming their scribe.

Mary went to Episcopal churches in Vermont and New Hampshire. When they were married in an Episcopal Church in Cambridge, they were encouraged to find a church home. They joined First Congregational in Burlington, Vt., while Alan finished medical school. After her older sister married a Jewish man and converted, part of their family gatherings included Jewish traditions—especially Hanukkah at Christmas. She and

Alan joined Westminster United Church of Christ in Spokane.

In the mid-1980s, she began volunteering with The Fig Tree until she decided to further her education. She went to Eastern Washington University, receiving a bachelor of arts in education in 1989. For a while, she went to Plummer as a substitute. Then she taught anatomy and physiology at Spokane Falls and took computer programming classes.

From the late 1980s until the early 2000s, Mary worked in Alan's office, doing the computer work and billing.

Beside working, Mary began to play violin again and joined Monday Musicale—singing in their Madrigal group—Spokane Falls Community Orchestra, the Project Joy orchestra and a string orchestra. Recently she has given up those groups because she and Alan are going frequently to Bellingham where both their daughters live with their families.

"I was still working when I started editing for The Fig Tree occasionally, but I have done more since Alan and I retired in 2002," she said.

Once she retired, Mary said, she decided volunteering at The Fig Tree would be a neat thing to do. "I like ecumenism. I like the stories. They excite me.

"I went to The Fig Tree 2003 Breakfast and agreed to volunteer," she said. "The next summer, I came on the Board and served for about five years,

including as secretary."

After Westminster UCC asked her to become clerk for their board, she left The Fig Tree board. Even so, Mary continues to find ways to bolster the work of the Fig Tree.

"I believe in the concept of people working together and finding common ground," she reflected. "Articles show different ways of life, the joys and problems of life, and people who make a difference. There are a lot of people of goodwill around.

"To me there are new articles about people each month. It's amazing what people of different faiths do," Mary said.

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

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This summer, Innovia Foundation is bringing The Longest Table, a national movement connecting people over dinner and conversation, to Eastern Washington and North Idaho. By launching this initiative locally, Innovia will help neighbors in 20 counties gather face-to-face.

"As our nation marks the 250th anniversary of its founding, this initiative offers a meaningful opportunity to reflect on where we are today – both as a

country and as a region – and to imagine the hopes and possibilities we hold for the future," said Molly Sanchez of Innovia.

"Longest Table gatherings transform public spaces into welcoming places of connection, where strangers become neighbors and neighbors become friends. By coming together around the table, participants are invited into conversation that sparks dialogue, deepens a sense of belonging, fosters

understanding, reduces isolation, and strengthens trust across communities."

Beginning in April, Innovia will offer microgrants of up to \$2,500 to fund Longest Table gatherings hosted across the region between June 1 and September 30. Grants may be used to cover costs such as tables, chairs, permits, promotional materials and youth activities.

For information, visit innovia.org/the-longest-table.

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Multi-racial, cultural community invites unity in action on voting rights

Having lived six months in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-gender, multi-lingual, multi-age, multi-political, multi-struggle, multi-Christian community, I carry the impact of those conversations and challenges in my everyday life. We lived together at the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute in a Swiss chateau near Geneva. Then we dispersed after sharing meals, worship, Bible studies, studies, discussions, dialogue, informal interactions together as a community.

We acknowledged and respected our different experiences of oppression, hate, abuse, exclusion—sharing the trauma and impact, not quantifying whose experience was worse but validating each other despite our differences. We need to be cautious when statistics are used as a means of excluding, alienating, invalidat-

ing suffering to divide people.

Together and in solidarity, we emerged opposing racism, oppression, nationalism and hate.

When I listen to people of different races and cultures in the U.S. multicultural society struggling for power and using histories of colonialism, oppression or racism to quantify whose experience was worse, I'm sad if we do not hear the common impact of those experiences across the differences. When I heard about the Supreme Court's ruling weakening the Voting Rights Act that we won in the Civil Rights movement, I am sad but motivated to work with the NAACP and others to restore what has been lost.

The NAACP brings interracial power to overcome struggles that divide us—people working together beyond the tone of their skin. As the NAACP said, "The

Supreme Court betrayed Black voters, they betrayed America, and they betrayed our democracy." I might add that it betrays not only all workers but all in the middle class. Whose rights will be next?

We need to be in solidarity with all those who experience hate, oppression and exclusion. Part of dismantling racism is to unite, as we did in the Civil Rights movement, across all our multiple differences. Gutting voting rights for Blacks guts democracy and any chance of economic equality and justice.

When the NAACP says they are fighting an assault on freedom, it affects everyone. As German theologian Martin Niemoller said they first came for Jews, Roma and disabled and then the political dissidents.

As we remain divided and diverted by political theater, the rich will get richer and the poor poorer. Though we may differ,

your pain is my pain. We must not allow ourselves to be put down as "weak" as we embody traits of faith that empower us to unite—empathy, mercy, humility, love, truth telling and truth listening.

I learned living day-to-day in that diverse community that people can and do understand and empathize, so we can stand in solidarity against evil, oppression and lies. We need step out of our silos to risk trusting each other.

We are all part of the family of God—across all our faiths, spiritualities and value systems. We cannot let our different understandings of and experiences of any form of discrimination divide us.

We must unite to restore voting rights to enfranchise all people. The fight for racial, social and economic justice and the fight for democracy are connected.

Mary Stamp - Editor

Six stops in Good Friday pilgrimage offered questions for reflection

At each station during "The Way of the Cross: A Spokane Pilgrimage" on Good Friday, April 3, from Salem Lutheran to Riverfront Park, faith leaders asked questions for reflection.

At the first station at Salem Lutheran (Jesus before the Sanhedrin): "In what ways do we too look for testimony that fits our preconceived judgments? In what ways do we ignore the truth when it does not fit our purposes?"

At the second station at the Spokane County Courthouse (Pilate tries Jesus) "In what ways do our state powers also

ask the wrong questions of vulnerable people? In what ways does our immigration system ask people who they are in ways that make no sense?"

At the third station at Spokane County Jail (Jesus is crucified): "In what ways have we said to people in detention centers, Save yourself? In what ways have we said to people who are undocumented, Save yourself? In what ways have we said to people caught in the injustice of our immigration system, Save yourself?"

At the fourth station at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Field Office

(the condemned speak to Jesus): "In what ways have we remembered those women the state had disappeared and deported? In what ways have we forgotten?"

At the fifth station at River Park Square/Mall (Casting Lots): "Who profits from the violence our government inflicts on vulnerable people? What can we do about it?"

At the sixth station, which was held at Riverfront Park (Jesus dies on the cross and Jesus is placed in the tomb): "Where are we still complicit in our neighbors' suffering? Where are you willing to act

in meaningful solidarity?"

The organizers suggested some actions: supporting immigrants by donating to support legal aid through Manzanita House at manzanitahousespokane.org, sharing Know Your Rights information with businesses, being trained to accompany immigrants to immigration check-ins, taking Rapid Response training to document ICE activity, joining Supportive Friends Teams at Feast World Kitchen or supporting immigrant and refugee-serving organizations and immigrant-owned businesses by visiting <https://linktr.ee/handsoffwa>.



Editorial Reflections

Icon remnant on abandoned dome of St. Nikolla monastery near Mesopotam

The Bektashi World Headquarters Tekke of Tirana

Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ of Tirana

Namgazga Great Mosque - Tirana

Religious life in Albania is a story of resurrection, restoration, rebirth

In this holy season of the Great 50 Days of Easter, we are sharing the wonderful story of the resurrection of religious life in Albania.

In our sabbatical through African and European countries rimming the Mediterranean Sea, a surprising shining jewel was Albania.

In Albania, we witnessed the resurrection, restoration and rebirth of religious life. We experienced harmonious coexistence, intentional intersection and purposeful partnership of Christians and Muslims.

Albania was a small but bright light during the terror-ridden Nazi era. Practicing a core value of besa (protection), Muslims and Christians protected Jews and refused cooperation with Nazis. Albania was the only country where the Jewish population increased during World War II, as these feisty people made trouble for Nazis and held safe space for Jews.

Today there are few Jews in Albania. Most emigrated to the newly independent Israel and fled the terror of the communist dictatorship after WWII.

Many remember the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, when Communist regimes gripped nations and enacted purges on their own people. Under Enver Hoxha, Albania was one of the most repressive, isolative Communist dictatorships.

Albania has a long, tense history of subjection to foreign powers—Rome, Constantinople, Venice, Sicily, Serbia, the Ottoman Empire, Italy and other countries through the early 20th century. Across centuries, there have been uprisings for independence, including efforts in WWII to repulse Italian fascists and

German Nazis.

Religiously, Albania has embraced the diversity of Abrahamic faiths for centuries. Christianity has been there since the first decades after Christ. Judaism arrived about 70 C.E. Islam came in the 1300s with the Ottoman Empire. Christianity is primarily Orthodox and Roman Catholic with some Protestants. Islam is also diverse—Sunni and Bektashi Sufi. There is also a high percentage of undeclared or unaffiliated "believers" and some atheists.

The post-WWII takeover by Hoxha and the Communist party led to purges of political opposition. Soon came purges of religion. All religions and religious speech were banned. All houses of worship were destroyed or turned into warehouses, bars or military facilities. All forms of Christianity, Islam and Judaism were annihilated by the State. Albania was declared an atheist nation.

Even cemeteries were destroyed to obliterate sacred memory. Many priests, imams, babas and rabbis were martyred, exiled or forced to adopt non-religious life. Most Jews emigrated to the new nation of Israel. Brutal repression continued for nearly 50 years, as the regime sought to enforce faith in itself as the almighty state and in its almighty dictator.

When we arrived last summer, there were beautiful new churches and mosques in cities and villages across the country. In the 1990s, the repressive regime toppled and was overthrown. Albania slowly but steadily and peacefully emerged into a democratic nation. Religious freedom was reinstated. Then came many years of restoration and resurrection of faiths.

Religious leaders who went into hiding

50 years earlier were quite old and not able to lead, but new life came forth. It came from other nations with leaders who came to help and also from people who had held the faith privately and in secret with their children and grandchildren.

From the ashes and ruins, faith was restored, resurrected and reborn. The first gatherings for public worship were in ruins of old churches and mosques. Thousands came out for worship. Over 25 years, hundreds of new houses of worship were built and hundreds more were restored. Thousands of new leaders were trained and deployed across the country. Hundreds of new social care agencies, schools, universities and hospitals were launched.

We saw many churches, mosques, tekkes and shrines. We were thrilled to join worshippers in the capital, Tirana, at the Orthodox Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ—so powerfully named to honor and celebrate Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of Christian faith in Albania. There, we met Sonila Dedja, who leads the women's ministry and co-leads interfaith collaboration in this small nation.

Sonila lived her childhood under the repressive autocratic state. Her grandfather was an Orthodox priest before the regime outlawed all religion and faith. He was unable to practice his faith in any open way, but he found ways to share and pass on his faith in hidden ways.

He told people bits of the teachings and healing ministries of Jesus without mentioning his name or other names. For example, he would say, "There was once this philosopher (or teacher) who

told a story about a foreigner who helped someone really beat up and abandoned on the side of a road, when no one else stopped to help—and this showed what a real neighbor was like."

Sonila grew up with her grandparents. Every night her grandfather blessed her with four kisses, on her forehead, then her chin, then each cheek. Without saying so, he made the sign of the cross on her. As the regime crumbled, and educational and religious freedom were restored, Sonila learned what was behind what her grandfather said and did, and she embraced Christian faith wholeheartedly as her true home. She now helps lead the Orthodox Church of Albania as a lay theologian and minister in its time of arising to new life.

Sonila's story is one among so many, across faiths. This is what we Christians would say resurrection looks like. Faith restored and renewed in Christian and Muslim forms, and a welcoming return opened for Jewish forms—and all the individual stories of faith reawakened or found again in a new generation. All are signs of new life.

New Life arises as the great, steady, unrelenting power of Love that bursts with light from the tomb, that reawakens life in what we thought was dead and lost, that calls us by name.

We pray all will hear the ever-merciful, all-embracing call of God, to follow Love and rise with the power of Life that cannot be annihilated.

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner and The Very Rev. Heather VanDeventer are Episcopal priests in Coeur d'Alene and Spokane.

Calendar of Events

Area code is (509) unless listed. Deadline 3rd Fridays

Ongoing • Second Harvest Food Sorting, 2-harvest.org

Mondays • Culture Nights, American Indian Community Center, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., aiccinc.org

Tues/Fri • Language of Life, Non-Violent Communication Practice Group, NAACP Spokane Building Restorative Communities Initiative, Tues 10 to 11:30 a.m., Liberty Park Library, Fri 12:30 to 2 p.m., Zoom, register brcspokane@gmail.com

May 1-31 • Be the Bridge Art Exhibit, Asian American Heritage Month (AAHM), Saranac Building, 25 W. Main, 6 to 8 p.m., aclspokane.org

May 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 • LGBTQ+ Seniors of the Inland Northwest, weekly Zoom social hour 4 p.m., lgbtqseniorsoftheinlandnorthwest.com

May 3 • Sharing the Dharma Day, Sravasti Abbey, "Working with Anger," 692 Country Ln, Newport, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 447-5549, sravastiabbey.org

• Spring Choral Celebration, Gonzaga, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 2 to 3:30 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events

• Organ Academy Recital, American Guild of Organists Spokane, St. John's Cathedral, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 402-319-1716, spokaneago.org

May 4, 11, 18 • Serviceberry: Abundance & Reciprocity in the Natural World book conversation, Indigenous educator Tamika LaMere, NAACP Spokane, Building Restorative Communities, 808 E. Sprague, 4:30 to 5:45 p.m., brcspokane@gmail.com

May 5 • National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/People (MMIP) Exhibit/Installation, Arevalo Student Mall, Eastern Washington University (EWU), 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., ewu.edu/campus-events

• Foster Care Day, Lutheran Community Services NW, Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 4 to 5:30 p.m., 343-5020, lcsnw.org

• How Labor Unions Are Fighting Trump's Actions Against Working Families and U.S. Democracy, Talk about It Tuesday, PJALS panel, moderated by Pui-Ya Lam, Zoom, 6 to 7:30 p.m., pjals.org

May 5, 12, 19, 26 • Heartistry: Artistic Wellbeing, environment for self-discovery, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit, 3 to 5 p.m., 279-0299

• Passage Meditation Group, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 534-7954, spokanebuddhisttemple.org

May 5-July 28 • Global Food & Art Market, The Gathering House, 733 W. Garland, Tues 4 to 8 p.m.

May 6 • Environmental Book Club, Save Our wild Salmon, Jupiter's Eye Café, 5:30 p.m., wildsalmon.org

May 6-7 Washington State Nonprofit Conference, Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA), online, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., nonprofitwa.org

May 6, 13, 20, 27 • Beginning Buddhism with Thubten Chonyi, Sravasti Abbey, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 447-5549, sravastiabbey.org

May 7 • The Fig Tree Development/Benefit meeting noon and **Board** 1 to 3 p.m., Zoom, 535-4112

• Ending Global Poverty: How Spokane Can Help, The Borgen Project, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 5 p.m., 893-8350, borgenproject.org

• Tour the YWCA Spokane, 930 N. Monroe, 5:30 to 7 p.m., ywcaspokane.org

• "The Afterlife Is Letting Go," AAHM, ACL Spokane, 7 p.m., 444-5300, telref@spokanelibrary.org

May 7, 14, 21, 28 • Taizé Prayer, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartletts@gonzaga.edu

May 8-9 • Family Fun Fair & Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander Heritage Festival, Fri 1 to 6 p.m., Sat 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4:30 to 7 p.m.

• Bella Cristo Spring Handbell Concerts, 8th Millwood Presbyterian, 3223 N. Marguerite, 7 p.m.; 9th, Christ the King Lutheran, 1700 E. Pennsylvania, Coeur d'Alene, 2 p.m.,

May 9 • Goodwill Thrift Bus ride to four Goodwill stores in EWA and NID, 202 E. 3rd, 7:45 a.m. to 3:15 p.m., giinmarketing.com/goodwill-partybus

• "Named and Sent: Finding Our Identity in Christ's Word," Women's Day of Prayer, Sr. Mary Eucharista, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net

• Sukiyaki Dinner, Highland Park UMC, 611 S. Garfield, 10 to 4 p.m., 535-2867, hpadcouncil@gmail.com

• Spokane River Roll, Spokane Riverkeeper & 350 Spokane, 1003 E Trent, 1 to 3:30 p.m., spokaneriverkeeper.org, 350spokane.org

• Nonviolence in Action: Peacekeeping & De-Escalation Skills for Protests & Events, PJALS, 1 to 5 p.m., pjals.org

• Chai Culture Club: Risographing Resistance, EWU Catalyst Building- Spokane, ACL Spokane, 1 to 5 p.m., aclspokane.org/heritagemonth

• A Jewish American Story Celebration, Jody Shapiro, for kids and families, South Hill Library, 2 to 3 p.m., 444-5300, telref@spokanelibrary.org

• Spokane Symphony Masterworks 9: To America, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., 624-1200, spokanesymphony.org

May 10 • Climate Chats Café for AAHM, Meeting House Café, 1801 W. 11th, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.,

aclspokane.org/heritagemonth

• "They Called Us Enemy," One Book, One Coast, ACL Spokane, Liberty Park Library, 5:30 p.m., 444-5300, telref@spokanelibrary.org

• Listen to Your Mother, personal stories about mothering and motherhood, Bing Crosby Theater, 901 W. Sprague, 7 to 9 p.m., 227-7638, bingcrosbytheater.com

May 12 • Washington ID Event & Resource Fair, Central Library, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 444-5300, telref@spokanelibrary.org

• Eastern Washington Legislative Conference Planning Team, 3:30 p.m., Zoom, 535-4112

May 13 • Rosary Event in Honor of Our Lady of Fatima, IHRC, 9:45 to 11 a.m., ihrc.net

• Mend-It Café, Spokane Zero Waste, The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, 4:30 to 7 p.m., spokanezerowaste.org

• Terrain Talks, 628 N. Monroe, 6 p.m., terrain.com

May 14 • MMIP Awareness Walk, Camas Center for Community Wellness, Usk, 11:30 a.m., 445-1147, kalispeltribe.com/blog/mmip-awareness-walks

May 14-15 • Wild and Scenic Film Festival, Spokane Riverkeeper & Roots of Resilience, Garland Theater, 7 p.m., spokaneriverkeeper.org

May 15 • Washington State Nonprofit Conference, Spokane NAWA, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., nonprofitwa.org

• Spokane Valley Connect, Opportunity Presbyterian, 202 N. Pines, 12 to 4 p.m., spokaneconnect.org

• Asians for Queer Liberation Panel, ACL Spokane, Gonzaga Hemmingson Auditorium, 4 to 6 p.m., aclspokane.org/heritagemonth/

May 16 • Forest to Frame: A Free Outdoor Art Festival, Spokane Art School, Finch Arboretum, 3404 W. Woodland, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 325-1500, spokaneartschool.net

• "Be the Light," CASA Partners Benefit for Children, Pergola Event Center, 2928 N. Madelia, 4:20 to 7:30 p.m., 462-2272, casapartners.org

• SIMBA Circus fundraiser, The Guardian, 1403 N. Washington, doors open 6:15 p.m., show 7:15 p.m., spokaneindependent.org

May 17 • Lullaby Concert, Spokane Symphony and Spokane Public Library, 209 W. Main, 2 p.m., spokanelibrary.org

• Jesus the Very Thought of Thee: Jennifer Daniels, Soprano, and Friends, The Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, 1115 W. Riverside, 2:30 to 4 p.m. 358-4290, spokanecathedral.com

• "Tevye the Dairyman" by Sholem Aleichem, Jewish American Heritage Month, Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 2:45 to 3:45 p.m., events.spokanelibrary.org

• Haitian Flag Day Heritage Celebration, Creole Resources, First Presbyterian, 308 S. Cedar, 3 to 6 p.m., creoleresources.com

• Together We Reach for the Stars, Spokane Youth Symphony Concert, The Fox Theater, 4 p.m., secure.foxtheaterspokane.org/1296/1472

May 18-29 • Support the Spokane Three, Federal Courthouse, pjals.org

May 19 • CHAS Mobile Clinic: Downtown Spokane, Goodwill Industries, 130 E. 3rd, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 838-4246, discovergoodwill.org

• Give Like a Woman, Erin Brockovich, Women Helping Women Fund, Spokane Convention Center, 3 to 5 p.m., secure.qgiv.com/for/givelikeawoman/event/2026glw

May 20 • Opioids and Our Community, a town hall, LaRue, Multicare with Peer Spokane, 122 N. Post, or online, 1 to 2:30 p.m.

May 21 • Salish School Golden Picha Groundbreaking, 2720 W. Elliott, 2 to 3:30 p.m., salishschoolspokane.org

• Sabes Que, Hispanic Business Professional Association, Max at Mirabeau, 1100 N. Sullivan, Spokane Valley, 6 p.m., hbpaofspokane.org

• NAACP Spokane Branch, General Meeting, SCC The Lair, 6:30 p.m., naacpspokane.org

May 23 • Fifth Anniversary of Gonzaga Climate Institute, Bozarth Mansion, 2145 N. Fairwood, 5 to 8 p.m., gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents

• The Grocery List Show, KSPS documentary, Studio CK 5:30 p.m., kspsofdocs

May 28 • Maylers for Mental Health, 6718 N. Pittsburg, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., failsafeforlife.org

May 29 • Art Fest, NW MAC, Fri 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sat 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sun 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., northwestmuseum.org

May 30 • People Power: Organizing Against Authoritarianism, 6 to 8 p.m., PJALS, pjals.org

May 31 • Mend-It Café, Spokane Zero Waste, The Scale House, 4422 E. 8th, 1 to 4 p.m., spokanezerowaste.org

• "They Called Us Enemy," Virtual Book Club with George Takei, 2 p.m., aclspokane.org/heritagemonth

• Looking Back, Looking Forward, Jewish Immigration Story with Karen Treiger, South Hill Library, 2 to 3 p.m., 444-5300, telref@spokanelibrary.org

• Taizé Prayer Service, IHRC, 5 p.m., ihrc.net

June 4 • The Fig Tree Meetings, Development/Benefit, noon and Board Annual Meeting 1 to 3 p.m.,

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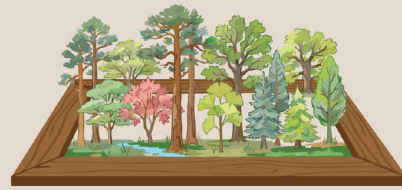


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Organizers of diocesan partnership celebrate 67 years of connections

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

Who could know that what began in 1959 in the rural highlands of Guatemala would result in a long-lasting relationship celebrated annually almost 3,000 miles away in Spokane?

That annual celebration organized by the Guatemala Commission of the Spokane Catholic Diocese happened on April 27 at the Barrister Winery to thank all the people who provide material and spiritual resources to help with the ongoing work in the Diocese of Sololá.

Mollie Dalpae, president of the commission, and Pam Thompson-Finn, volunteer communications director, described the celebration.

It thanked those in the diocese who have been supportive of projects in Sololá. It included a silent and oral auction to showcase work from the projects and encourage donations.

The Guatemala Commission consists of about 25 people mostly from supporting parishes in the Spokane Diocese. It meets four times a year, manages donated funds and communicates information from the people of Guatemala to the people of the diocese.

About once a year, members of the commission visit Guatemala and learn first-hand about the region and the needs of the projects they assist.

The projects supported by the commission focus on health, education and pastoral work. They include four medical clinics managed by Dr. Jose Miguel Vasquez, the Nawal Estéreo radio station, the minor seminary Señor San José and pastoral work in Santa Catarina, Antigua Ixtahuacán.

For each annual celebration, the commission brings someone from a program in Guatemala to give supporters an understanding of the projects and increase motivation to support them.

This year guests were Lourdes Tzoc Ramirez, director of the radio station Nawal Estéreo, and her translator, Polly Lauer, an assistant professor at the University of Montana who partnered with Nawal Estéreo for nine years to document their history.

"This year we were so excited to have Lourdes with us," Mollie shared. "She has been involved with the station since 2007 and the director of the Maya radio station for more than 10 years. She is a real celebrity in Sololá. The radio's story inspired us."

The radio station was established in 1962, after the appointment of Father John Rompa, a priest of the Spokane diocese as



Mollie Dalpae and Pam Thompson-Finn

a missionary to Sololá.

In 1959, Pope John XXIII, the same pope who convened the second Vatican Council, made a plea for priests and religious in the United States and Europe to go to Latin America to serve the people there who did not have many priests or religious in their regions. He asked bishops to send missionaries to regions where there were Catholics but few resources to serve them.

Bernard Topel, who was the Bishop of Spokane at the time, heard this call, connected with Bishop Angélico Melotto Mazzardo of Sololá in Guatemala and responded by sending priests there. The first two missionaries to Sololá were Fr. Cornelius Verdoorn and Fr. Francis O'Neil, who were later joined by Fr. Rompa and a couple of other priests.

Once there, Fr. Rompa began to minister to the people and with them started many projects that the current members of the Guatemala Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane have committed to support.

Polly recently received a doctoral degree from Yale based on her research of Indigenous radio stations, especially the one in Sololá that was born in the early years of the Guatemala Mission.

She described some of the history of that mission.

"Once there, Fr. Rompa struggled to connect with Nahualá's parishioners because of language and cultural barriers. He spoke limited Spanish and no K'iche' or Kaqchikel, the Maya languages of the region. Moreover, many people lived in isolated hamlets that were a few days walk from the church. He began to imagine forming a radio school, a rural distance education project like those in Colombia."

The Colombian schools began in the late 1940s and were cultural radio stations that grew into a massive educational movement reaching 8 million farmers at their height. The system relied

on "radiophonic schools"—small groups of peasants meeting to listen to broadcast lessons, guided by a local volunteer tutor.

In Guatemala, they became the source of all kinds of basic education for a people who had little access to services that most people in the United States take for granted: fundamental education covering health, literacy, basic math, spiritual values and sometimes they also provided updated information about situations of concern—dangerous weather conditions, political unrest or special celebrations throughout the region.

For the region, the radio was valuable not as a source of entertainment but as a lifeline to provide important information where other options were not present.

When Fr. Rompa returned to the U.S., he left Janet Druffel, School Sisters of Notre Dame, as the next director of the station. Now, Lourdes, an Indigenous woman, has been the director for more than 10 years.

Polly detailed the contributions of Lourdes as the first Indigenous woman to head the radio station.

"As director since 2015, Lourdes is a public leader who has grown the station's technical capacity and programming," said Polly. "She has expanded opportunities for women and youth to participate on the air. She is committed to training youth from the ages of eight to 18 to be the future of Maya media in



Lourdes Tzoc Ramirez

Guatemala.

"Lourdes continues to keep the station at the vanguard of Indigenous media and appreciates the commission's ongoing support of the station's work," Polly added.

Lourdes' current programming in an area where 80 percent of the population survives below the poverty level of \$13 a day continues to educate about Indigenous rights, women's participation, environmental justice, and local and national politics. It also includes traditional marimba music, live transmissions of community events, live transmissions of traditional major Catholic feasts.

"She is an important person in the region. When she speaks, people listen," said Polly.

Mollie traces the positive effect of another of the current projects that was born from that initial mission, and which the diocese's Catholic parishes help support.

"Over time, so much has evolved and developed," she said. "When we first began, we were helping provide elementary education for children. These children succeeded and wanted to go to high school, so we worked to help provide scholarships for them.



Polly Lauer

"Now some of these young people have finished high school and want to go to college. St. Joseph's parish in Colbert is one that is especially helping with education programs along with the three Catholic parishes in Walla Walla among others," Mollie said.

Recently returning from her first visit to Sololá as a member of the commission, Pam of Northwest Passage Consulting has been impressed by the people she has known there.

"Over the years, this mission has evolved and, although 80 percent of the people there are very poor, surviving on less than \$13 a day, the Indigenous people themselves have taken over more and more ownership of the projects that were important to them. The people there are always so kind and generous to us when we visit."

For information, email mdalpae@aol.com, pam@nwpasco.com or visit dioceseofspokane.org/guatemala-commission.

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