43rd Year of Publication

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The Fig Tree

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online at thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Relationships are at heart of ministries

By Mary Stamp

Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth's life and career decisions guide him as he connects congregations in the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church to develop relationships with Indigenous people, among different regions, across racial divides and within congregations.

Growing up, his flexibility began as he went to The Methodist church two Sundays a month with his dad's family and the Baptist church two Sundays a month with his mother's family.

After high school, he left his hometown in Decatur, Ala., to serve four years in the Air Force and returned to figure out next steps. Although he started pharmacy studies at the Baptist Birmingham Samford College, he earned a bachelor's degree in religion in 1997.

At the United Methodist Claremont School of Theology in Southern California, he was diverted from his original goal of teaching New Testament after he joined a Lilly program in 1999 and was assigned to Bowen Memorial Methodist Church, an African American church south of downtown Los Angeles. Its first members, who came from Alabama in the Great Migration, were part of the jazz scene in the 1940s and 1950s.



Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth guides United Methodists in the Greater Northwest Area.
Photo courtesy of the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church

In five years there, Cedrick discovered pastoral ministry. Raised by his grandparents, he had an affinity for the 12 members who were elders, now living in a neighborhood that had become Hispanic, Latino and Spanish-speaking.

After graduating in May 2000 and beginning three-fourths time as Claremont's director of alumni and church relations, Cedrick continued at Bowen quarter-time until 2003. The church team included an elder to do pastoral care and a Spanish-speaking pastor to relate with neighbors. The church continues to grow.

"That church formed my focus on team ministry," said Cedrick, who began doctoral studies in organizational leadership at Pepperdine, a Church of Christ school in Malibu, Calif., and then served Crenshaw UMC from 2003 to 2008. His next assignment was as superintendent of the Los Angeles District—a large chunk of Southern California—from 2008 to 2015.

Then he served four Santa Ana

Continued on page 4

Couple bring a taste of Peru to town for the annual Festival of Fair Trade

Matt West and Gina Gastulo are committed to connect Peruvian artisans with the fair-trade community in Spokane because they know that fair trade means Peruvian women can earn enough income to make their families more secure. It also means they can preserve 1,000-year-old techniques and traditions while they weave placemats, blankets, ponchos and handbags or make silver jewelry.

Peru is Gina's homeland and is where Matt met her while serving five years in the Peace Corps.

They will be a new vendor at the annual Festival of Fair Trade, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 27 and 28, in the lobby of the Community Building. Co-sponsors of the event are Kizuri, the fair-trade shop there, and Ganesh Himal Trading Co., the first fair trade warehouse in the region.

Matt, who teaches science at Garry Middle School, and Gina, who is an assistant teacher at Spokane Falls Community College's Headstart program, were married in a church ceremony in 2022 in Peru.

They noted that their marriage certificate is signed by Father Robert Francis Provost who is now Pope Leo XIV. They also had a civil wedding in the U.S. required for U.S. immigration.

Matt grew up in Spokane knowing the fair traders. A school friend married Austin Zimmerman, who co-owns Ganesh Himal. His sister went to school with Jillian Joseph, who owns Kizuri. His mother and the mother of Kizuri's founder, Kim Harmson, are friends. He passed Kizuri every day when he worked with The Lands Council in the Community Building.

Those ties sparked his interest in fair trade.

During Matt's final year at Evergreen State College in Olympia, he accepted a Gilman scholarship to research development at San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic from 2006 to 2007. Using baseball and other sports, he drew youth to learn the importance of health

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Fig Tree Fall Fund Drive continues thru November

The Fig Tree 2026 Fall Fund Drive opened with sending letters to more than 600 sponsors, following up with email reminders and emails to congregations, setting up a Facebook fundraiser and posting regular reminders. There will be another mailing in November and more emails and calls to individuals.

As of Oct. 29, The Fig Tree has raised $8,375 toward the goal of $26,000, leaving $3,500 in board pledges still to be matched to double gifts. Last year at this time, $4,650 had been raised—also including the board matches.

Bulletin inserts and fliers are available to spread the word and invite donations from faith communities and their members. Anyone can make a fundraiser for The Fig Tree on Facebook.

"The Fall Fund Drive is a chance for readers to say they value our media that reflect credible communication, solutions journalism and vital voices," said Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate, who is available to speak to groups. "Donations help spread hope, build understanding among diverse people and energize people. When people connect, lives change!"

At the Spring Benefit, speakers suggested some reasons to support The Fig Tree:

- **Laurel Fish spoke of the Spokane Alliance** sharing The Fig Tree's value of persisting together to work for justice.
- **Luc Jasmin III of the Governor's office** resonated with the power of persistence to overcome today's exhaustion and fear.
- **LaRae Wiley of the Salish School** of Spokane knows the power of language and stories. She values how Fig Tree stories "weave together a brilliant tapestry about the work going on in our community, opening relationships...and creating miracles."

To donate, visit thefigtree.org/donate.html or send a check to The Fig Tree, 1323 S. Perry, Spokane, WA 99202.

Religion News Briefs

Around the World

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

Churches challenge call to end UN committee

A Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) message on Oct. 19 rejected a U.S. call to end the mandate of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization.

"Decolonization is complete when the peoples still on the list have freely determined their future," the message reads. "The Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism ends in 2030. This is a time to accelerate the work, not abolish it."

The right of peoples to self-determination is not a matter of opinion, emphasized the message. "The International Court of Justice, most recently in its 2019 Chagos advisory opinion, has treated United Nations Resolution 1514 as declaratory of the customary right to self-determination," the text reads. "To call the foundation of the UN decolonization process 'non-binding' is to tell colonized peoples that their rights are optional."

The message, signed by PCC general secretary James Shri Bhagwan, stresses that international oversight remains necessary. "Pacific churches have stood for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific for more than five decades," reads the text. "Our region still carries the fallout of nuclear testing in Mā'ohi Nui and the Marshall Islands. The peoples of our region are not asking for favors. They are asking for a promise made in 1960 to be kept."

Theology not abstract study but to be embodied

In a keynote speech at the Global Network for Public Theology conference, World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Jerry Pillay reflected on why public theology cannot be an abstract academic exercise but must ask how Christian faith is to be articulated, embodied and witnessed within the public realities of a wounded world.

"We live in a world increasingly characterized by fracture and fragmentation," he noted. "Human beings are increasingly divided from one another, communities are separated by competing narratives of identity and belonging, nations are increasingly suspicious of one another and religious communities can themselves become instruments of exclusion rather than agents of reconciliation."

At the same time, humanity is experiencing a profound crisis of meaning, he pointed out. "Technological progress has not necessarily produced moral progress," he said. "Greater connectivity has not necessarily produced deeper communion."

Humanity faces crises that no nation or institution can solve alone, he emphasized, noting that "the world's fragmentation exists along with unprecedented interconnectedness. We are more connected and more divided. This paradox is a central challenge."

WCC head says to move from mission to mutuality

World Council of Churches general secretary Jerry Pillay spoke on Oct. 15 for a gathering of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany on "Decolonizing mission: from mission to mutuality."

He said decolonizing mission is "about freeing mission from patterns of power, domination and cultural superiority that have sometimes accompanied Christian witness. It also is about recovering mission as participation in the mission of God."

Jerry called for honest recognition that Christian mission has a complex history in which "Christianity was sometimes presented as though European culture and Christianity were inseparable."

He called for acknowledging this history, not to condemn previous generations, but to ensure that today's generation does not repeat their assumptions.

"The question today is: Can we proclaim Christ without reproducing cultural domination?" he asked. "I believe we can. Indeed, we must."



Regional Ecumenical & Interfaith News

Legislative Conference will be on Jan. 30

Fourteen nonprofits and faith organizations are planning the 2027 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference on the theme "Creating a Culture of Healing, Peace and Justice" from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 30, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond.

Speakers for the opening plenary will focus on issues of prioritizing religious dignity and respect in a pluralistic society.

Fenrir Close of the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane is organizing youth to create art on the theme and discuss their pieces during the youth plenary and an afternoon workshop.

Workshops are being organized by the NAACP Spokane Chapter, Matthew 25, Muslims for Community Action and Support, the Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium, Gonzaga University's Climate Institute, the League of Women Voters, 350 Spokane, Northwest Mediation Center and Indigenous leaders.

Kristin Ang of the Faith Action Network of Washington and Jean Welch Hill of the Washington State Catholic Conference will present an overview of issues coming before the Washington State Legislature on which their faith organizations are encouraging people in congregations to be informed and express their voices.

Forty agencies will have displays on their efforts and there are currently more than 16 sponsors, who donate $125 to $500 to cover costs of the event, along with registration fees of individuals and groups who sign up to attend.

The lead agencies coordinating the planning team are The Fig Tree, Faith Action Network of Washington and Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington.

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

Climate Center sets 'Our Common Home'

Gonzaga University's Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment announces three presentations for its "Our Common Home Lecture Series."

• Rishi Sugla, lead scientist at the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington, Becca Nixon, climate social science specialist, and Dante Jester, climate resilience program manager at the Climate Institute will speak on "Climate Resilience Through Mutual Aid," at 6 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 5, in the Hemmingson Auditorium and also livestream.

Their presentation focuses on the impacts of climate hazards and extreme weather straining public systems and grassroots networks of care and solidarity as climate resilience.

• "Strategies and Approaches to Equitable, Climate Resilient Water and Sanitation in the United States" features Morgan Shimabuku, senior research specialist at the Pacific Institute, from 6 to 7:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 16 at Hemmingson Auditorium.

She researches solutions to water equity and access challenges, benefits and tradeoffs of water management strategies and water resilience

• "The Inner Dimension of Climate Action: Transformative Skills for Resilience and Regeneration," at noon, Wednesday, Dec. 2, on Zoom features Jamie Bristow, a writer and policy advisor on the application of inner development and contemplative practices in public life, and Haley Crim, the climate curriculum developer at MIT Open Learning.

For information, call 313-6548, email henning@gonzaga.edu or visit gonzaga.edu/climate-institute.

Fall Folk Festival will be Nov. 14 and 15

Volunteers are signing up to assist with the six stages that will be held Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 14 and 15, at Spokane Community College, 1810 N. Greene St.

The free festival draws about 6,000 attendees to enjoy more than 100 multicultural performances of musicians, dancers and storytellers, plus crafts. It was voted third in The Inlander 2026 Best Arts and Cultural Event Contest.

Doors open at 10 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. Performances are 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday.

The first Fall Folk Festival in 1996 drew about 350 people and 12 groups performing at the Unitarian Universalist Church. The Spokane Folklore Society, founded in 1977 to promote awareness of the region's cultural and folk arts, supports the festival.

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

NAACP organizes restorative justice event

NAACP Spokane Branch and Building Restorative Communities are offering two days of connection, community, healing and restorative justice from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Friday, Nov. 13, and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 14, at Gonzaga University School of Law.

This is an opportunity to enjoy community, deepen relationships, engage in meaningful conversations, encounter healing and explore restorative justice practices rooted in Indigenous culture.

Participants may attend one or both days. For information, visit naacpspokane.com.

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SNAP partners to distribute energy-saving kits

SNAP, McKinstry Inland Northwest and Avista Utilities distributed 1,000 energy-saving kits on Oct. 22. The kits include LED light bulbs, window plastic, weather stripping and draft stoppers—tools to help households improve energy efficiency, stay more comfortable and help lower utility bills this winter. Avista provides items for the kits and information on how to conserve energy and reduce utility costs.

For information, call 710-7449 or email dean.henrich@snapwa.org.

Shalom Ministries begins some meals

Shalom Ministries held a community brainstorming meeting Oct. 15 at Westminster Congregational Church to explore its future, having lost its site at the church on Third and Howard.

Oc Oct. 30, using a temporary kitchen, they began serving the breakfast from 9 to 11 a.m., Fridays, with CHAS and the Spokane Regional Health District in the Bloom Psychiatry parking lot at 302 E. Pacific. The Monday Night Dinner will be distributed by mobile outreach.

Dexter Phillips, Shalom Board president, said Shalom seeks a day center—a space where neighbors can share a meal, connect with service providers and engage in enriching activities.

"Our goal extends beyond survival," he said. "While food is a foundation, we aim to build a pathway toward lasting recovery and restoration, helping our neighbors address the root causes of their struggles so they can thrive."

For information, visit shalommeal.org.

Baha'is celebrate Twin Holy Birthdays

The Twin Holy Birthdays of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh will be celebrated by Spokane area members of the Baha'i Faith on Monday evening, Nov. 9 and Wednesday, Nov. 11.

The days mark the births of the Báb, herald of the Baha'i Faith and Bahá'u'lláh, its prophet and the founder of the Baha'i Faith in 1844 in Iran. The Báb was born the first day of Muharram—the first month in the Islamic calendar—and Bahá'u'lláh on the second day of Muharram, said Deb Bisenius, public information officer for the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is in Spokane.

"The message of Bahá'u'lláh is that of unity," she said. "He founded the most recent of the world's religions. It has about 8 million believers who live in 100,000 locations around the world."

For information, call 326-0152 or visit spokanebahai.org.

Human Rights Spokane names 2026 champions

Four individuals and a group of 11 clergy will be honored as Human Rights Champions at the 2026 Human Rights Spokane Awards Banquet and Auction on Thursday, Nov. 12, at The Centennial, 303 W. North River Dr.

For information, visit humanrightsspokane.org.

Spokane Youth Symphony will perform Nov. 15

The Spokane Youth Symphony (SYS) will perform their first concert of the 2026-27 season at 4 p.m., Friday, Nov. 15, at the Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague.

The "Rhythm without Borders" program features all four of the SYS groups—Spokane Youth Strings, Spokane Youth Sinfonietta, Spokane Youth Philharmonics and Spokane Youth Symphony Orchestra (SYSO).

From June 23 to July 2, the SYSO toured to Sydney, Australia. SYS artistic director Philip Baldwin said such tours motivate involvement and provide Inland Northwest youth with awareness of the larger classical music community. The musicians and their families raise the money for trips.

For information, visit spokaneyouthsymphony.org.

NECC-Zone recognized for work with youth

The U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) and the American Beverage Foundation, whose support helped expand the Northeast Community Center and The ZONE, Spokane's Youth Wellness Zone (YWZ), visited Spokane Oct. 20 to see how their grant supports students' health and well-being.

YWZ is a youth-led initiative that empowers students to define wellness, identify priorities and develop strategies to support mental health. Launched in the 2024-25 school year, it offers an elective wellness class at On Track Academy. Students identify youth wellness needs, propose solutions and work with community partners to develop strategies.

In January 2026, the City of Spokane received $200,000 from the USCM and American Beverage Association's Healthy and Sustainable Communities grant. YWZ increased staff, participation, partnerships and initiatives.

USCM CEO and executive director Tom Cochran spoke of investing millions in programs that help cities strengthen communities and improve outcomes for children and families. As local leaders need to do more, this partnership is an example of how public and private sectors can work together.

"Investments in young people are investments in the future of our community," said Spokane Mayor Lisa Brown.

During their visit, officials met with students and staff, and toured the wellness classroom and Schoolyard Forest.

"Strong communities are built by leaders who understand their cities and the people they serve," said Kevin Keane, president of American Beverage Association and Foundation.

"The promise to our community's youth was: If you share your priorities and work on strategies to improve youth mental health and wellness, our city's neighborhood and civic leaders, businesses and organizations will support you and take action," said Jene Ray, executive director of the Northeast Community Center and The ZONE.

"Our partnership with The ZONE to create a Youth Wellness Zone in our neighborhood is impacting the lives of young people today and into the future," said On Track Academy principal Chris Burke.

For information, call 625-6740, visit my.spokanecity.org.

Native Action Network honors women

Native Action Network recognized five Native women as the 2026 Enduring Spirit Award Honorees on Oct. 29 and 30 at the Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort in Suquamish, Wash.

Local honorees are Toni Lodge, Turtle Mountain Chippewa, and Martina Whelshula, an Arrow Lakes Nation citizen with the Colville Confederated Tribe. Three others are Denise Bill, Muckleshoot; Carolyn Hartness, Eastern Band of Cherokee; Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis, Pueblo of Isleta.

Toni Lodge, CEO of The NATIVE Project in Spokane, is an elder, mother and grandmother who does intergenerational healing in the Native community. With a background in journalism, education, therapy, grant writing, healthcare and administration, she has led the project for 30 years. She addresses healthcare disparities with an urban Indian organization that offers healthcare, dental, behavioral health and youth services along with prevention and cultural healing.

Martina Whelshula, an educator, trainer and consultant specializing in intergenerational trauma impacting Indigenous communities, has worked on local and national policies, education and behavioral health. She is developing an integrative cultural treatment model to address trauma, mental health and substance use disorders for tribes. Martina, who has been a research director for national Indian health policy, a P-12 tribal language instructor in the public schools and Head Start director for the Colville Tribe, has served seven years as executive director of a Native American inpatient drug and alcohol treatment program for youth.

Denise Bill, executive director of adult and higher education for the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, earned an educational doctoral degree from the University of Washington, writing a dissertation on "Native American Educational Leadership in the Pacific Northwest."

Carolyn Hartness, a consultant serving individuals, families, communities, Tribes and organizations nationally and internationally, focuses on holistic, culturally responsive, evidence-based and spiritually grounded wellness that strengthens communities.

For more than 35 years, she consulted with Indigenous communities in the U.S., Canada, Norway, Australia and New Zealand on cultural diversity, wellness, recovery, prevention and intervention related to fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. She facilitates listening circles with incarcerated Indigenous men and women with the state reentry council.

Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis, a member of the Washington State Supreme Court appointed in 2020 by Governor Jay Inslee, is a Pueblo of Isleta member and a descendant of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico. She was the second Native American on a state supreme court and the first in this state. After being elected for a six-year term in 2020, she was the first Native American to win Washington statewide. She is also of Jewish descent.

For information, visit the nativeactionnetwork.org.





United Methodist bishop forges relationships to overcome divisions

Continued from page 1

churches—Tongan, Cambodian, Filipino and Hispanic—that speak a mix of languages, including English. Each was struggling to survive.

"Working together, we formed one congregation with three of the four, selling the property to develop a block for affordable housing and green space," he said.

Despite that success, in 2017 Cedrick took two years off, unsure if he would continue in ministry. He did substitute teaching, drove a forklift and consulted on organizational effectiveness.

In 2019, the bishop asked him to serve Grace UMC, which he served during the pandemic. In 2021, he was assigned as director of innovation and communication for the California Pacific Annual Conference, which serves Southern California, Hawaii, Guam and Saipan.

Then in 2022, Cedrick was elected a bishop in The United Methodist church, receiving his first assignment to the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area, leading conferences serving Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, Washington and a bit of British Columbia.

Cedrick is energized by the area's work with Indigenous people, beginning with Nooksack UMC and the Nooksack Tribe in Whatcom County.

"Our Camp Indianola on Puget Sound is on a sacred Suquamish site," he said, seeing those efforts as focused on building relationships, not quickly saying, "Here's the deed."

In 2024, Cedrick went to Nezperce, Idaho, to give Nimiipuu land back to the Nez Perce Tribe as a culmination of a decolonization, repentance and reconciliation process started before he came by the Rev. Dr. Allen Buck, director of the circle of Indigenous ministries.

In 2018, Allen, a Cherokee from Oklahoma, began conversations with tribes and the UMC. He also pastored a church, working quarter-time.

"Indigenous ministry is a priority, so we increased resources for it and hired Allen full time," Cedrick said. "The ministry requires the difficult process of introducing a new view of history to replace an old one."

Allen guides a truth-telling process with six teams who are studying churches, leaders and land genealogies. For example, in tracing the Wilbur Memorial UMC in White Swan on the Yakama reservation, they learned that the founding missionary had helped the U.S. government start a school to assimilate children.

"Other teams unearthed aspects of history that have been unsettling for some church people as they learn what tribes have long known," said Cedrick, who does not want people to rush past truths or history to appear courageous and just say, "This is sacred land. Let's give it back."

"To participate in repair, people need to know what happened," he said. "We are in a process. We will be uncomfortable while we take time to learn the full narrative."

For him as a Black American, Cedrick finds it strange to apologize for what happened to Indigenous people in colonial times.

"I apologize on behalf of the church. I'm clear about who I am and know my role calls for it," he said.

Cedrick finds tribes open as churches reach out and finds tribes seeking out the church.

"We only establish a relationship when we are open to the broader narrative," he said. "It's an exciting time to listen and learn what has been ignored, forgotten or dismissed, and to work to create space for conversations."

New to the Northwest, Cedrick has found strong localized divisions among 12 "competing sub-regions" in the three conferences—west and east of the Cascades in Washington and Oregon, the Idaho Panhandle, Southeast Idaho and Alaska. Eastern Oregon does not identify with Portland, as Northwest Oregon does, and south of Eugene is like California.

"Each region feels it's the outlier, with its needs forgotten," he observed. "That reality makes it hard to have a unified message. "

So the area has made an administrative shift in recent months. Now superintendents are responsible for 10 to 15 churches that are less than two hours apart.

"To avoid reinforcing a region's ideas about itself, our leadership respects each of their contexts," Cedrick said.

Today's political climate stirs fears for pastors and laity about the impact of divisions on church relationships.

Laity don't want to lose friendships with people they have known from 40 years of going to church and camps.

Regional leaders invite pastors to find a balance between avoiding being a lightning rod and having courage not to hide their convictions. Laity and clergy may fear losing members to other churches, but should preach, teach and lead from a place of conviction, he said.

In recent months, Cedrick has encouraged churches to see themselves as places for conversation more than places for decision. Voting can divide. So he asks: "Can churches be places where people talk and relate rather than divide and decide?"

The Greater Northwest Area now trains lay people to be "conversation starters" to help churches consider new ways to use the debt-free, mostly empty buildings they own. They ask: "Can the buildings be places people gather without an agenda to talk while quilting, sewing or studying a book?"

Cedrick is also excited that churches are partnering with nonprofits to offer affordable health care and housing. Some open their space for community or government agencies to provide health care close to where people live.

Some work with Family Promise to shelter people in rooms or partner with Safe Parking in Western Washington to make their parking lots safe spaces for unhoused people to live in their vehicles. Many churches also offer morning and evening meals.

Another priority of the Greater Northwest Area—eliminating racism—requires intercultural competency training for laity and clergy as the UMC diversifies its pastoral leadership pool faster than its congregations.

"We need to focus on how to talk with and see each other," said Cedrick.

Conferences are now also training 20 people as conveners to respond to local initiatives, connecting congregations interested in doing similar ministries so they can share resources.

"When someone asks the conference, 'What are you doing?' our response is, 'We are doing what you are doing.' A conference may not be doing anything if the congregations are not doing anything," Cedrick noted.

"It's based on collaboration, self-determination and keeping ministry in the hands of people who want to do ministry," he said.

For information, call 206-870-6837, email bishop@greaternw.org or visit greaternw.org.

YWCA lists 47 nominees

Among 47 leaders nominated for the 2027 YWCA Women of Achievement award is Mary Stamp, The Fig Tree editor.

Nine of them will be selected for an award, as the YWCA Spokane seeks to highlight women doing meaningful, transformative work in Spokane and beyond, women who embody the YWCA mission, give generously of themselves and make Spokane a better place for all.

The nominees are Juli Al-Amin, Madi Allen, Haley Barranger, Mallory Battista, Donalda Brantley, Mary Cameron, Heather Cantamessa, Namva Chan, Angela Chapman, Terri Crafts, Sarah Dixit, Amy Doneen, April Eberhardt, Jennifer Evans, Olivia Evans, Cathy Eylar, Anna Franklin, Marley Hochendoner, Julie Holland, Sydney Krebsbach, Jacquelyn MacConnell, Kathleen Makena, Susan McDonald Osborn, Yalda Mohmand, Danie Monaghan, Lili Navarrete, Kara Odegard, Darya Pilram, Tracy Poindexter-Canton, Traci Rennaker, Majda Ritchie, Stefanie Robinson, Jacquelynne Sandoval, Serra Schlosser, Naghmana Sherazi, Susan Stacey, Mary Stamp, Ana Trusty, Christine Weaver, Julie Wells, Carol West. LaRae Wiley, Latrice Williams, Mary Wood, Maggie Yates, Janice Yoder and Emily York-Hughes.

Over 44 years, YWCA Spokane has honored more than 300 women in nine categories.

The 2027 honorees will be recognized at the Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon Friday, March 12, 2027, which raises funds to support services for women, children and domestic violence survivors.

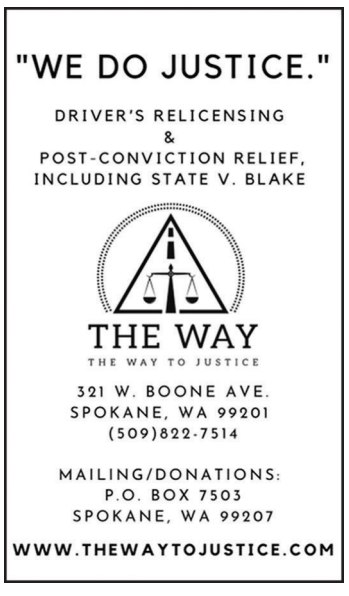
For information, call 789-9305, or email woa@ywcaspokane.org.











Cyclical Inland Northwest invites people to start unique ministries

"Love in action is what I'm about," said Johnny Edmondson, co-director of the Cyclical Inland Northwest ministry with the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest (PIN), a coach helping leaders discern their journey and director of Growing Neighbors (GN).

Cyclical is a local expression of Cyclical, Inc., which was founded in the Presbytery of San Fernando, Calif., to help people discern and start new expressions of the church to show God's love for the world by inspiring faithful innovation.

From 2005 to 2024, while he was youth and family minister for Shadle Park Presbyterian Church, Johnny began that work when he launched Growing Neighbors as an innovative, ecumenical ministry before the PIN started the Cyclical ministry program.



Johnny Edmondson prepares to pick a giant zucchini.

GN collaborates with diverse communities and organizations to equip neighbors to grow and share healthy food and relationships. It expresses his belief that God cares about and is actively involved with the world.

"God asks us to engage and embody love and promises to go with us," he commented.

"At Shadle Park, I felt something different needed to happen and the church needed to be more involved in the community," said Johnny, an ordained Presbyterian minister. "My call to church planting led to growing healthy relationships by planting community gardens and increasing food access, waste reduction, environmental care and community development.

"God speaks to us through creation, loves all of creation and reconciles all to Godself, so we need to care for creation. We can do that by reducing waste and building healthy communities, using regenerative gardening practices, localizing the food system, generously sharing our food and gifts, and treating all of creation like family," said Johnny.

To further his ministry, he earned a master of divinity degree with a creation care specialization in 2021 at Portland Seminary and worked in an apprenticeship with the Washington State University Extension Master Gardener Program for practical ministry experiences, tying together biblical theology, pastoral leadership, eco-theology and indigenous studies.

Now Growing Neighbors is a non-religious nonprofit that partners with community organizations and churches. It hosts communal meals, Little Free Pantry boxes, farmers market booths, workshops and programs such as Growing Artists and Growing Chefs to help people learn to cook what they grow. It continues to start hyperlocal gardens in the county.

On Saturdays from Aug. 8 to Sept. 26, Growing Chefs held events at churches, libraries and other spaces with community gardens and cooking facilities, so people could enjoy a garden-to-table experience in different areas. Better Health Together, a social care network, sponsored the series.

Growing Neighbors celebrated its 10th anniversary at its annual Hoedown Oct. 27, around the free community meal every Tuesday at Shadle Park Presbyterian, 5508 N. Alberta. The celebration included music, dinner, dancing, a garden tour, games and stories from the growing season.

GN is developing decentralized hubs around neighborhood churches, community centers, libraries and nonprofits to connect local folks with tools, supplies, training and activities to foster resilience.

With GN and Cyclical ministries, Johnny is "cultivating an ecosystem" in which many new expressions of church can grow and thrive.

"We are promoting love that inspires faithful innovation, doing new things with and for God," he said, describing the ministry as "doing accompaniment," walking alongside others, eating together and inviting people to share stories, present ideas, use their imaginations, pay attention to what the Spirit is already up to in their neighborhoods and join those efforts.

"If an experiment doesn't work out, we learn from it and try something else," he said of his model as coach.

With Cyclical, Johnny meets with two groups on a regular basis, a Discerners Group and a Starters Group.

The Discerners Group participants might come with an idea to develop. They engage in discernment practices, including experiments to see if it grows into a new expression of church.

Starters Group members have already started something and are looking for support. They enter at different stages. It's not a linear process, he said.

"We accompany, so people don't feel alone when they discern and start something. We share joys and challenges, study scripture, pray and listen to what's up in their contexts," Johnny said. "Both groups meet around meals, because good things happen when people are sharing a meal."

The Presbytery funds the dinners and a spiritual director or coach for each group. Discerners dinners are once a month on Mondays. Starters meet for lunch every other month in homes and restaurants in neighborhoods.

There are about 10 discerners and about that many starters.

Some ministries are started in a local church and some at a neutral site to be welcoming to people hurt by churches.

Cyclical is ecumenically minded even though it is hosted by the Inland Northwest Presbytery. It's just for anyone who wants to start something.

The team of Cyclical Inland Northwest identifies and supports those who are "discerning starters, church starters and existing churches" as they join God's mission through the natural lifecycle of starting new churches.

The leaders are innovators who share a common culture and practices created to thoughtfully start new churches across the Inland Northwest.

Johnny listed some of Cyclical starters. The first four have been featured in stories in The Fig Tree.

• **Brandon Comella saw** a community need while working at Millwood Presbyterian Church and started Millwood Impact as a non-religious nonprofit to partner with several community organizations. It is described at millwoodimpact.org and thefigtree.org/June25/060125millwoodimpact.html.

• **Ross Carper, co-founder** of Feast World Kitchen, said the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural organization includes people of many faiths who prepare and serve meals from their cultures.

"Cyclical helps us creatively build community among leaders motivated by the Christian call to 'welcome the stranger' by providing practical care and supportive friendship, without proselytizing," Ross said, inviting people to visit feastworldkitchen.org and thefigtree.org/sept21/090121feastworld.html.

• **David Sittser's ministry**, Side by Side, helps people of all abilities do life together, connecting people with developmental disabilities to build friendships by engaging in activities such as art, cooking, soccer and worship. They meet at Neighborhub, 2705 W. Boone, co-using the space with a church called The Garden. Details are at sidebysidespokane.org and thefigtree.org/oct23/100123sidebyside.html.

• **Emily Kuenker started** Grace Commons Spokane to connect young adults with faith formation in public life and advocacy. Details are at gracecommonsspokane.org or thefigtree.org/dec25/120125kuenkercommons.html.

• **Mark Onginjo**, an immigrant from Africa, started Amani—meaning "peace" in Swahili—a new worshiping community for African immigrants who speak Swahili. They meet at Opportunity Presbyterian Church.

• **Gabe Shippam started** Healing Villages, a story-driven movement that makes churches better healing communities by helping Christians and their leaders be known for emotional, spiritual, relational and missional health. Information is at healingvillages.care.

• **Jon Shuler founded** the Cloud of Witnesses project to help Christians tell their faith stories through guided storytelling and visual mapping at cloudofwitnesses.co.

• **George Fricks began** the R House student center at the University of Idaho with the Ecumenical Campus Ministries Association to walk alongside college students. More is at ecmausa.org

Johnny partners with other ministries, schools, libraries, businesses and nonprofits, including for Black Earth Day, Seed to Soul and Thrive International.

"These ministries are the tip of the iceberg," he said, inviting others to "get ready to discern to start something new to work with God, who is already at work, actively and creatively."

For information, email johnny@presbyinw.org, or visit presbyinw.org/cyclical.org or cyclicalinc.com.

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Couple find meaning as they help Peruvian families make a living

Continued from page 1

habits and education.

In 2007, Matt earned two bachelor's degrees at the Evergreen State College in Olympia. One was in biochemistry with a minor in hydrology and the second was in intercultural studies with a minor in teaching English as a second language. After graduating, he joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to be an environmental volunteer in Chongoyape, Peru. At a private nature reserve, Chaparrí, he did reforestation, rescued animals from circuses, rehabilitated them and released them into the wild.

Matt also advised universities on tourism that respects natural resources, led overnight camps and used a USAID grant to install the first rural waste management system there with old oil drums as waste containers.

His next assignment was in Pimentel, working with fishermen who used reed grass to make boats. He encouraged them to use sustainable fishing techniques and work with the national government to protect marine areas.

Matt met Gina in August 2010 at a national conference for Peace Corps environmental volunteers in Huanchaco. She was working in another village with a Peace Corps volunteer to strengthen the role of national park rangers.

Gina, whose home village is La Zaranda, had a master's degree in public relations from Universidad Nacional Pedro Ruiz Gallo. She worked in health, education and culture, did public relations for the national museum and eventually became a city councilwoman.

Returning to Spokane, Matt worked with The Lands Council and then the East Central Community Center before the Martin Luther King Jr Family Center took over its management.

After earning a master's degree in education at Washington State University in 2019, his first year of teaching was during COVID.

He continued to visit Gina in Peru, working with her on community development in the summers and Decembers of 2021 and 2022 and summer of 2023. It took a year and a half to complete the paperwork for a fiancé visa to bring Gina to Spokane.



Matt West and Gina Gastulo show some of their fair trade items.

In their ongoing visits to Peru and community development work, they have found that the most sustainable form of community development is to empower women to produce products to earn an income to support the household.

On the outskirts of the Bosque De Pómac National Park, an area with many ancient pyramids, Gina assisted weavers who use pre-Incan techniques.

"In the hundred years between the Incas and the conquistadors, the village was home of pre-Incan tribes," said Gina.

These women continue pre-Incan weaving with cotton grown only in Peru. In the pyramids are large murals with traditional symbolism they use in their designs.

Another group makes tapestries for the national museum produces native cotton fabrics with clay, bees wax and traditional dyes. For fair trade, they make placemats, blankets, ponchos and handbags.

A street artist who earned a master's degree at a national art school, uses modern representations of folklore dancers and animals in murals and on T-shirts.

Another group uses several-thousands-of-years-old techniques to create handwoven silver filament jewelry, such as pendants and earrings.

Matt and Gina have funded a multi-generational workshop where independent artisans work as a collective to keep the traditional artisanry alive.

Many of these artisans are Matt and Gina's long-time friends.

"We believe in what they are doing as they share and learn traditional techniques," Matt said. "They hope to form nonprofits so they can teach the skills to the next generation.

"**The pre-Incan artisans** in the Peruvian Andes in the north also need to work collectively to counter the black market of outsiders selling cheap replicas," Matt said.

"Part of the Peace Corps mission is to return and share the culture we experienced with people in the U.S.," he said. "So, every time I go, I bring back food, recipes, blankets and artisan work to share.

"I want to help our artisan friends sell things so they can continue to use the traditional techniques," Matt said. "I am glad to bring together my connections with Peruvian producers and my connections with fair trade in Spokane."

Matt said families in Peru are stronger when women are paid a fair wage for what they are doing.

"It empowers the whole household and the whole area," he added.

"It helps artisans keep the language and traditions alive," Gina added.

Artisans often work together in a workshop, where they have a consistent social outlet and conversation among the generations to pass on knowledge about their craft and about life.

They also discuss how the land is worked, how to prepare for natural disasters or plagues, or what plants are used for dyes and for healing.

"Workshops are an opportunity to share stories and histories, to learn about what candidates to vote for and how to keep their animals safe," Gina said.

Often civic leaders go to the workshops to share information on public health and community needs with multiple households.

"For example, with El Nino bringing more rain and more mosquitos that spread dengue and zika, leaders are going to workshops and reminding people to buy mosquito nets for their windows," said Matt. "They also prepare people to work together when prices skyrocket or when a disaster happens."

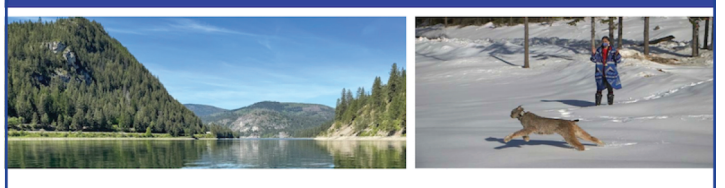
Fair trade is a way Matt and Gina can continue as public servants and help families find a sustainable way to make a living, rather than working for someone else to dig ditches or wash dishes.

"It makes our souls feel good to help in this way," said Gina.

For information, call 998-0636 or email wesmat01@gmail.com.



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Andi McGoran shares about her life-changing experiences at Taizé

"Madame, when you come to France, you *must* go to Taizé!"

"Why?" I asked. "I don't even know where Taizé is!"

"Just go, and you will *know* why."

This conversation with one of Andi McGoran's former French students at Mead High School, Brenna Robinson, daughter of former Whitworth University President Bill Robinson, occurred in 1998.



Andi McGoran offers a monthly Taizé service in Spokane.

Andi, who grew up in the Napa Valley area of California, and is involved with St. Peter's and Sacred Heart parishes in Spokane, was granted a one-year sabbatical by the Mead School District to study French at the Centre International d'Études Francaises in Angers. Her husband, who also was granted a sabbatical from teaching chemistry at Eastern Washington University, joined her.

Brenna was by then a Whitworth student who had just returned from study abroad that included a stay in the French community.

"Being a dutiful teacher following the advice of a student, I booked reservations to stay a week in the Ecumenical Community of Taizé in eastern France near Switzerland," Andi said.

She and her husband, Ernie, had met at the University of California Berkeley, where he studied chemistry, and she studied English. She earned teaching credentials at Berkeley, while he did post-doctoral work at Michigan State. In 1966, they moved to Spokane for him to teach at Eastern Washington University. She began teaching in the West Valley School District.

Andi took time off from teaching after their sons were born. They were 8 and 11 when the family spent two years on a sabbatical in Lausanne, Switzerland. The family was immersed in French. On returning, she did substitute teaching and eventually taught French at Mead, where Brenna was one of her students.

"Brenna was right. It was a life-changing experience," she began. "Those who come to Taizé, spend four hours a day in prayer."

In the summer when more than 10,000 youth flock to Taizé and sleep in dorms or tents each week, accommodations for those over the age of 30 are limited, so Andi booked reservations for September.

With so many young people leaving their churches today, Andi wondered what was the attraction that brought so many to Taizé. She learned that young people were hungry for what they found there.

"They find the Love of Christ. They find a unique, personal relationship with a God who loves them," she said.

A day at Taizé follows a set schedule. It begins with an optional 7 a.m. Catholic Mass in a small chapel next to the larger church. At 8 a.m., all the community, including the 80 Brothers of Taizé dressed in their white albs, gather for a one-hour service with Scripture Readings and the traditional Taizé chants "that beautifully penetrate your soul," said Andi, listing several favorites: "Ubi Caritas," "Veni Sancte Spiritus," "Nada Te Turbe," "Jésu le Christ" and "Jesus, Remember Me."

Once someone hears them, they hum the tunes and the songs keep running around in their brains.

The songs are sung in French, English, Spanish, German and Latin because the young people who do come, come from all parts of the world.

There is a small fee charged—more for those who come from the U.S. or wealthy countries, less for others. Everyone is assigned a work task.

"Ours was serving lunch," Andi said.

After the first hour of prayer, they serve breakfast at 9 a.m. in huge tents with wooden floors. It is a spartan but adequate meal, prepared by the Catholic nuns in the nearby village. All Taizé meals are prepared by these nuns every day of the year.

Why? Because people come to Taizé every day, every week, every month.

After breakfast, there is an hour or two of Scripture study at 10 a.m. with one of the Taizé brothers in the language of a group of guests. The scripture passage for Andi's group was John 17:21, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

"This verse is the heart and soul of what Taizé represents. The community seeks to bring together all who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior of us all. Scripture classes are offered in 52 languages so that all who come will understand," she explained.

At noon, everyone returns to church for another hour of prayer and song followed by lunch at 1 p.m.

"While we did our work detail, it was amazing how we could communicate with people without speaking their language. We smiled a lot. We used the few words we learned to say, 'Hi,' 'How are you?' 'Nice to see you.' Our eyes spoke 'soul talk.' Our hearts sang."

Afternoons from 1 to 4 p.m. are reserved for quiet contemplation, rest, silence, walks and free time. At 4 p.m., tea is served from huge vats with simple cookies. In this social time, guests try their language skills with new-found friends.

There were 3,000 people there during the McGorans' stay in 1998. They met people from Great Britain and the Ukraine. With other English speakers, they communicated openly, but with their Ukrainian friends, it was a language of the heart, a smile, a tap of the shoulder, a hug and a gift.

"I still cherish the painted wooden Ukrainian egg they gave us," she said.

At 5 p.m., it was time for a simple dinner, which like the other meals was served with plastic trays, bowls, plates, cups and a huge metal spoon.

At 7 p.m., everyone returned to church—this time for two hours.

"At 9 p.m., we trudged to our room—which had two cots, a wash basin and a desk—in the local village of Aumône, a 15-minute walk in the dark. We should have brought flashlights," Andi laughed.

Every week, Taizé celebrates Easter. Every Friday is Good Friday, celebrating Jesus' passion and death on the cross. Every Saturday night, everyone dons headsets and sits in a certain area where the homily is simultaneously translated into 52 languages. Guests listen to the language they choose.

At the end of the Saturday service, a large crucifix is placed on the floor. Young people gather around it to pray, often staying past midnight. Many take this opportunity to place their foreheads upon the cross and offer their lives to Christ. Every Sunday is a celebration of the joy of Resurrection.

Every year before his death in 2005, Brother Roger, the Swiss Protestant who founded Taizé in 1940 in Burgundy, France, met with the Pope in Rome to discuss spiritual needs of the young people of the world. Brother Roger's first successor was Brother Alois, an ordained Catholic priest. In 2023, his second successor, Brother Matthew, an Anglican began as prior. Every year between Christmas and Jan. 1, Taizé hosts an International Day of Prayer somewhere in the world. That event typically draws 150,000 young people from many Christian denominations.

"The Brothers are self-sustaining, depending upon the sale of their music and their pottery, which is all produced in the community," Andi explained. "They live an existence based upon the Love of Christ as known in the Gospel. Being there, I could not help but be enfolded in the sense of the sacred."

Andi was so touched that she now brings the "Taizé Experience" to Spokane.

From 5 to 6 p.m., on the last Sundays of the months between September and May, participants gather at Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 6910 S. Ben Burr Rd.—except in November, December, March and May, when they meet on the Sunday near the holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and Memorial Day.

This Taizé Hour of Prayer is one hour of quiet song, worship and Scripture readings. There is a time for voicing special intentions and for individual prayer around the cross.

Musicians for the services include Marlene Schuster, piano; Paul Schuster, guitar; Christine McDaniels, Gloria Riedlinger and Patty Lopez, sopranos; Georgia Spencer and Alaina Zemke, altos; Trouong-Son Nguyen, tenor; Jeanne Finger, flute; Suzanne Bassett-Rogers, viola, and Catharine Scherer, harp. They welcome other musicians.

Andi invited anyone interested to come and experience the impact of Taizé.

"It just may be life changing," she said, noting that Brenna is now pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Kalispell, Mont.

For information, call 995-0987.





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Artist proposes creating eight sculptures for Lilac Services for the Blind

Ildiko Kalapacs, a local artist who trained in classical drawing and sculpture in her homeland of Hungary, is working with a grant writer to raise $49,000 to create a three-dimensional, multimedia permanent installation of eight bronze sculptures of people's heads in the lobby waiting room of Lilac Services for the Blind.

The frontal portraits of different people would be in a classical, realistic style.

Ildiko, who graduated from Eastern Washington University in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in studio art, is working with a blind poet who writes about his experiences of overcoming his blindness. He will share some of his poetry in English and Braille, for blind or partially blind people can read it. At the bottom of each sculpture will be a bell with a different sound, so people can associate each face with a sound.

Cheryl Martin, executive director at Lilac Center for the Blind, loves the proposal, because it emphasizes diversity. She and the staff empower people who are blind or have low vision by giving them tools to live to their full potential.

"People don't realize that blind people come from diverse backgrounds, genders and cultures," said Ildiko.

"It's important that blind or partially blind people understand that someone cares about them. It's important that this sculpture is from a not-blind person," she said. "Someone sighted is inspired to do a tactile sculpture for blind or visually impaired people to explore by touch and sound.

"It will celebrate those the Lilac Center serves," she added.

Ildiko has done three-dimensional head sculptures for other exhibits and installations, including of refugees and women.

"Although I am not blind, I want to create something for people who are blind to explore. I hope it will be uplifting," she said.

"We want it to be a calming experience while they wait for meetings and classes," she said.

Ildiko notes that people who are blind are often unseen or ignored. This is a way she can offer recognition as someone who is sighted and cares to give them something lasting.

Cheryl is gathering donations for the sculpture.

For information, call 328-9116 or cherylm@lilacblind.org.

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Youth mark Native American Heritage Month

For Native American Heritage Month, the Colville Tribes Youth Development Program is presenting a lecture series during November at the Nespelem Government Center Auditorium.

Three speakers—Shelly Boyd, Shandy Abrahamson and Tony Louie—will discuss Indigenous culture, language, education, music and community.

Shelly, the Sinixt Arrow Lakes cultural facilitator since 2017, will speak at 11 a.m., Tuesday, Nov. 10. A Sinixt descendent in Inchelium, she reconnects Sinixt people with their ancestral homeland, history, language and culture. As a certified Indigenous language teacher and longtime educator, she preserves Sinixt knowledge, documents ancestral histories and connects future generations.

Shandy, Tribal education and workforce development leader, speaks at 11 a.m., Tuesday, Nov. 17. A Sinixt and an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation from the Omak District, she was previously director of Washington State's Office of Native Education. Her work focuses on strengthening Tribal sovereignty, expanding educational and career opportunities and empowering future generations and professionals.

Tony, an Indigenous singer, song writer, poet, actor and language advocate in Inchelium, will share at 11 a.m., Tuesday, Nov. 24. A member of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, he received the Native American Music Award for his music, which blends country, blues and Indigenous storytelling through soulful performances. Tony is also dedicated to revitalizing Nselxcin through his work with Inchelium Language House to preserve language and culture for future generations.

For information, call 624-2476, visit cct-ene.com/k-12.

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One River, Ethics Matters gathers leaders on Columbia River policies

The 12th and final One River, Ethics Matter Conference (OREM-12) will be an international gathering of Indigenous and faith leaders, scholars and environmental ethicists, policymakers and scientists, gathering to address the impacts of climate change on the Columbia River watershed as communities adjust to changing national policies.

It will be held from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Thursday and Friday, Nov. 12 and 13, on Zoom so it is accessible for Canadians reluctant to come south of the border and co-sponsors at Yale University.

Hosts are the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) and Washington State University (WSU), and sponsors include Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology, the Sierra Club and the Columbia Institute.

Gathering after the midterm elections, participants will determine how to work in challenging times and what are next steps in moving forward to protect and restore the international Columbia River and the river's life.

Beginning in 2014, the OREM conference series has facilitated international ethics consultations each year on the "critically ill" Columbia River. Speakers have shared about the multi-generational trauma resulting from dams flooding their traditional lands, blocking the journey of salmon between spawning grounds and the ocean and ending many Indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions.

The inspiration for OREM came from the work to modernize the 1964 international Columbia River Treaty after 50 years of damming the river for flood control, irrigation and power. Indigenous, faith, academic, environmental and other community voices sought to include Indigenous sovereigns at the treaty-negotiating table for restoring salmon runs and the health of the damaged Columbia River as co-equal with power and flood control.

The focus has been on Indigenous Tribes and First Nations related to individual and communal trauma that resulted in international PTSD, flooded sacred lands, boarding schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the loss of and threat to the Tribes' first foods.

Collaborating with faith leaders, academic scholars and Indigenous people, John Osborn, a physician 41 years on staff at the Spokane and Seattle Veterans Administration Medical Center, recruited a team who brought together three processes in ethics.



John Osborn

Those are 1) the 2001 Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on the Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good, which set the frame for a spiritual, social, ecological transformative process; 2) medical ethics as a consultative process, and 3) the Truth and Reconciliation healing process from South Africa.

Catholic Bishop Emeritus William Skylstad was at Gonzaga University to open the first conference and will give the opening prayer for the Nov. 12 session.

"We have used the OREM efforts to encourage that decisions about the river be based on ethical principles," said John. "That work is ongoing.

"We will not have enduring solutions to conflicts over the Columbia River until decisions are grounded in ethical principles of justice, righting historic wrongs and fair allocation of limited resources, stewardship and self-determination," John explained.

"In the ER, when caring for patients incapable of making decisions, we seek surrogates who know their values. For fisheries and the river who have no voice, who best speaks for them? The answer is Indigenous people who have lived with salmon and the river from time immemorial," John emphasized.

Conference participants continually have called for Indigenous surrogate decisionmakers for the river and fisheries to be at the treaty negotiation table to avoid further river destruction and salmon extinction.

While the conference series will end Nov. 13, the efforts will continue because the Columbia River Pastoral Letter is a living document and the people who live along the Columbia River will continue to advocate for stewardship of the land and water.

Although the series is ending, John said its scope has been significant as it has met in Spokane 2014, Portland 2015, Boise 2016, Revelstoke 2017, Missoula 2018, Castlegar 2019, the Estuary 2020, Okanagan 2021 and Spokane 2022. OREM joined with the Universities Consortium on Columbia River Governance for regional water and ethics conferences virtually in 2023 and at Gonzaga University in 2024. The 2026 conference will be virtual. There are short documentary films from most of the OREM gatherings.

With treaty negotiations on the shelf and the U.S.-Canadian relationship "a mess," John said it's time to discuss "how to do good work in hard times, which is a question Indigenous people have been struggling with for a long time."

Negotiators had reached an imperfect agreement in principle before the 2024 election, but negotiations are no longer happening. In addition, with recent changes in the cross-border relationship, including tariffs, border economies are hurting.

The Columbia, as an international river, compels both the U.S. and Canada to work together to address threats to its life and the people who live on the river. The risks of salmon extinction and climate change compel stewardship, responsibility and the ethical duty to work together, John believes.

"That's not happening now," he said, but "the question is, given climate change and changes in national policies, how do we move forward with what needs to be done?

"On the personal level, I have met many wonderful people," said John, who was inspired by meeting Bishop Skylstad in 2001 and Indigenous and academic leaders at a 2012 conference by the Universities Consortium on Columbia River Governance in Polson, Mont.

He learned about the Tribes' interest in working with NGOs on the Columbia River Treaty.

From there, John and his wife, Rachel, worked with Eileen Delehanty Pearkes, Gerry Nellestijn, Pat Ford, Martin Carver and many others to create the Columbia River Roundtable that convened in November 2013 in Nelson, B.C. It still meets monthly. They connect with civil organizations and Indigenous sovereigns interested in environmental concerns and restoring salmon.

Out of his interest in the pastoral letter and medical ethics, John had asked whether the Indigenous sovereign nations would support an ethics conference. Their answer was yes.

John met with Lutheran pastor Tom Soeldner, who had done pastoral work in South Africa as the apartheid government was dying and in Namibia during the first years of independence, giving him first-hand experience with the Truth and Reconciliation Process.

The first conference, hosted by UCUT and Gonzaga University, brought together the pastoral letter's process for transformation, the consultation process used in medical ethics and the truth and reconciliation process for healing and dialogue.

The programs have followed the sections of the Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter: "Rivers of Our Moment," "Rivers through Our Memory," "Rivers of Our Vision" and "Rivers as Our Responsibility."

"It has been an incredible life journey to meet so many committed Indigenous, faith and academic leaders throughout the region and beyond," said John.

"I have learned to see the world through the eyes of people who have lived with the river from time immemorial, to learn of the impact of the Oregon Treaty in 1846 that drew an international boundary across a river watershed on traditional lands of Indigenous people," he said.

"When it comes to the river and salmon, both are sacred. People will put aside differences to bring home the salmon," he said. "It is always hard to put aside entrenched differences, but that is what the salmon and river need to survive and flourish."

John has compiled a summary web page to access all the films at ethicsmatters.org/orem-summary.

"Now we need to bring together all of what we have learned to inform those who come after us of the ongoing challenges and decisions," he said, considering whether that might be in a documentary film, scholarly paper or book.

"The work is not done," he concluded. "We will continue to encourage dialogue across the border to restore our special relationship with our neighbors, the land and waters."

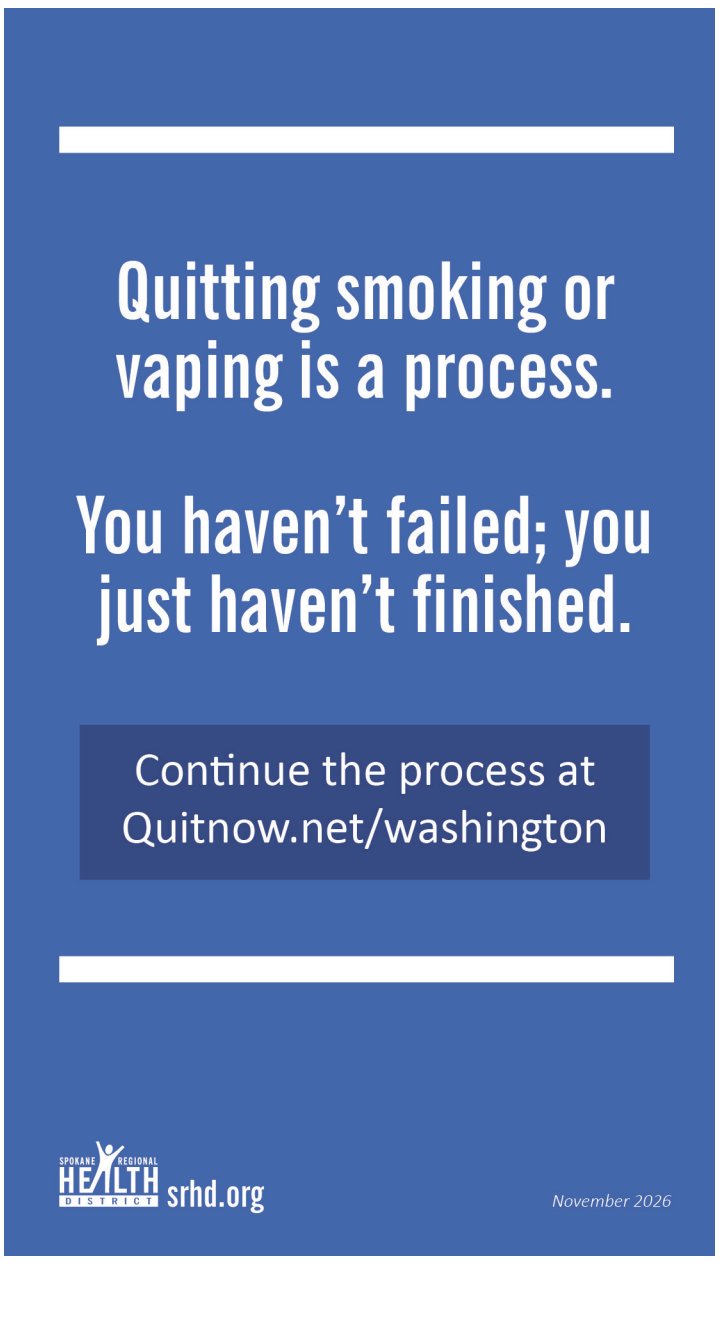
As part of that, John is involved with the Peace Arch Dialogues to restore civil dialogue between Canada and the U.S., focusing on transboundary waters.

For information on the conference, visit ethicsmatters.org/orem-12.



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Professor helps students find their own voices in writing, poetry

By Sedona Liming - intern

Mischa Willett, head of Whitworth's new master of fine arts (MFA) in creative writing, inspired by his own passion for English and poetry, seeks to help students find their own voices, the joy of writing in their unique ways and a love for each other as they create.

As a five-year-old, his fascination when his mother read the King James Bible to him was more about the poetic words than the stories of theology.

Now writing free verse, he feels his poetry is like "doing cartwheels" that allow him to "live in the sentences" he writes.

Whitworth University brought Mischa on staff in July 2025, opening its doors to the writing community for the first cohort of the MFA in creative writing. The program follows a two-year, low-residency format.

Students chosen for the program work mostly remotely with mentors scattered across the world, who are well-known writers in their fields. Twice a year, they will come to campus for a nine-day residency where they attend workshops and master classes, listen to guest speakers, and write and edit each other's work. Over two years, they will visit Whitworth five times for the residency portions.

The coursework includes reading and writing responses to about 50 books that are chosen for the students. Mischa said, "The program is tailored not only to each class or year but each person."

The concept was adapted from an MFA program previously offered at Seattle Pacific University (SPU). It was cut due to budget reductions.

Mischa, who previously taught in the MFA program at SPU, wanted to continue the Christian-focused creative writing community. The SPU program was well known in the writing community and produced many published writers.

Mischa noted one graduate now works for the New York Times as a film critic.

When the SPU program's end was in sight, some faculty presented the program to universities across the country. They chose Whitworth to continue the program because of its approach towards differing faiths.

"I really feel the faith here. People have massively different opinions about matters of theology, but everyone still gathers together and loves each other," he said.

The program expands Whitworth's broader literary and creative community by providing the opportunity for students to take classes from all over the world over video calls.



Mischa Willett heads Whitworth's master of fine arts.

Many graduates from the previous SPU program still hold it close to their hearts and send donations to contribute to the program's funding and well-being.

The hope is that it will also help strengthen Whitworth's undergraduate program for English writing and encourage students to further their education at Whitworth by continuing into its master's program.

A bachelor's degree in any field of study is the only academic requirement to qualify for the program.

Past students have ranged from recent undergraduates and teachers to empty nesters, retirees, pastors, veterans and stay-at-home parents.

The common thread is that students are dedicated Christians and excited to grow their writing skills.

The course's Christian focus is highlighted in the curriculum through the guest speakers, who for the most part identify as Christian, the texts students read and the discussions professors lead.

A distinctive part of the MFA's nine-day residencies is that a chaplain is hired to begin each day with Scripture and prayer alongside students.

"Because the cohorts are made up of Christians, the students encourage each other and pray for each other," Mischa said. "Many of the students stick together even years after the program."

Faith has always been an important focus in Mischa's life.

"I took my faith seriously. From the time I could speak, I was praying seriously," he said.

His family never had a denomination they identified with but would find churches that "seemed like the spirit was there" wherever they lived.

This led him to seek out a faith-centered education at Wheaton College in Illinois. He also was the first person in his family to attend college.

After reflecting on the spiritual lives of people who were influential to him, he noticed that most were a part of the Evangelical Anglican Church. As a result, he found his home in that church and was confirmed in the Anglican Church of North America.

Mischa enjoys the practices and communion that Anglicanism has and the ability to go to any church and hear the same gospel and worship service.

He incorporates his faith into his writing through the underlying messages in his poetry. In the classroom, he fosters conversations about how each reading can be related to faith.

Mischa found his calling for MFA mentorship after teaching in Seattle Pacific University's program, specifically with the poetry cohort.

"Immediately it was the most fun thing I'd ever done in my life," he said.

"I found that there were these things I knew that I couldn't give to anyone because I didn't have people asking and because I was not working with people of that level, but the graduate students just wanted everything, everything I knew and anything at all."

As a child, Mischa moved frequently because his father worked as a bowling alley mechanic. After living all over the country, he felt the most at home in the Northwest, which brought him to Seattle.

He lived in the Seattle area for about 18 years while attending the University of Washington's MFA program and teaching at Northwest University and Seattle Pacific University. He was excited to continue teaching in Washington when he moved to Spokane to create Whitworth's MFA.

His love for writing had always been present even from a young age.

As an undergraduate at Wheaton College, Mischa entered as a freshman majoring in Christian education with the intent to become a pastor. After jumping around in different fields, he studied abroad in Oxford and discovered a love for education and writing, which led him to decide on English as his major.

Poetry was always something Mischa had a passion for even before he pursued it as a career. As a freshman, he found himself printing poems on a classmate's printer, the only one in the dorms.

"I would go into his room late at night and type poems and print 50 copies of them and fold them up in the middle of books and stuff like that."

The transition to writing poetry in a more serious fashion was sparked after hearing poetry readings at Wheaton from Dana Gioia and Li-Young Lee, who are prominent authors in the poetry world. Mischa was inspired by their work and saw that poetry writing could be a realistic career.

As a seasoned poet now, Mischa has written three books.

His most recent book, "This Gift Card Has Already Been Redeemed," was published in early October. The book is a collection of poetry that addresses "faith, prayer and church, but also disappointment, displacement and deep reading."

The first cohort for the program included students working in four genres: poetry, fiction, nonfiction and spiritual writing.

All the spots for the January 2027 cohort have filled, but the program is accepting inquiries from applicants for future cohorts.

"The goal is that everyone becomes the best writer they have in them to be," Mischa shared, "but secondary, what I want is that they love each other."

For information, see whitworth.edu/mfa.

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Specialized Needs Recreation brings participants joy, activities, hope

By Kaye Hult

To walk into the Specialized Needs Recreation (SNR) gathering place at 3700 Government Way in Coeur d'Alene is to walk into an atmosphere electric with joy, enthusiasm and hope.

No matter where one looks, people are involved, helping greet visitors, playing a card game together, attending a puppet show or helping with a variety of chores.

As SNR board member Suzanne Knutson walks around, people continually come up to greet her and tell her what is going on with them.



Ann Macklin, Crystal Teeters and Suzanne Knutson enjoy lunch.
Photo courtesy of Suzanne Knutson

"SNR fills a need for people with special needs to develop independent living skills through recreation and socialization," she said. "It is here to enrich their lives and enhance their growth as individuals."

Signs posted on the walls throughout the building reinforce these goals: "You Belong." "You Matter." "You are Enough." "You are Strong."

"Many participants, if they were not here, would be home alone, isolated, possibly depressed," she said.

"Additionally, being a caregiver to an individual with special needs can be isolating and lonely. SNR provides respite for caregivers," she continued.

The program serves more than 300 people with more than 6,000 annual visits. Participants come from Kootenai, Boundary, Benewah and Shoshone counties and Spokane Valley.

Suzanne moved to Coeur d'Alene in 2017 to be guardian for a cousin in Montana. Her cousin told her she didn't want her to live in Montana, but living in Coeur d'Alene was okay.

"When my cousin passed away a couple years ago," she said, "it opened up the possibility for me to join the board."

Before coming here, she had taught home economics and was a stay-at-home mom, homeschooling her kids.

"When I moved here, I had an identity crisis," she said.

Like many others who move here, she was looking for resources to help her help her cousin. She found Specialized Needs Recreation and has been involved with them ever since.

Suzanne brought people to SNR events before becoming formally involved. Now she describes herself as a full-time volunteer. She helps with writing grants, marketing and community outreach for the board.

"We assume competence for SNR participants," she explained. "If our participants need help, they ask for it. If I need help at SNR, I go to the participants first. They know where things are. They know the routine. We want to offer opportunities for their input. They should be included. SNR is their space.

"SNR is a safe place with no judgment or stigma. It is where people experience massive amounts of kindness and acceptance," Suzanne continued.

At the center itself, activities abound. On the center's TV, they can participate in Wii sports such as bowling, tennis, golfing, snowboarding, surfing and pickleball. There are puzzles and games and crafts in which people can engage.

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday, SNR's Life Group provides a place for participants ages 18 and up to spend time with friends, staff and volunteers, while also practicing social interactions as they learn to live a more independent life.

Suzanne said a typical week includes crafts, sports, outings, cooking, social events, bowling and volunteer projects.

Every day at 10 a.m., they have a morning meeting, when they go through the day's schedule. They take responsibility at every level, including cleaning up at the end of the day.

Mondays generally are a social day at the center. For example, women come to teach table looming. Participants also bring projects they want to work on.

Tuesdays, participants go over to the Post Falls Real Life Ministries gym for basketball.

Wednesday bowling recently expanded to two sessions, doubling to 47 participants.

Thursdays, participants go into the community. They eat lunch at local restaurants. They may visit a park, movie, theater or museum.

Every other Friday, they cook. Fred Meyer provided enough gift cards last year to pay for the groceries they needed. Recently, they cooked chicken noodle soup and grilled cheese sandwiches.

On alternate Fridays, Kiwanis holds an Aktion Club. Participants may plant garden plots at Shared Harvest Community Garden or place wreaths on veterans' graves for holidays. A favorite activity is distributing food at the Second Harvest Community Food Bank. They also pick up trash at community parks.

"They like to volunteer," Suzanne said. "They also like to participate in outreach events where Specialized Needs Recreation has a display table.

"It's their place," she said. "We do what our participants want to do."

Beyond the Life Group, SNR has a kids' camp, Camp All-Stars, in the summer for those aged eight through 17. It also includes a sports program and an evening group for ages eight and up.

At one time, the City of Coeur d'Alene Parks and Recreation Department had a therapeutic recreation program. When that ended, the special needs community wanted to have something. That became SNR. They became a nonprofit in 1984.

"**We receive no state** or federal funding," Suzanne said. "We rely on community support through grants, donations and volunteers.

"Most adults with disabilities are on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)," she said. "We have to keep our program affordable. Many apply for scholarships. We raise money so people can come and have fun."

"Recently several nonprofits and others have created events to help us raise funds," Suzanne said, noting that those events have included golf, pickleball and kickball tournaments.

"Any time we can be out in the community or bring the community into our space for awareness of what we do, it raises understanding," said Suzanne, who is one of 11 board members.

SNR has three full-time staff—Lindsay Patterson, executive director; Brianna Shirey, program director, and Wendy Wetzel, program coordinator—and several part-time staff.

Specialized Needs Recreation recently launched a capital campaign for a new, larger building.

"The City of Coeur d'Alene has set aside almost five acres for us to build a recreation center for people with disabilities at Cherry Hill Park on 15th," she said.

"We have contracted with the city to raise $3.5 million in three to six years," she said. "We're bursting at the seams."

Specialized Needs Recreation, which currently has a 3,000 square foot facility, seeks to build a dedicated space where individuals with special needs can participate in meaningful activities, build friendships, develop skills and experience a greater sense of belonging.

As this campaign moves forward, they are reaching beyond their current families and participants to Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls, Hayden and Rathdrum.

"Building awareness is a community-wide responsibility," Suzanne said. "By engaging local businesses, civic organizations, community leaders and residents, we can help more people understand the need, recognize the impact SNR has on local families, and discover meaningful ways to support this effort.

"The building will be an investment in inclusion, opportunity and a community," she said.

She was reminded recently why SNR is so important.

"One participant, Dave, is hard to understand when he speaks. To my knowledge, Lucas did not speak," she said. "I looked up to see them in an animated conversation. Hearing them talk and laugh was so special. Participants are here because they feel included. They feel they belong and are understood."

For information, call 208-755-6781 or visit SNRIdaho.org.

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SCC creates new path to college degree

Spokane Community College (SCC) has created a path for eligible students to work toward a high school diploma and college degree at the same time, with financial and academic support.

"We've created Running Start for adults," said SCC President Jenni Martin. "It offers the benefits of Running Start to people who aren't in high school anymore. It's a path to finishing college for older people who don't have a high school credential."

Through SCC's High School + College approach, students without a high school credential can earn college credits while completing high school requirements. College coursework can count toward both, allowing students to work on a diploma and associate degree at the same time.

SCC uses its existing High School + waiver and Washington's Ability to Benefit (ATB) provisions to help students complete their first six college credits without paying out of pocket. After that, students can access federal financial aid if they meet requirements.

"Some Washington community and technical colleges offer a waiver for HS+ students taking college level classes, and some offer ATB on a limited basis," said Jaclyn Jacot, SCC vice president of instruction. "SCC is the first college in the state to combine the benefits of HS+ with ATB. The program is faculty-driven, student-centered and focused to move students from earning their high school diploma through a college degree in less time."

Students receive academic support as they learn to navigate college.

"We give students college experience without the college pressure," said Sherri Fujita, dean of Adult Basic Education at SCC.

For information, visit spokane.edu/learn.

Fig Tree one of 50 SNAP partners recognized

The Fig Tree was one of 50 nominees for the SNAP 2026 Mission and Values Partner Awards honored at SNAP's Partner Appreciation Event Oct. 21, at The Boxcar Room in Spokane. SNAP honored partners, volunteers, vendors and donors.

Chosen from nominees were three for the legacy award, PJ Grabicki, Avista Utilities and Bob Peele homeless advocate; the equity award, Alvaro Figueroa of Avista; the respect award, Bruce Dentler, Linda Howe, Noreen Taylor, Pearl Bouchard, Sharon Niblock of the Eastern Washington Long Term Care Ombudsman.

Recognized for the justice award was Derrick Jenkins of the Carl Maxey Center; the community award, Spokane County Emergency Management, City of Spokane, Spokane Public Schools, Innovia Foundation and American Red Cross; for the fire response award, the Disaster Assistance Center, and for the mission in action award, Neighbors on the Go Carol Stolp, Ken Cogswell, Elaine Terdeal, Marilyn Darilek, Troy Tassin, Bill Fassett, Chelsey Daniels, Merlene Summers and Dale Raugust.

Lindsey Shaw of SNAP said The Fig Tree was nominated because it contributes to SNAP's mission and makes a difference in the lives of Spokane neighbors with its monthly newspaper and annual resource directory.

"The Fig Tree ensures people have access to inspiring stories, important information and resources they need to thrive," she said, pointing out that SNAP values that it makes resources accessible both online and in print.

"Their commitment was evident during the recent disaster response. The Fig Tree showed up at the Disaster Assistance Center with their Resource Guide, recognizing that people needed clear, accessible information at a difficult time," she said.

She also recognized the Fig Tree for quickly creating a Short-Term Directory of Fire Resources to help connect people affected by the fires with the assistance and services.

"The Fig Tree helps strengthen the community by connecting people with opportunities, resources and hope," Lindsey said.

For information, visit snapwa.org and thefigtree.org/directory.

Speakers tell of friendship in polarized society

Weyerhaeuser Center for Christian Faith and Learning at Whitworth University will host a discussion with Cornel West and Robert George "On Friendship in a Polarized Society" at 4 p.m., Friday, Nov. 6, in the Robinson Teaching Theatre.

Cornel West, the Dietrich Bonhoeffer chair at Union Theological Seminary, teaches courses in philosophy of religion, African American critical thought, classics, philosophy, politics, cultural theory, literature and music.

He previously taught at Harvard University and is a professor emeritus at Princeton University. He earned degrees from both schools.

His 20 books include *Race Matters and Democracy Matters*, and his memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*.

Robert George, McCormick professor of jurisprudence at Princeton and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, served as chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, on the President's Council on Bioethics and on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

He was a U.S. member of UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology and is a former judicial fellow at the U.S. Supreme Court.

A graduate of Swarthmore College, he holds a juris doctorate and master's degrees from Harvard and other degrees from Oxford University.

For information, call 777-3298, email dhenreckson@whitworth.edu or visit whitworth.edu/cms/administration/weyerhaeuser-center-christian-faith-and-learning/upcoming-events.



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Second Harvest consistently finds generosity rises to need, as in fires

A couple who had never volunteered for Second Harvest Inland Northwest before came to the warehouse on day two of the Spokane complex fires in August and helped five days a week for three weeks because they live in a neighborhood where fires burned down most of their neighbors' homes. They had kept a sprinkler going on top of their house and did not lose it.

"They felt thankful they still had a house," said Eric Williams, community partnerships and media director.

The couple are just one example of how people rose to meet the needs for food and volunteers during the wildfires. In times of greater need for food, he finds that Second Harvest experiences greater generosity.

Kathy Hedgcock, senior leader of philanthropy, shared comments of three women she met at the Disaster Assistance Center.

• **Ana and her family** just returned from traveling when evacuation alerts sent them back out the door. With three children, visiting family while everyday necessities sat in a home they couldn't access, made Ana feel she was restarting. Food and other resources helped make that easier.

"It meant less stress on us so we could focus on what we needed to do," said Ana, surprised how quickly people stepped forward to help. "Seeing everybody just swoop in and help with no judgment was amazing."

• **For Chelsea, food assistance** was more than groceries while she, her spouse, their five-year-old daughter and two service animals were displaced to temporary lodging. As the days away from home increased so did expenses.

"We can use groceries. Everything costs so much. To take that off our plate is huge," said Chelsea, who estimated that the value of a box of food helped her family cover two or three nights of shelter. With so much uncertain, meeting one basic need helped preserve other resources for another day.

• **Brenda is more** accustomed to offering help than asking for it. After wildfires forced her from her home, she stayed with friends and turned to community resources while waiting. Food assistance offered immediate relief, freeing funds for other needs.

What has stayed with her most was how readily people showed up for one another, giving her perspective on the other side of helping others.

"Spokane is unique. It seems like every time anything happens, no one questions," she said. "They start doing things to help others."

Eric finds that generosity was what Second Harvest, the food bank for food banks, experienced during and after the wildfires in August and September through the 26 Eastern Washington and North Idaho counties it serves.



Volunteers Isabelle Christensen and Taryn Standage of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and local volunteer, Bryan Conn Sr., set up a mobile market at the Disaster Assistance Center at Shadle Park High School in Spokane.

Photo courtesty of Second Harvest

Eric noted that Spokane area mobile markets provided 73 percent more food and served 50 percent more families in August 2026 compared with August 2025.

Accompanying the surge in need was a surge in volunteers and in donations, he said.

"It was instant that individuals, organizations and corporations stepped up," said Kathy. "Some who usually give were giving an extra gift."

In addition to the regular distributions and mobile markets, for several weeks, Second Harvest had an extra mobile market at the Wolff Family Child Hunger Solution Center at 402 N. Perry St. across from the main warehouse. They also partnered with Excelsior Wellness at 3754 W. Indian Trail, in the area most impacted by the Spokane fires to supply food for their Indian Trail Community Care Hub during seven weekdays in August.

In both cases, the usual mix of perishable and shelf-stable food they have at mobile markets was provided, but Kathy said they had to have ready-to-eat foods because families did not have access to kitchens.

Second Harvest had volunteers and staff at the Shadle Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) while it was open. Eric was impressed with how Washington Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (WA-VOAD) coordinated the work of faith communities, nonprofits, the state's national guard, county disaster programs, the American Red Cross and others who were there.

"We had to lean on staff and volunteers to step up, but, boy, did everyone help," said Eric. "People in the community continually asked how they could help."

Another key element to the response was Second Harvest's existing network of food banks, including Union Gospel Mission, The Salvation Army and faith communities where people also brought food donations.

"After the first days, many evacuees stayed with family and friends, so food pantries around town saw an uptick in use," said Eric. "It was hard to predict where demand would be. We sent food to locations as requested."

In times like the fires, it's vital to have a network of reliable locations with one or two staffers to respond to needs, he said.

"Because most families will take time to rebuild, there will be additional long-term needs," Eric explained.

"For many affected by the fire, it was their first time to access food pantry food," Kathy observed. "Many learned for the first time where the nearest food pantry is."

Eric said Second Harvest is working with area schools for guidance on how to best meet the ongoing needs.

"The schools have their finger on the pulse of the needs, because they are usual sites for mobile markets," he said.

With the surge in need from the wildfires, Eric realized the benefit of being part of the Feeding America network. Five truckloads of food from other areas came as an immediate response.

• Food Lifeline, a sister agency in Seattle, sent a full semi load of mostly shelf stable foods.

• One truck load came from the Washington Department of Agriculture.

• A grocery store that is a generous donor gave an extra load.

• West Side egg donors sent eggs in cartons and liquid eggs.

• A full semi load of food came from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

• Friends at The Idaho Foodbank sent a semi load of shelf stable Chobani milk from large dairies in Southern Idaho.

"To have shelf-stable milk helped because people were not housed, were at neighbors or were in a camper with no refrigerator," Kathy said.

"Being in a network was a godsend with the additional donations at pantries," Eric added. "It was just as helpful to donate to a local food pantry as to Second Harvest. What was important was that there was extra food for people who needed it."

"Needs continue to be high, but generosity comes close to meeting them," said Kathy. "Generosity follows need.

"During COVID, we also experienced people immediately reaching out and asking, 'What do you need?' We are fortunate to be in this community," she said. "Often, we do not need to ask. People want to respond—food donors, financial donors and volunteers. They want to help people in any way they can."

On the first day of the fire, Second Harvest put out big bins and invited people to donate nonperishable food. They filled 27 bins.

"There was a surge beyond the norm, but what is normal is not acceptable," Eric added, referring to ongoing food insecurity.

"While the surge from the wildfires has settled down, but by February and a year from now, people who do not yet have a house will need to come to us, and we need to make sure there is food available in our pantries and food networks," he said.

Eric said there is a usual increase in generosity during the November and December holidays that carries Second Harvest's network through, but there are always people facing hunger in February.

Now Second Harvest is also anticipating the impact of cuts to the federal SNAP food subsidies.

"SNAP accounts for nine times the amount of food distributed in the entire charitable food security system we are part of," said Eric.

There are many variables related to SNAP in proposals now before Congress, including repealing it or modifying it with different proposals, he pointed out. Whether a farm bill passes and what changes it may make to SNAP will have impact.

That's the climate of uncertainty in which Second Harvest operates. It must adapt to be ready to receive and pass on the generosity and volunteerism of the community.

For information, call 534-6678 or visit 2-harvest.org.









Editorial Reflections

After 80 years, our lives are a laboratory for ecumenism and unity

Readers of The Fig Tree are part of the 80-year legacy of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, a residential study center that brings together groups of 30 to 60 each year at a Swiss chateau overlooking Lake Geneva and the French Alps.

In that idyllic setting, we lived, prayed, ate, walked, studied, conversed together as a community for up to six months. Despite the idyllic setting we interacted on the painful matters of the world, faiths, differences, wars, inequities, struggles, health, tragedies—every issue under the sun—are discussed.

Bossey was founded in 1946 as an international, interconfessional residential graduate study center for people to deal with the difficult questions about how to live faithfully in a fractured world.

From midnight until 6:30 a.m. on Oct. 7, I participated on Zoom in the 80th anniversary celebration of Bossey with church and civic leaders from around the world.

For eight decades, Bossey has influenced the lives and ministries of thousands of students who have gone on to serve churches, faiths, nonprofits and communities around the world. Through open, respectful study, daily encounters, dialogue and friendship, we students were transformed in this "laboratory of ecumenism," and began a pilgrimage we have continued through our lives, drawing others to walk with us to forge reconciliation and unity.

I attended Bossey in 1969 to 1970 with 60 people from 40 countries, participating in shared life, in formal and informal dialogue about our faith and how churches were engaged in the lives of people and action for social, human, civil, women's, environmental and religious rights.

I became involved with connecting Bossey alumni, and as a result, directory editor Malcolm Haworth, as a teen, and I had participated in the 50th anniversary in 1996. I started a newsletter called "Beyond Boundaries." That year, Marijke Fakasiieiki, now development and editorial associate for The Fig Tree attended the graduate theological studies before she attended Pacific School of Religion. Marijke has also been involved in connecting alumni.

Part of the legacy of my experiences at Bossey is sharing with people in the Inland Northwest through The Fig Tree community and regional stories of how churches and faith communities have an impact on the quality of life here. We also share stories from Ecumenical News International and the Communications Department of the World Council of Churches in our column on page 2.

Few media pick up those stories, which this month included a call for studying forests around Ethiopian churches to help restore tree cover, for human rights progress at the UN and for Indigenous and youth voices to be heard at the COP 17 climate summit in Ulaanbaatar. Each month there are more stories shared at oikoumene.org than we can include.

For 43 years with The Fig Tree, I shared stories of people on a similar pilgrimage right here to build interfaith understanding, common witness, persistent action and a hopeful reality. It is a joy to share with and walk with our partners here.

Mary Stamp - Editor

Clergy Care

Sounding Board

Sing a New Song

Faith leaders reflect on clergy care and new songs for new times

Given the pressures pastors are facing right now, we have an opportunity to go deeper than an annual pat on the back in October, which is Clergy Appreciation Month.

Local ministry is joyful, sacred work—but it can also be exhausting, complex and surprisingly lonely. Pastors carry hospital visits, late-night phone calls, budget headaches and community anxieties, while showing up every Sunday with a word of hope for people who are carrying burdens of their own.

Honoring pastors well starts with seeing the real person behind the call. Pastors have bad days, hard weeks, families to care for and limits just like everyone else. One of the best ways a congregation can love its pastor is simply giving them permission to be human. That means protecting their days off, insisting they take their vacations, giving them space to care for their families and remembering that rest isn't a luxury—it's how anyone stays healthy for the long haul.

It also means sharing the load. Pastors can feel like it's up to us to make our churches healthy and successful. We often treat pastoring like an endurance sport to run alone. Churches often look to the pastor to "fix" things so the church will thrive, but healthy, vital churches don't happen because one heroic leader carries the whole load. They happen when pastors and congregations genuinely look out for each other and support each other in becoming whom God is calling each to be.

Pastors can also feel tempted to tie their worth to attendance numbers, full calendars or keeping everyone happy. We need to remind our pastors—and pastors need to remind themselves—that their value in Christ has nothing to do with how busy they are or how many people are coming.

While last month was an opportunity to appreciate pastors, we need regularly to be sure the relationship between the church and the pastor is healthy and life-giving.

We can name the places of tension and friction and begin talking about what shifts and changes need to be made for the relationship to work better. We can also affirm what is life-giving about how we work together? Where are we frustrated? What would help our pastor sustain this work for the long haul? Have the conversation with your pastor and reach out if you need the neutral voice of a superintendent or other regional pastor.

Rev. Geoff Helton
Superintendent, Inland and Seven Rivers Missional Districts

Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church

At the House of Bishops meeting recently we talked about what we see in the world today, and much of what we are seeing is change.

Throughout the world, we are experiencing rapid change due, in part, to climate change, technological advances, wars and demographic changes. These changes come to us as external forces, beyond our immediate control, and so many people feel powerless. Rapid change may cause people to feel powerless, bringing anger and resentment. Then some look for something or someone to blame. Scapegoating others is a classic way people respond to express a sense of power and control. We are seeing this taking place on the global level.

We have been here before. Our history and our scripture tell us the dangers of scapegoating others, seeing other people as enemies and the source of all our problems. Fear and hatred do not bring about good. When we allow fear and anger to lead us to exclusion, to scapegoating, to discrimination, we always end up on the wrong side of the Gospel.

Fortunately, there is another way, and it is the way of Jesus. When the world sings hate, we sing love. When the world sings revenge, we sing forgiveness. When the world sings punishment, we sing mercy. When the world sings fear, we sing faith.

There are many changes taking place in our world, and I expect that to continue, but what will we sing in response to those changes? This past year, our diocesan theme has been "Sing to the Lord a New Song." The songs we sing are new because we live in new times, but they are not new when it comes to love and forgiveness and mercy and faith.

We sing with our spiritual ancestors, our songs of hope and joy, lament and sorrow, trust and faith. We are called to sing a new song to the Lord in a world that does not know the song. We are called to let our voices ring out the story of salvation, the story of hope, the story of redemption.

As we sing a new song to the Lord let us use the words and the tunes that speak to us today and let us join our voices with our spiritual ancestors in trust and faith and love and hope so that in the midst of great changes around us, we will not give in to the fear and anger but stay firmly rooted in our faith in Christ.

Bishop Gretchen Rehberg
Episcopal Diocese of Spokane

What can churches do as banks feed debt and the climate emergency?

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group held their 2026 Annual Meetings in Bangkok, Thailand, Oct. 12 to 18. At the same time, churches and civil society met at the International People's Assembly with a different question: How can money for climate action reach the countries that need it without adding to their debt?

A workshop on "From Debt to Climate Justice: Financing Just Transitions" took up that question. The World Council of Churches (WCC) organized the workshop with the All Africa Conference of Churches, Centre for Financial Accountability and World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

A just transition is a move away from fossil fuels that is fair to workers and communities. Participants looked at the role of multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank, in financing climate action.

Philip Vinod Peacock, general secretary of the WCRC, said "capitalism has learned to commodify even disaster. When floods and cyclones strike, communities in the Global South are offered more loans, insurance products and investment opportunities, so their suffering becomes a new market.

"A crisis caused overwhelmingly by the wealthy is turned into debt for the poor and profit for others," he pointed out.

For Rev. Jackline Makena Mutuma of the Methodist Church in Kenya, loans are the wrong tool for climate and just-transition needs. "It's not about climate finance. It's handing the bill to the victims."

From 2020 to 2023, Kenya experienced the worst drought in four decades. Floods killed 291 people between March and May 2024. Now the government spends nearly half of its revenue on servicing debt, Jackline explained.

"This is the climate-debt trap: the more the climate hurts you, the more you pay for money," she said.

Mutuma called for grants, not loans, for adaptation, meaning coping with climate impacts already under way, and for loss and damage, the harm communities can no longer avoid or adapt to.

She also called for debt cancellation, wiping debts out, for automatic pauses in debt payments when disasters hit, and for recognition of the ecological debt owed for climate and environmental harm.

"Africa is not the debtor in this story," she said. "We are the creditors of an ecological debt that has never been paid."

For both church leaders, these are questions of faith. "Every day, Christians around the world pray in the Lord's Prayer, 'forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,'" said Peacock. "We cannot say those words in church on Sunday and accept a financial system on Monday that keeps whole nations in debt bondage."

"Scripture is not neutral on debt," said Mutumam pointing to the Jubilee of Leviticus 25, which calls for debts to be cancelled, and land restored every 50 years, and where God says, "the land is mine."

She also named Zacchaeus, the tax collector in Luke 19 who promised to repay those he had cheated. Churches "can call creditors who profit from disasters to repentance, the way Zacchaeus repented," she said. "Jubilee is not a favor that creditors grant. It is a correction that God commands."

Joe Athialy, executive director of the Centre for Financial Accountability, was asked what counts as "bankable," since the banks' models favor large, commercially attractive projects. Uhuru Dempers, head of the social development desk at the National Council of Churches in Namibia, was asked whether banks can tackle structural inequalities, and what should replace the dominant model.

The workshop was one of five WCC engagements around the annual meetings. On Oct. 12, the WCC joined the International People's Assembly. On Oct. 14, it took part in two events on wealth concentration and international tax cooperation. Both were co-organized by the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation, which the WCC co-founded, with Oxfam and other partners. That evening, the WCC hosted the webinar "Follow the Money: Multilateral Development Banks, Fossil Fuels and Climate Justice."

Faith groups carry the call for grants, not loans, to COP31, the UN climate conference in Antalya, Türkiye, from Nov. 9 to 20, as part of the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action from 2025 to 2034.

World Council of Churches News
oikoumene.org/news



Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed
Submit events to development@thefigtree.org by the third Friday

Second Harvest Mobile Markets and Food Sorting 2-harvest.org

Nov • **Coats for Kids,** kxly.com/features/coats-4-kids/

Mons • **Stress Busting for Caregivers,** Frontier Behavioral Health Caregiver Support Program, Zoom, 2 to 3:30 p.m., 458-7450, caregiversupport@fbhwa.org

• **Culture Nights,** American Indian Community Center, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., 535-0886, aiccinc.org

Tues • **Compassion Every Day,** Sravasti Abbey, Pend Oreille PUD, 130 N. Washington, Newport, 6:30 to 8 p.m., to Nov 17, sravastiabbey.org

Tues/Fris • **A Language of Life, Non-Violent** Communication, 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

Weds to Oct 28 • **Wednesday Storytime,** Wishing Tree Books, 1410 E. 11th, 10:30 to 11 a.m., 315-9875, books@wishingtreebookstore.com

Weds Oct 21-Nov 25 • **Discussion on Magnifica Humanitas** with Liv Larson, ELCA Lutheran NW Intermountain Synod, Zoom, 6:30 p.m., nwimsynod.org

Thurs • **Taizé Prayer,** Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartletts@gonzaga.edu

Suns • **Sharing the Dharma Day**, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Lane, Newport, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 447-5549, sravastiabbey.org

Nov 1-7 • **Indigenous Birth Justice Week,** Indigenous Birth Justice at 3204 W Riverside,

Nov 3 • **Election Day,** deliver ballots to County Election Office drop boxes before 8 p.m.

Nov 3-5 • **Board Member Boot Camp,** Idaho Community Foundation, Nonprofit Center, (208) 342-3535, idahocf.org/programs-calendar

Nov 4 • **Legal Clinic,** The Carl Maxey Center, 3114 E. 5th, 12:30 to 4:30 p.m., 795-1886, cmc@carlmaxeycenter.org

• **QPR Suicide Prevention Training,** NAMI Spokane, 152 S Jefferson Ste 100, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 838-5515, namispokane.org

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

• **PJALS Rapid Response Volunteer Training,** location after registration, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., pjals.org/rrvt

• **The Fig Tree Benefit/Fundraising,** Board Meetings, 12-1 p.m., 1-3 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org

• **"The Healing Power of Listening,** Allen Tacke, Monastery of St. Gertrude Spirit Center, stgertrudes.org

• **Climate Resilience through Mutual Aid**, Gonzaga Climate Institute, Hemmingson Auditorium, 702 E. Desmet, 6 to 8 p.m., climateinstitute@gonzaga.edu, gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents

• **How AI Can Lead to Greater Humanity** in Healthcare, Hemmingson, 702 E. Desmet, 6 to 7:30 p.m.

• **"Bringing Hope to the Youth of Spokane,"** Keys of Hope Fundraiser for Youth for Christ, Summit Spokane, 6 p.m., 327-7721 info@spokaneyfc.org, spokaneyfc.org

• **Grief Tending Circle,** Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 6:30 to 9 p.m., harmonywoods.org

Nov 6 • **Christian Witness in a Polarized Society,** Cornel West and Robert George, Whitworth, 300 W. Hawthorne, 4 to 5:30 p.m., dhenreckson@whitworth.edu

Nov 7 • **Spokane Neighborhood Summit**, Gonzaga Hemmingson Ballroom, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

• **St. Gregorios Bazaar,** 1735 E Bridgeport, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mediterranean food served from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

• **Holiday Bazaars in Cheney,** United Methodist, 204 4th, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Congregational, 423 N. 6th, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., St. Paul's Episcopal, 625 C, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., St. Rose of Lima Catholic, 460 N. 5th, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. cheneyumc.org

• **Artisan Craft Bazaar,** Jacob's Well Church, 3016 E Fifth, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

• **Fall for Jesus, Pop Up Shop,** shop, worship, connect, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, 500 S. Stone, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

• **Lutefisk & Meatball Dinner, Sons of Norway,** benefit for local Spokane Charities, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 326-9211, sonsofnorwayspokane@gmail.com, sonsofnorwayspokane.com

• **Reconnecting Roots: An Urban Native Story**, South Hill Library, 3324 S Perry, 1 p.m., spokanelibrary.org

• **Pioneer Day,** German American Society, 25 W. 3rd, 5:30 to 11 p.m., germanamericansociety-spokane.org

• **Freedom Fund Gala,** NAACP Spokane Branch, Spokane Convention Center – Jr. Ballroom (300), 7 to 9 p.m., naacpspokane.com

Nov 7-8 • **The Pastoral,** Spokane Symphony, Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat 7:30 p.m., Sun 3 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org

Nov 7 • **Race to Feed Our Veterans 5K,** Meals on Wheels Spokane, Fairmount Memorial, 508 N. Government, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., 232-0864, mowspokane.org

• **15 years: Many Faiths Fighting for Justice,** Faith Action Network's Annual Dinner Fundraiser, Gonzaga's Hemmingson Center, 5 p.m., fanwa.ejoinme.org/15YearsSpokane

• **Inaugural Feast of Holy Relics,** St. Mary Catholic, 304 S Adams, Spokane Valley 5 to 7 p.m., 928-3210, stmary@dioceseofspokane.org

Nov 9 • **Planted in Faith, Growing in Grace,** Immaculate Heart Retreat Center Fundraiser, 6810 S. Ben Burr, 5 to 8 p.m., 448-1224, ihrc.net

Nov 10 • **Women Lead Luncheon,** GU School of Leadership Studies, Hemmingson Center Ballroom, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., womenlead@gonzaga.edu

• **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference** planning, Zoom, 3:30 p.m., kaye@thefigtree.org

Nov 11 • **ED Coffee House,** Nonprofit Association of WA, Zoom 9 a.m., members.nonprofitwa.org/events/20261014-online-ed-coffee-hour

Nov 12 • **Eva Lassman "Take Action Against Hate"** awards, Human Rights Spokane Awards Banquet, Spokane Convention Center Centennial Ballroom, 334 W. Spokane Falls, 5 to 8 p.m., humanrightsspokane.org

• **Spoken River,** fundraiser, Spokane Riverkeeper, Spokane Convention Center Ballroom, 300 BCD, 334 W. Spokane Falls, 5 to 8 p.m., 464-7614, spokaneriverkeeper.org

Nov 12, 13 • **One River, Ethics Matter,** 8:30 a.m. to noon, Zoom, ethicsmatters.org/orem-12

Nov 12, 26 • **Dances of Universal Peace,** Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733, facebook.com/spokanedup

Nov 13 • **Women Lead Mujeres Lideres Conferencia,** Gonzaga Leadership Studies in Spanish, The Leo Center, Pasco, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., gonzaga.edu/school-of-leadership-studies/women-lead

• **Transportation Speed Dating,** a networking event, 499-4810, hollyc@specialmobility.org

• **Feast World Kitchen Gala**, "One Table, Many Stories," 6 to 9 p.m., Mukogawa Events Center, 4320 W. Owens Ridge Rd., 608-1313, feastworldkitchen.org

• **Celebrate the Season,** The Salvation Army, Spokane Convention Center, Centennial Ballroom, 334 W. Spokane Falls, event, 6 p.m., 325-6810

Nov 13-14 • **Building Restorative Communities** Gathering, NAACP Spokane Branch, Gonzaga University School of Law, Fri 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Sat 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., naacpspokane.com

Nov 13-22 • **The Best Christmas Pageant Ever,** The Kroc, 1765 W. Golf Course, Coeur d'Alene, Fri 6 p.m., Sat 2, 6 p.m., Sun 2 p.m., 208-660-9870

To Nov 14 • **Unto the Ends of the Earth,** Legacy of the Great Commission in the Inland NW, St. John's Cathedral, Th-Sat 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., stjohns-cathedral.org

Nov 14 • **Cathedral of St. John Christmas Faire & Bazaar,** 127 E. 12th, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., stjohns-cathedral.org

Nov 14-15 • **Annual Fall Folk Festival,** Spokane Community College, 1810 N. Greene, Sat 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., spokanefolkfestival.org

Nov 15 • **Eva Schneider,** an 11-year-old in Auschwitz, story of a Holocaust survivor, Chabad of Spokane, Spokane Convention Center, 334 W Spokane Falls, 7 p.m., 990-7878, JewishSpokane.com

Nov 15, 22 • **Catechesis through the Sunday Sacred** Liturgy, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 2 p.m. ihrc.net

Nov 16 • **Strategies and Approaches to** Equitable, Climate-Resilient Water and Sanitation, Morgan Shimabuku, GU Climate Institute, Hemmingson Auditorium, 6 to 8 p.m., gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents

Nov 16-18 • **Farm and Food Symposium**, Spokane Conservation District, Mirabeau Park Hotel, Spokane Valley, spokanecd.org/pages/farm-food-symposium

Nov 17 • **Democracy & Discourse, Osita Nwanevu,** Whitworth University, Weyerhaeuser Hall 107, 4 p.m., whitworth.edu/cms/news-and-events/election-year-speaker-series

Nov 18 • **Day of Prayer on the Faithful Departed** Created for Eternal Life, IHRC, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net

• **Rural Nonprofit Gathering,** Nonprofit Association of Washington, Zoom, 1 p.m., members.nonprofitwa.org/events/20261118-rural-nonprofit-gathering

Nov 19 • **A Night to Sip & Support,** NAMI Spokane fundraiser, drinks, live music, dinner, silent and live auctions, Barrister Winery, 1213 Railroad Alley, 6 p.m., ed@namispokane.org

Nov 19-21 • **Handel's Messiah,** Spokane Symphony and Chorale, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, Thu-Fri 7:30 p.m., Sat 3 p.m., 624-1200, spokanesymphony.org

Nov 20 • **Kootenai Nonprofit Group,** Idaho Nonprofit Center, Family Support Center, 9:30 to 11 a.m., (208) 342-3535 x 40, idahocf.org

• **Sabes Que,** Hispanic Business Professional Association meeting, Nuestras Raices, 1214 E. Sprague, 6 p.m., 557-0566, nuestrasraiceswa.org

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

Nov 20, 21 • **Foundations of Community Organizing,** IAF Pacific Trainers, Spokane Alliance, Spokane Education Association, 230 E. Montgomery, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., spokanealliance.org/events

Nov 21 • **Holiday Goods and Goodies Sale,** Comstock Neighborhood Council and Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., manitoumc.org

• **Holiday Craft Fair,** Lake City Center, 1916 Lakewood, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., (208) 667-4628

• **Salmon Tales,** Salish School of Spokane fundraiser, Gonzaga Hemmingson Center, Grand Ballroom, 702 E. Desmet, 6 to 8 p.m., salishschoolofspokane.org

Nov 22 • **Taizé Prayer Service,** IHRC, 5 to 6 p.m., ihrc.net

• **Handel's Messiah,** Spokane Symphony and Chorale, Panida Theater, 3 p.m., panidatheater.org

Nov 26 • **The Third Cup,** Mahima International conversation over tea, Women's Club of Spokane, 1428 W. 9th, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., 788-5947, info@mahimainternational.org

Nov 27 • **El Mercadito**, Latino cultural market, Liberty Park, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., latinosenspokane.org

Nov 27-28 • **Festival of Fair Trade, Global Holiday Market**, 35 W. Main, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., shopkizuri.com

Nov 28-29 • **A Winter Market in the Quarry,** The Scale House Market, E. 8th, Spokane Valley, Sat 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., thescalehousemarket.com

Nov 29 • **Campana Sobre Campana: Christmas in Mexico**, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7:30 to 10p.m., 313-4776, ticketcenter@gtonzaga.edu

Nov 30-Dec 18 • **Silence the Christmas Noise,** Monastery of St. Gertrude Spirit Center, stgertrudes.org

Dec 1 • **World AIDS Day,** Spokane AIDS Network, Washington Cracker Building, 304 W. Pacific, 4 to 9 p.m., program 6 p.m., 844-1758, sannw.org

Dec 3 • **The Fig Tree Benefit/Fundraising,**12-1 p.m., Board, 1-3 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org

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Retired nurse defines and addresses options for rural health care crisis

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

The rural health care crisis is the same as the health care crisis in the rest of the country but worse, because the rural population is older and poorer, stated Cris Currie from his vantage point as a former Spokane County visiting nurse and an advocate with Health Care for All-Washington, a nonprofit promoting quality, sustainable, affordable, publicly funded health care for all state residents.

One aspect of the crisis is the risk of rural hospitals closing, which would mean the loss of inpatient care for people needing surgery and treatment, and fewer health care professionals.

In a 2026 report from Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform (CHQPR), no rural hospitals in Washington and only one in Idaho closed inpatient services, but 64 percent of 38 critical access rural hospitals in Washington and 52 percent of 29 in Idaho lost some services. Of 11 percent in Washington, 4 percent are at immediate risk of closing.

"If closures occur it will dramatically affect the quality of life for people in the area," Cris said.

In a 2025 article on the possible closure of Dayton General Hospital, a resident expressed a common concern: if the hospital closed, the town would probably die with it.

Currently, Medicaid covers about 25 percent of Washington's rural population, slightly more than other states that did not expand it. As insurance premiums increase, Cris expects there will be more Medicaid recipients in rural areas, where there are fewer jobs to provide benefits. Rural residents will be greatly affected by Medicaid cuts and work requirements in the HR1 budget bill (One Big Beautiful Bill) Congress passed in 2025.

The nonprofit healthcare research organization KFF—formerly Kaiser Family Foundation—estimates total Medicaid cuts at an estimated $911 billion over 10 years. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated $1.124 trillion in cuts to federal health spending over the same period. To partially offset losses from these cuts, Congress passed a $50 billion, five-year Rural Health Transformation Program.

In an article in Health Affairs, Carole Johnson points to some shortcomings of the program. 1) States must apply for funds with a short window for planning its best use. 2) It expires in five years when the Medicaid cuts are permanent. 3) There is no requirement that the funds impact



Cris Currie

rural health care services. 4) It is administered at the discretion of federal Centers of Medicare and Medicaid administrators who can also approve the funds for non-rural activities.

Cris reported that Governor Ferguson said that for the first year Washington received $181 million of $200 million requested. The state expects to receive about $1 billion through 2030 for rural residents in all counties.

"This won't come close to compensating for the federal cuts to Washington, which one estimate places at $36 billion over 10 years," he said.

Cris added that rural health care requires transportation. With fewer people needing services there, as hospital corporations take over local hospitals, and combine to be bigger, they focus on urban areas, so rural residents have long drives to urban areas for care.

He said this leaves a vacuum of care for ordinary care that needs immediate attention—an accidental cut with a knife, a broken leg or an accident with machinery.

Cris came to the Inland Northwest in 1979 after growing up in Indiana, earning bachelor's degrees in biology from Earlham College and nursing at Creighton in Nebraska, and a master's degree in conflict resolution from Antioch University in Ohio. Then he lived in Minnesota, where he canoed the lakes and met his future wife, Nora Searing.

"I came here because of the mountains—I've climbed many—thinking it would be easy to find a job as a nurse, but when I came, Spokane had a glut of nurses. It took me months to find a job," he said.

Cris found a nursing job at Providence Sacred Heart Hospital when Sister Peter Claver was in charge.

"When she retired, she was afraid the values she and the hospital had maintained would be lost. She surveyed staff to find what values they found important to preserve," Cris said, noting that he felt the values shifted toward for-profit perspectives.

He left Sacred Heart and worked in conflict management for 10 years. Then, for financial reasons, he went back into nursing with the Visiting Nurses Association, Spokane's only nonprofit visiting nurse program.

After Cris retired, his concerns for health care in the U.S. continued. Now he advocates for solutions to America's rural healthcare crisis through Healthcare for All-Washington.

At a September 2026 conference on America's rural healthcare crisis in Tacoma, healthcare providers from Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho and Oregon met. They offered four recommendations for "a sustainable, practical approach for the future of rural healthcare:" 1) Make Rural Healthcare Available, 2) Make Rural Healthcare Affordable, 3) Utilize Science to Prepare for the Next Pandemic and 4) Organize for the Long Haul.

The recommendations detailed how to overcome the crisis. The full document is at vashonbeprepared.org/conferencedeclaration.

Cris' advocacy focuses on promoting the single-payer option to finance healthcare. That means one entity, usually the government, pays for health care for everyone. Patients still see doctors and go to private or public hospitals, but the bill goes to one single payer.

He has written papers on advantages of this approach for the Healthcare for All–WA website. He has also written and updates an e-book, "A Medicare for All Q & A" —available free online.

Chapter 55 explains how single payer could benefit rural hospitals and underserved areas. A single-payer Medicare for All system would require hospitals to operate on a budget and not mingle operational and capital funding. They would move from for-profit to nonprofit. Currently, hospitals pay for expansion and equipment from profits or operating margins with a minimal certificate of need process.

The new system would require hospitals to demonstrate the need before a new allocation is granted. Instead of basing decisions on competitive or profit interests, hospitals would have to study use trends and adapt to changing community needs.

Cris explained this could mean small hospitals would receive more federal funds to convert inpatient space to outpatient services or long-term care to address local needs. Single payer might facilitate telemedicine, partnering with regional medical centers, adding a pain clinic, drug and alcohol unit or dental services, and improving access to primary or urgent care.

If every resident has health care benefits, he said, people will not have to forgo care due to an inability to pay, so use should increase and it will be easier to recruit physicians and others to serve these communities.

States that expanded Medicaid have already experienced some of this, while those that refuse to expand Medicaid generally experience an ongoing rural healthcare decline, Cris said.

For information, email criscurrie22@gmail.com or visit hcfawa.org/important_resources_papers.



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