

39TH YEAR OF
PUBLICATION

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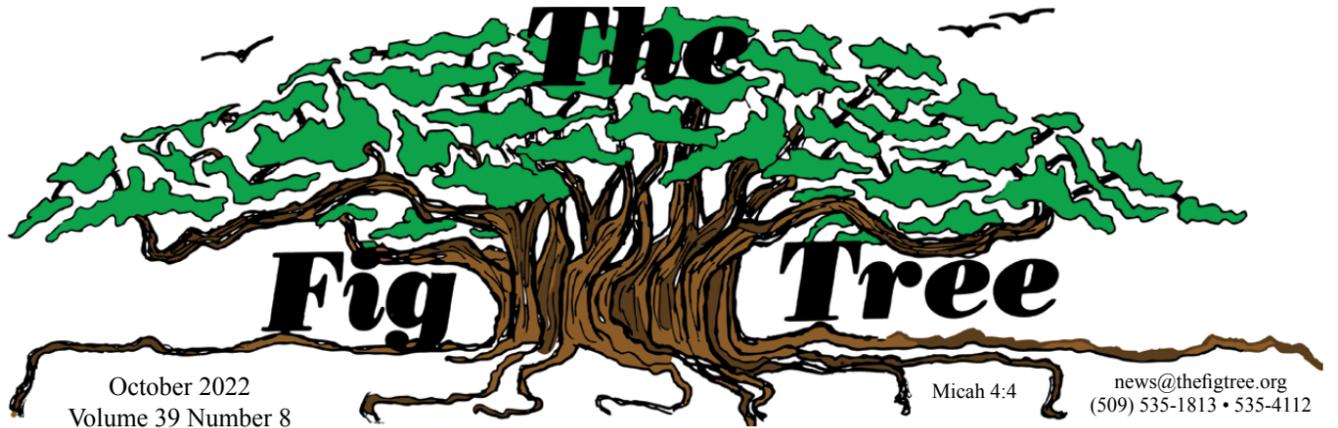
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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest
online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Connections empower local churches

By Mary Stamp

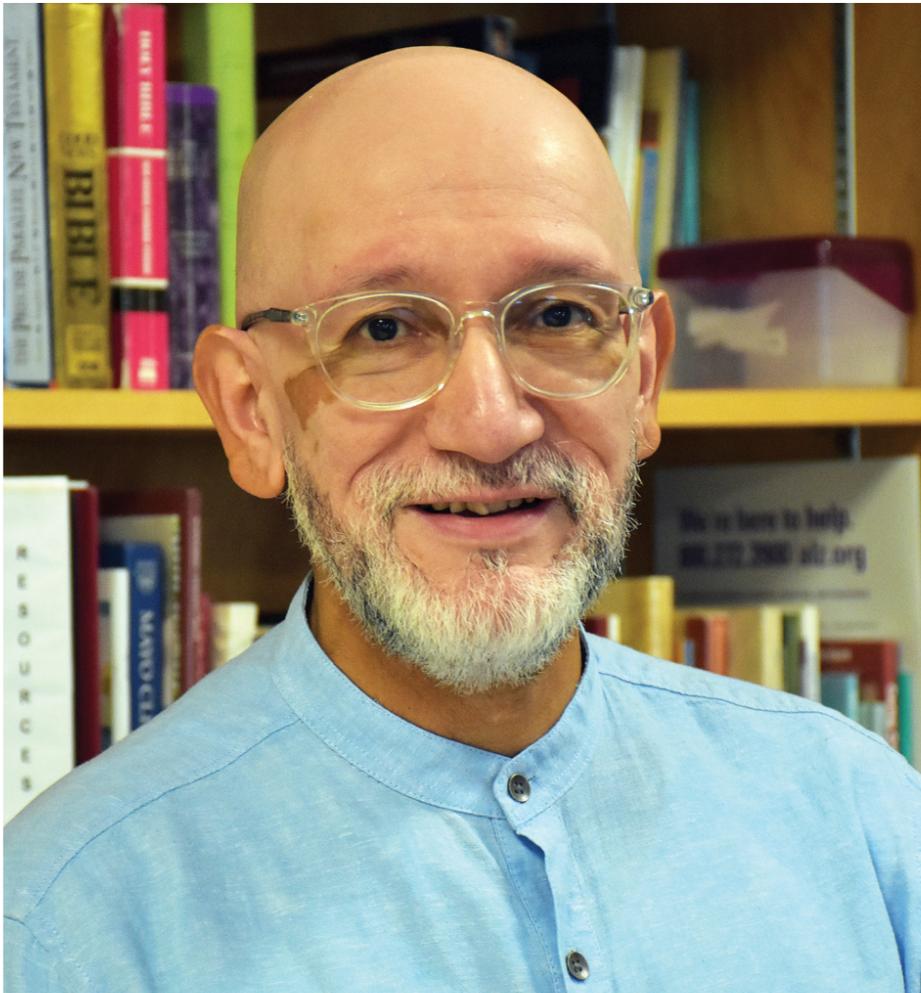
For United Methodist Church (UMC) District Superintendent Daniel Miranda, the daily grind of paperwork, conversations, emails and meetings includes love and grace, prayers and blessings related to pastoral transitions, missional work and guiding a few congregations that are choosing to disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church.

Since becoming district superintendent of the Seven Rivers and Inland Districts 15 months ago, Daniel has been learning about the 75 churches in the district.

“The biggest role is to figure out how to have more conversations about how to do missional work together,” he said. “It’s easy to focus on local churches, but there is a reason we are connected in sharing resources, having colleagues, having encouragement, knowing what other churches are doing and supporting one another.”

Daniel and his wife, Sheila, who is the connectional minister working with lay education in the district and works as assistant superintendent, live in Spokane.

For missional groups, he is linking groups based on geogra-



United Methodist District Superintendent Daniel Miranda guides congregations.

phy, size and like-mindedness to start conversations on missional needs.

“Missional needs of one church are easy, compared with four or five churches, which can agree to cooperate on something bigger that takes the church into the community,” he said.

The start of the process was slowed by COVID.

“I first thought we could do more in person, but with continued COVID infection rates and people not ready to come together because of health concerns, we have been able to do much through Zoom out of necessity,” said Daniel, who is now doing about 20 percent of his work in person.

“There are some things I can’t do on Zoom, but Zoom has made meetings easier and more cost-effective,” he said. “Zoom is valuable for connecting five people from around the state without driving, using gas or spending time on the road. It helps us be stewards of our funds and the environment.”

Sitting in person across a table in the same room, however, is important in transitions of leadership

Continued on page 4

World Council of Churches offers perspectives, insights for local efforts

Two Fig Tree staff and two freelance writers/volunteers participated as accredited press in the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Aug. 29 to Sept. 8 to share with this region insights from the global vantage point. Articles are included in this issue and will be in upcoming issues.

Participating were editor Mary Stamp, editorial associate Marijke Fakasiieiki, volunteer editor Catherine Ferguson SNJM—who “attended” online—and Gen Heywood, pastor of Veradale United Church

of Christ, who went in person. Because sessions are available at the WCC YouTube, Kaye Hult, a staff writer, wrote a story, too.

Each of the stories includes links to videos of the full sessions. The videos will continue to be online and can be used by congregations for study sessions and discussion starters.

The worship services are also available at the WCC YouTube channel with ideas that can be incorporated for prayers and new songs to bring new and multicultural, multi-lingual songs to use in worship. After assemblies,

many songs related to the themes are widely used.

The Assembly section begins on p. 5 with sharing voices of young indigenous people, describing impact of climate change on their lands and lives.

An overview of statements and decisions the assembly made by consensus is on p. 6.

On pages 7 and 8 are reports of the General Secretary Ioan Sauca and Moderator Agnes Aboum on work they have overseen for the WCC and its programs.

A plenary on European churches’ response on Ukraine and refugees is summarized on p. 9.

An assembly is an opportunity for encounters with new people. Gen’s interview with Carmen Lansdowne of the United Church of Canada is on p. 10.

A world Jewish leader depicts the WCC’s interreligious partnerships in a story on p. 11.

“Inundated in a society where men still dominate in running media and defining news, a journey into the world with the WCC lends to new perceptions and possibilities,” said Mary.

Fall Festival of Sharing helps Fig Tree be fruitful

The Fall Festival of Sharing is The Fig Tree’s fall drive to invite readers to become sponsors and for sponsors to renew their support. The drive is particularly important this year, because of increased costs for printing, distribution and mailing. The goal this fall is to raise \$13,500.

Supporters can help share The Fig Tree story, to spread the news and resources, and involve more people in undergirding the mission of sharing stories, connecting people, fostering understanding and inspiring respect among the diverse people in the region.

“Our editorial approach is unique, not following the media bandwagon of hyping differences and disagreements, which keeps people tense and vulnerable,” said editor Mary Stamp. “We do peace journalism and solutions journalism. We give people a voice and a chance to reflect.”

“We also connect people with resources that help them improve their lives through our annual Resource Directory,” she said. “We published 2,000 more copies this year—18,000—and have fewer left now than we did this time last year because it’s an effective in-demand self-help tool.”

Fall Festival of Sharing donors help keep The Fig Tree and Resource Directory strong and growing, building staff and board capacity to develop a new program for networking—soon providing communication tools for direct sharing between congregations and agencies to strengthen their efforts.

Sponsors may send donations by mail, go to thefigtree.org/ to give by credit card through PayPal, GiveLively or Facebook. For information, call 535-1813 or email mary@thefigtree.org.

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Religion News Briefs

Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100
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WCC offers just community of women and men

A vision of a Just Community of Women and Men was approached from many geographical and church perspectives at a pre-assembly plenary session Aug. 29 and 30 before the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Karlsruhe, Germany. Presenters spoke of learning from past initiatives on “just community” and current challenges of gender justice.

The Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace visits to countries found that:

- Systematic exclusion of women from leadership is widespread in churches and secular structures.
- Men at war use sexual violence as a weapon.
- Discrimination against women is everywhere.
- Women of faith collaborate to overcome traditional limits.
- Race and gender are often viewed through a religious lens, based on oppressive cultural standards.

• Most media tend to reinforce stereotypes of women and minority populations, because men dominate news operations. Online trolling targets women who step out of subordinate roles. Ecumenical organizations, including the WCC, call for active engagement with the media to challenge gender perceptions.

• While global planning could be done over Zoom during COVID-19, public health response to the pandemic often found intensified domestic violence and poverty for families.

The Just Community of Women and Men pre-assembly included debate in small groups and plenary sessions, affirming inclusive community. Presenters added that a “just community” must recognize gender minorities. One said, “It is no longer just a matter of women and men.”

Rapporteurs listening to the sharing prepared a report on the concerns expressed, the biblical precedents for endorsing the rights of and responsibilities to women and minorities, the state of violence and resistance, and an affirmation of mutual respect among all people. Participants made concrete recommendations to help churches feel the pain of sexism and racism, and inspire churches to end them and bring healing.

For information, visit oikoumene.org/what-we-do/just-community-of-women-and-men.

‘Waterfall of Solidarity’ shares stories of pain

During the Assembly, the Thursdays in Black campaign shared a visual statement of their solidarity for a world without rape and violence.

Among those they recognized as “trailblazers” in raising awareness about gender-based violence in their communities and networks was Janine Marja Schneider, a Brazilian tapestry artist. She has created a “Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance” that was displayed at the Assembly.

Janine designed and sewed the six-by-eight-meter tapestry, with patches sent by schools and churches. Each 30x30cm patch shared a story of violence a woman or her loved one experienced.



Women view ‘waterfall’ display. Photo by Gen Heywood

In that way, Janine used art to raise awareness that will help overcome gender-based violence.

“We want a different world so the cry of women can be heard and we can change cultures and attitudes,” she said.

The WCC supports the Thursdays in Black global movement of solidarity and hopes to inspire and multiply efforts against rape and violence. For information, visit oikoumene.org/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Legislative Conference, Benefit plans under way

Plans are underway for the 2023 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference on “Caring for our Common Home—Now and Forever” and for our 2023 Benefit Lunch on the theme, “Sharing Resources - Transforming Lives” to celebrate the 50th anniversary of publishing the Resource Directory.

The Legislative Conference will be held Saturday, Jan. 21, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond, and on Zoom.

The featured speaker will be Gen Heywood, pastor of Veradale United Church of Christ and convener of Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience. She will share insights from the World Council of Churches.

There will be plenaries on homelessness/housing and climate change, along with workshops.

The 2023 Benefit Lunch is scheduled for Friday, March 10, at Cataldo Hall at Gonzaga University and online. There will

also be video and speakers on Zoom at breakfast time Wednesday, March 15, or any time.

Persons interested in helping with plans for either event and hosting tables for the Benefit may contact The Fig Tree.

Staff and volunteers are again doing tables at events and available to speak at congregations and community groups.

For information, call 535-1813 or 535-4112, or email mary@development@thefigtree.org or resource.directory@thefigtree.org.

Domestic Violence Awareness is October focus

The Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition (SRDVC), Stop the Silence Spokane and End the Violence in Spokane are organizing activities and events for the second annual “Purple for a Purpose” during October, which is national Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Organizers hope that 250 local businesses will participate this year. Among the events SRDVC is planning in October are:

- Eastern Washington University’s Women’s and Gender Education Center will screen a Spanish-language film on do-

mestic violence, “El poder de contarlo”—“the power to speak out”—at 3 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 6, at the center in Cheney

• Gianna Bardelli Yoga will offer discounted trauma conscious Yoga classes at 3 p.m., Saturdays, Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, at 1507 E. Sprague Ave., Ste. C. For information, visit giannabardellyoga.com

• SRDVC will offer story times and activities for youth and a reading list for adults at Spokane County Libraries from noon to 2 p.m., Fridays in October. On Oct. 7 they will be

at North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne Rd.; on Oct. 14, at Spokane Valley, 12004 E. Main; on Oct. 20, at Airway Heights Library, 1213 S. Lundstrom St., and on Oct. 27, at Moran Prairie Library, 6004 S. Regal St.

• SRDVC invites people to wear purple on Thursdays, Oct. 6, 13, 20 and 27, to raise awareness.

• Tuesday, Oct. 18, is the Domestic Violence Awareness Month Day of Giving, and Oct. 17 to 23 is the Week of Action.

For information, visit purple4apurpose.com or endtheviolencespokane.org.

Fall Folk Festival will be Nov. 12, 13

The Fall Folk Festival is “live” in 2022 with performances from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 12, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 13, at the Spokane Community College Lair, 1810 N. Greene St.

The event will present 75 performing groups including Baha-

rat, Blue Ribbon Tea Company, Dan Maher, Meshugga Daddies, Lyle Morse, Musha Marimba, Northwest Hula and Mele Polinahe, Sesitshaya Marimba, Angus Scott Pipe Band, Highland Scottish Dancers, Silver Spurs, Spokane Taiko and more.

The Saturday Night Contra

Dance with Arvid Lundin, Deep Roots and Nora Scott will be back from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Organizers seek volunteers and donors to sign up and offer support.

For information, email info@spokanefolkfestival.org or visit spokanefolkfestival.org.

PJALS prepares weekly BOLD sessions

The Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) will offer weekly sessions of BOLD Academy from 6 to 8 p.m., Wednesdays, Sept. 28, Oct. 5, 12, 19 and 26 on Zoom

In honor of advocate Sandy Williams, participants will explore the issue of racism.

Four sessions will take place

in a caucus space and then the full group will build understanding of different perspectives on how race functions in white and BIPOC communities.

The BOLD Academy developed a curriculum to address how to “beat the divisive dog-whistle politics of the reactionary rich by building cross-racial

and cross-class solidarity.”

Jac Archer of PJALS said the purpose is to create dialogue with people in the community struggling on issues of racism and poverty in Spokane County. The goal is to improve the community.

For information, email jarcher@pjals.org

Baha’i celebrate holy days Oct. 25 and 27

Baha’i Celebrate the Holy Day

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of the Birth of the Bab in Spokane begins with dinner at 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 25, at Perkins Restaurant, 12 E. Olive Ave.

A luncheon with a program about the Birth of Baha’u’llah, founder and messenger of God,

will be held at 1:30 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 27, at North Spokane Library, large meeting room, 44 E. Hawthorne Rd.

For information, call 863-4461 or email deb.bisenius@gmail.com.

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United Nations Day Dinner
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 featuring
Marijke Fakasiieiki - The Fig Tree

United Nations Association & Gonzaga University
Hemmingson 201
taninchev@gonzaga.edu,
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Transitions Luncheon will be in person

Transitions' 20th annual "People Who Care" (PWC) fundraising lunch features Edie Rice-Sauer sharing favorite moments from her 12 years as executive director. The luncheon, from noon to 1 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 6, at the Centennial Hotel, 303 W. North River, is on the theme, "Growth and Wholeness."

Speakers will give attendees a glimpse into Transitions work to end poverty and homelessness for women and children in Spokane.

There will be a link for those who wish to attend online. For information, visit help4women.org/pwc2022.

Eucharistic Miracles Exhibition is Oct. 3-14

The Carlo Acutis Eucharistic Miracles Exhibition will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday, Oct. 3 to 14, at St. Mary's Parish Family Center, 618 E 1st St. in Moscow, Idaho. The exhibit is from The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Vatican in the Roman Catholic Church through the Real Presence Eucharistic Education and Adoration Society.

Carlo, an artist, cartoonist and computer enthusiast, created the panels before he died from leukemia at 15. He wanted to draw others "close to Jesus" through awareness of the mystery of the Eucharist. The panels explore miracles through photos and art collected from 128 accounts starting in the third century.

For information, call (208) 882-4813.

Goodwill presents community resource fair

Goodwill will host a Community Connect Resource Fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 4, at The Warehouse Athletic Facility, 800 N Hamilton St.

Resources and services for healthcare, veterans, employment, skills and education, housing/food, senior services and recovery will be available onsite.

For information, call 319-3561 or email teresab@giin.org.

Performances raise funds for Salish School

"According to Coyote" will be presented free by Spokane Ensemble Theatre at 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 10 at the Pavilion in Riverfront Park. A paid performance is at 2 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 16, at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture. The show will benefit the Spokane Salish School.

Actor Kellen Lewis, the only performer, is from the Nez Perce Tribe. With music, dance and drama, writer John Kaufmann and director Josephine Keefe immerse the audience in animal movement and tales, focusing on power of stories of Coyote, the trickster hero of American Indian mythology.

For information, visit spokaneensembletheatre.com.

Diwali Festival features Rangoli Art

A Happy Diwali Festival of Lights will be from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 22, at Riverpark Square, 808 W. Main, sponsored by Spokane's United We Stand. It includes a vegetarian food festival, rangoli art contest, cultural demonstrations, live performances, arts and crafts.

The Spokane Central Library, 906 W. Main, is offering a Rangoli Art Workshop for families and children six or older from 1 to 4 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 2. Himani Agrawal, a Vedic Cultural Center artist, will demonstrate and teach Rangoli. That ancient art of intricate designs is used on floors of houses and Hindu temples to bring good luck, peace and happiness. Designs can be entered in a contest and displayed at River Park Square.

For information, call 928-9664, email charitydoyl@yahoo.com or visit spokaneunitedwestand.org.

New Hope seeks solutions to homelessness

New Hope Resource Center in Colbert is sponsoring a presentation on "A Solution to Homelessness in North Spokane County" at 7 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 3, in the Robinson Teaching Theater at Whitworth University.

The event features Charles Durrett, architect, author and advocate of affordable, socially-responsible and sustainable-design housing.

He has contributed to community-based architecture and co-housing in North America and around the world, including Haystack Heights in Spokane's Perry District.

Charles has developed several communities for people exiting homelessness and understands the challenges they face. He recently was in eastern Poland to help develop childcare and housing for refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"He will discuss an innovative solution to catalyze community engagement in a North-Spokane-oriented effort to meet the crisis in our area," said Shari DeBerg of the New Hope Resource Center Housing and Homelessness Task Force in Colbert.

The focus of the project will be on "community first," a concept Charles has piloted and uses along with "housing first" that provides the support people need to stabilize their lives.

"The entire community benefits when these needs are addressed. It has been shown that it is cost effective to provide permanent solutions," Shari said.

When Pastor Eric Peterson founded Colbert Presbyterian Church, the congregation built a separate building to house New Hope Resource Center, a nonprofit that serves extremely low-income people in several zip code areas of northern Spokane County, including Mead, Colbert, Elk, Chattaroy and Riverside.

New Hope is supported finan-

cially by 12 local congregations, grants and donations. Many New Hope clients are "precariously housed" or homeless, Shari said. "Some are living in cars, old RVs, crude structures and tents. In fact, Mead School District reported 400 to 450 students last year who met the HUD definition for homeless."

Founded in 2003, New Hope sees a growing crisis.

In July, 101 new clients came from its service area seeking help. Clients receive help with such needs as food, clothing, household items, personal essentials and, when necessary, outdoor survival gear.

"Our mission is to serve basic human needs in North Spokane County. We do this without discrimination, following Christ's example," Shari said.

In April 2021, New Hope formed a Housing and Homelessness Task Force to research and address critical housing needs in the outlying areas. After extensive research, the task force has decided that tackling the problem in the suburban and rural area will not look like projects elsewhere in Spokane.

"This event will inform the community that we have a pressing local problem, one that we, as a community, can work together to solve," Shari said.

Co-sponsors of the presentation include Whitworth University, the League of Women Voters.

Other donations to offset the

cost of the program are welcome, Shari said.

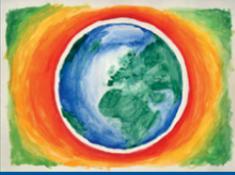
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Learning to live with one another builds ties beyond disagreements

Continued from page 1
and congregations, and when there is a crisis.

Ten churches in the Pacific Northwest are in the process of considering or choosing to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

Some start the process and are unable to complete it, and some are unsure because there are steps they need to take: a two-thirds vote of church members, paying two years of its apportionment and paying a prorated share of the conference's pension liability, Daniel said.

"Some want to disaffiliate because the Pacific Northwest Conference is more inclusive of the LGBTQ members and clergy than their church," he said.

Disaffiliation of a church is a way to exit and not live with the conflict. Around the U.S. the number of churches that are disaffiliating varies from place to place, Daniel said.

He has read some articles that speak of the UMC "splitting," but just five percent of churches in the PNWUMC Conference are considering disaffiliating.

"I would not call that a split," he said.

There are options for them to join other Wesleyan-minded denominations, like the Church of the Nazarene, Free Methodists and the newly created Global Methodist Church, formed for more conservative churches.

"United Methodist Church" is the name of the UMC around the world.

Around the world, Daniel said, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, American Baptists, Lutherans, the United Church of Christ and Church of England have all been engaged in similar decisions and conversations.

"For me, it's about being inclusive because there is room for all people in God's kingdom. The Church will be better if we are more inclusive and accepting, kinder to one another and learn from each other, but it takes work," Daniel said.

"Part of living in the modern world is awareness that the world has shrunk. God calls us to see differences less than what we have in common," he explained. "In these times, it's hard to say a person is not good enough for church. We try not to have the church be just for people who are from a similar culture, are like-

mindful or watch the same news. "The church would lose if all were conservative or liberal," he said. "We need to learn to live with one another. There is deep spiritual value in that."

Daniel is sad that some churches are exiting, but believes it is important to provide for a gracious exit strategy to avoid conflict.

"We also need to accept gracefully and with kindness the conservative churches that decide to stay," he said. "I'm grateful to have churches, even if they disagree, stay and live together."

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, said that "though we may not all think alike, we may all love alike."

Even in early years, he said, Wesleyan churches were not in complete agreement on everything but found it worthwhile to be in community, honoring and respecting each other, and moving forward as family, he explained.

"I have family I do not agree with, but we still live and celebrate together," Daniel said. "Our different lived experiences shape how we see the world."

Daniel also works in partnership with other denominational leaders in the regional Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, Catholic, Disciples, United Church of Christ and American Baptist churches.

"We meet as regularly as we can each month," he said. "I value the denominational partners helping each other and cooperating to share pastoral leadership."

One example of working together was at the end of September, when regional faith leaders collaborated to speak out about the "Reawaken America" Christian nationalism rally in Post Falls with vigils at Episcopal churches.

"We cooperate to have a voice to remind people that God is not just the God in or of America, but the God of all people," said Daniel, who participated in training that the Episcopal Diocese offered and who encouraged members to participate in vigils. "We need to keep in mind that Christians in the U.S. do not have sole sovereignty over God's name."

Daniel, who was born in Colombia, invites people to remember a scripture he read as a

child growing up in New Jersey, John 3:16, which says that "God so loved the world..."

"God's greatness is shown in being inclusive of women and men, all colors and all races," he said.

His family moved to the U.S. when Daniel was eight and his father had an opportunity to do carpentry in Plainfield, N.J., a diverse community.

"I attended a high school that included students from 12 cultures. I learned how to live in community with people who are different, sharing our lives and food. I learned there is more than one way to do things," said Daniel, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in the mid-1980s.

He considers that "training" vital for living and working in diverse settings.

While there are few racial or ethnic churches in Eastern Washington, the district is in conversations with two communities about starting Spanish-speaking United Methodist Churches. It's helpful that Daniel speaks Spanish. Diverse churches on the West Side include Tongan, Japanese and Latinx.

"We have to live into inclusive worship, too," he said of worship opportunities that gather "people who speak every tongue and gather people of every color to raise a cacophony of voices."

Daniel's ministry since graduating from seminary in 1987 has included serving congregations in Wisconsin and serving as a missionary in Japan and the Philippines. After coming to Washington in 2003, he served churches in Waterville, Pateros and Auburn before coming to Spokane in 2021.

For information, email dmi-randa@pnwumc.org.

Saturday Night Cinema
OCTOBER LINEUP

- 10/01 Arsenic & Old Lace
- 10/08 Bringing Up Baby
- 10/15 Citizen Kane
- 10/22 East Of Eden
- 10/29 Little Man Tate

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Indigenous youth underscore the need to restore balance to the earth

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

During the ecumenical youth gathering pre-Assembly to the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly, a panel of indigenous youth challenged the churches with issues integral to their lives and communities.

Brenda Rumwaropen from West Papua in Indonesia expressed her challenge from the theme of the assembly, “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity,” using a saying from her people: “Love will move the world to reconciliation, but you can’t love something if you don’t know something about it. So how can you love me if you don’t know something about me and my culture?”

She underlined the importance of restoring the wholeness of creation decrying that, for indigenous Papuans, the connection between nature and the source of the land has been broken. The Papuans are on the brink of losing their own culture and language and, with it, their identity. In part, this is because of an education system which causes the disconnection of the Papuan indigenous from the land.

“We cannot let the system change us. We need to change the system. To do this the Papuan youth need to believe in themselves,” Brenda explained.

For this to happen, she recommended that leaders enforce customary laws especially regarding selling of the land. She also urged leaders to set up indigenous education. For this, they



Sara Keränen, Eleazar Perez Encino, Cindy Kobei and Brenda Rumwaropen call for changing systems.

have already created the Papuan Indigenous University and need to create more indigenous village programs.

Sara Keränen, an Inari Sámi youth from the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Finnish side of Sápmi, highlighted her people’s wisdom in caring for creation as they have done successfully for centuries.

“Sami do not take more than what we need. We don’t take more berries than we need nor fish. Everything we take we use. We don’t waste anything. We know how to live sustainably. We see the news every day of the climate crisis. It is terrifying for us—especially our youth because we see our future being taken away.”

Sara also condemned what she named as “green colonialism,” a practice of taking away indigenous rights, particularly land rights, in the name of sustainability—and with that also

taking indigenous lands for solar, wind, water and other renewable sources of energy.

“Our land is being taken away because it is considered as empty land, but,” she questioned, “can it really be sustainable if the land is taken away from the indigenous people who have taken care of it for many years?”

Kerio Wetsah from the Nagas tribes in India, described himself as having become a foreigner in his own land and emphasized the indigenous people’s loss of identity and culture as they are displaced and discriminated against.

“As indigenous, no matter who or where we are, we are a land-centered people. The land gives us our identity and sense of belonging. Displaced tribal people are forced to migrate to neighboring areas where they are exploited by non-indigenous people.”

Eleazar Perez Encino from Mexico repeated some of the same themes as the other speak-

ers: denial of land rights, loss of identity, loss of culture and language, but from the perspective of a Mayan from Chiapas.

Related to climate change, he speaks in defense of the land.

The native peoples were dispossessed of their land beginning over 500 years ago when the Europeans arrived and brought Christianity with them.

“The church played a role in the dispossession of the people’s identity and spirituality by teaching that native people and their religion were diabolical, that what is important is heaven and not what is here on earth.”

He also decried an education system that dispossesses native people’s identities in favor of the economic system of capitalism.

“In primary school they taught us that water was a resource. They put in our heads that the beauty and gifts in nature were natural resources, but for native peoples these aren’t resources, they are graces, gifts, living beings.”

For him, it is impossible to talk about reconciliation with creation without talking about capitalism. He does not see climate change as the crux of the problem but rather the exploitation caused by mining and the pollution of water and lands by transnational companies. These companies are now talking about sustainable mining, but, for him, there can be no such thing as sustainable mining. To use this phrase is a lie because in mining everything is destroyed.

Cindy Kobei, a young law-

yer from Kenya, served on the committee that was responsible for preparing the Ecumenical International Youth Day 2022 Event Toolkit publication.

Cindy noted that even the United Nations, which has a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, has not agreed on a definition of what makes an indigenous person.

Informally, an indigenous person belongs to a group of native people who were the original inhabitants of a particular region of the world. She belongs to the Ogiek people who traditionally lived in the Mau Forest of Kenya.

“We need to understand the meaning of the indigenous experience from the African perspective,” she said.

“Since I was born, I have seen my community members and family members evicted from the lands,” she added. “I used to go to my grandmother’s house, and she taught me, so there was a transfer of traditional knowledge from her generation to ours. Now I have lost my language, culture and the land. Everything is connected to the land.”

Concluding the panel, Cindy shared with the participants an educational tool that she and other members of the ecumenical youth network worked on for three months and launched during the Assembly: Ecumenical International Youth Day 2022 Event Toolkit: Indigenous Youth and Land Rights Activism 2022. It is at oikoumene.org/resources/publications/2022-ecumenical-international-youth-day-toolkit.

For information, visit youtube.com/watch?v=XkOaY6GXjeQ and oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly.

Indigenous pre-assembly concerns included in statements

By Gen Heywood

In welcoming people to pre-assembly discussions with Indigenous peoples before the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Seforosa Carroll, a Rotuman Australian and minister in the Uniting Church of Australia, acknowledged that the space (sitting in rows) and the structure (limits of time) of the session were not the ways her the people gathered.

She said the goal of two days of panels was to develop a message to the WCC and a joint message with the other Pre-Assembly groups. She asked delegates to listen carefully so they could advocate for the proposals. They did, and many of the proposals were included in the statement on Indigenous people the Central Committee adopted.

The Assembly theme, “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity,” brought forth pain for speakers because important steps are missing for Indigenous People

An Indigenous Taiwanese pastor said the elements fundamental to healing are self-determination and storytelling.

“The church must repent for its part in blocking self-determination of people. Roman Catholic Pope Francis recently apologized for boarding schools in Canada, but actions must follow, including overturning the Doctrine of Discovery,” he said.

“Storytelling is fundamental to indigenous life. It heals with transformational power and affirms our common humanity,” he said, telling how stories uncover the truths of the past so “the truth

can set us free.”

Many speakers talked of the harms they experience.

Sarah Elena Eva of the Sámi people in the Norwegian part of Sápmi—the traditional homeland of Sámi that extends through Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia—said climate change alters winters so reindeer cannot find food, permafrost melting has caused the land to collapse in places, and berries harvested for winter food are no longer growing.

“The Sámi have contributed the least to the climate disaster but suffer greatly from it,” she said. “Suffering also comes from ‘green colonialism,’ which includes corporations wanting to set up wind turbines on their land. It has already started without the permission of the Sámi.

Others spoke of the destruction of the earth by “green corporations.” They said it is a lie that these corporations will respect the environment and land they want to build on or mine.

“It is not acceptable to the Sámi to ‘save the climate’ by destroying nature,” Sarah said.

June Lorenzo, a Laguna Pueblo and Navajo (Diné) tribal judge in Southwest New Mexico, called for the group to go beyond the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

She spoke of 30 years of uranium mining, adding that nuclear energy is not clean energy.

“There is no nuclear plant in New Mexico, but hundreds of tribal people have died from the cancers caused by mining uranium for nuclear energy,”

June said.

People from Nigeria, South Africa, small islands in the Pacific, South America and Mexico all told stories of harms that must be addressed before reconciliation and unity can be achieved.

Proposals for the “Reconciliation with Indigenous People” statement were developed, refined and incorporated—including the suggestion to form a desk on Indigenous Peoples at the WCC. Their suggestions to address inter-generational trauma and embrace traditional spiritualities along with Christian spirituality were also included.

Hearing testimony at the pre-assembly, developing proposals, presenting them to the Policy Reference Committee and creat-

ing the statement exemplifies the process to guide the WCC in its future programs.



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Decisions impact the vulnerable, oppressed, marginalized, excluded

Just about every injustice, hatred, oppression, disaster, inequity, exclusion and sin was mentioned in speeches, documents, prayers and public issue statements during the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches Aug. 31 to Sept. 8 in Karlsruhe, Germany.

More than 4,000 Christians and people of other faiths and no faith were among those who gathered in person, plus thousands more online to follow this once-in-eight-years gathering, which was held nine years after the 2013 Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea because of COVID-19.

The agenda of the world is the agenda of the churches around the world.

At the first Assembly in 1948, there were 147 member churches, predominantly from Europe and North America.

This year, delegates came from 352 member churches, which have grown to include more and more from Asia, Africa and Latin America, plus Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

The witness of the first assembly—to welcome the German churches into membership, despite the complicity of many with Nazism and the Holocaust—was repeated before this Assembly when the WCC Central Committee affirmed that it would not exclude the Russian Orthodox Church for its support of the aggression in Ukraine.

The spirit is to include all at the table so dialogue can happen.

Ukrainian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox representatives were both there. Ukrainian Orthodox observers were given space in the plenary on Europe to speak and denounce the war begun by Russian President Vladimir Putin on Feb. 24 in Ukraine.

Even though a Russian delegate in a closing session expressed frustration that Russians had limited time in public sessions, Russians participated in developing the statement on the war.

That statement denounced all war and militarization as contrary to the love of Christ. It denounced the Russian government for starting the war in Ukraine that displaces millions, kills thousands, and perpetrates and continues to perpetrate war crimes. It also expressed concern about people in Russia, Russian soldiers and suppression of Russian war protestors.

However, the top concern was the climate “crisis”—re-named from climate “change” to indicate the imminent threat it poses. Youth decried its threat to their very existence.

Climate was the focus of one of six statements adopted, four at the Assembly and two by the newly-elected, 150-member Central Committee. They are:



Delegates vote.



New presidents elected.



Worship was central.

1) **“The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community”** calls for urgent action because “we are interdependent in God’s creation” and “we are running out of time.”

It calls people to repent their selfishness that contributes to the climate emergency in which those who contribute the least to it suffer the most. It calls for listening to Indigenous Peoples to combat climate change by restoring creation, “reimagining and deconstructing the prevailing worldview and theology” to redirect resources to protect and renew ecosystems. The statement is at oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community.

2) **“The Things that Make for Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity”** affirms the commitment “to peacemaking through interreligious dialogue and cooperation,” and calls for a global ceasefire in all armed conflicts.

It acknowledges the pain that violence and conflict put on vulnerable communities, the elderly, women, children and youth. It challenges the use of “religious language, authority and leadership to justify, support or ‘bless’ armed aggression or any kind of violence or oppression.”

It urges churches to promote peacemaking to challenge division, polarization and injustice.

The statement is at oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-things-that-make-for-peacemoving-the-world-to-reconciliation-and-unity.

3) **“Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East”** urges dialogue to bring lasting peace and security for all in the Middle East. It says authorities are squeezing the Christian presence in Jerusalem, threatening the multi-religious and

multi-cultural identity of the city, displacing Palestinians, and undermining prospects for a two-state solution.

The statement is at oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east.

4) **“War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region”** denounces “the illegal and unjustifiable” Russian invasion of Ukraine and renews the call for a ceasefire, as well as the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops. It appeals to all sides in the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and infrastructure, and treat prisoners of war humanely.

It asserts that war is incompatible with God’s very nature.

“We urge all states to provide for safe, regular and accessible pathways and opportunities for human mobility in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights obligations, and to take proper measures against the abuse of the vulnerability of migrants and refugees.”

This statement is at oikoumene.org/resources/documents/war-in-ukraine-peace-and-justice-in-the-european-region.

5) **“Reconciliation with Indigenous People”** urges continued advocacy with Indigenous Peoples to defend their human rights, their right to self-determination and to participation in decision-making within churches and society. Since the first contact with colonizers, Indigenous Peoples have experienced continued harms to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of the land, water and air.

The statement invites churches to address their need for healing from historical and intergenerational trauma through Truth and Reconciliation processes that restore justice and heal relation-

ships. It calls on WCC member churches to fund a WCC desk for the Indigenous Peoples Program and to recognize the complicity of churches in the genocides.

The statement is at oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-reconciliation-with-indigenous-peoples.

6) **“Confronting Racism and Xenophobia, Overcoming Discrimination, Ensuring Belonging”** declares “there is no justification in faith or science for the racism, xenophobia and discrimination we are witnessing in the world.”

The WCC urges that “these words lead to action against the injustices perpetrated against vulnerable communities.” It also calls for faith leaders to urge government policy makers to dismantle structures and to revisit their own complicity in slavery and colonialism and to journey towards repentance, confession, reparations, reconciliation and healing. It identifies misuse of social media and anti-foreigner nationalist movements as contributing to racism.

The statement is at oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-confronting-racism-and-xenophobia-overcoming-discrimination-ensuring-belonging.

In addition, the Assembly adopted four statements, called “Minutes,” addressing some lesser-known issues.

• **A Minute on Indigenous Papuan People**, the majority of whom are Christians, denounced systemic violations to their safety and human rights, arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, sexual and gender-based violence and denial of access to their territory, rainforests and environment, which corporations are destroying to access resources. The WCC committed to build awareness and accompany the people and churches.

• **A Minute urged** acknowledgement of the Syriac-Aramaic genocide in 1915, part of the upheavals at the same time as the Armenian genocide. The genocidal acts were mostly against Christian communities of Aramean, Chaldean, Syrian, Assyrian and Greek descent.

• **A Minute on the Nagorno-Karabakh war** condemned use of chemical weapons and cluster munitions, targeting civilians, hospitals and infrastructure, and other war crimes, atrocities and torture. Hundreds of ethnic Armenians are illegally held by Azerbaijan in violation of the Geneva Convention. The WCC appeals for releasing hostages and POWs, protecting holy sites and setting a just, sustainable peace.

• **A Minute on ending war** and building peace on the Korean Peninsula urges WCC member churches to be in solidarity with Korean churches, participate in the Sunday of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification on the Korean Peninsula and help collect 100 million signatures to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty by the 70th anniversary of the armistice in 2023.

As is the tradition, the 11th Assembly also approved a “Unity Statement,” that included increasing youth participation in WCC commissions, committees and its Central Committee.

The assembly’s Unity Statement called for Christian love in today’s world and uplifted the significance of the call for Christian unity. It concluded: “We affirm the vision of the WCC for the visible unity of all Christians, and we invite other Christians to share this vision.”

It invites people of faith and goodwill to trust that a different world—one that respects the earth, assures everyone has food and abundant life, one that is decolonized, more loving, harmonious, just and peaceful—is possible.

“In a world weighed down with so much pain, anguish and fear, we believe that the love we have seen in Christ brings the liberating possibilities of joy, justice for all and peace with the earth,” it says, concluding, “Compelled by a vision of unity, we journey on together, resolved to practice Christ’s love ... trusting in the promise that Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”

The statement is at oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/A05rev1-Unity-Statement.pdf.



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Leader joined in pilgrimage visits for listening and solidarity

In his report to the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly Aug. 31 in Karlsruhe, Germany, WCC acting general secretary Ioan Saucă touched on the churches' role in responding to the climate crisis, COVID-19, war in Ukraine and other global challenges.

"In responding to the hardships of our times, we need one another, we depend on one another, and we can advance only if we walk together," he said, noting that if the WCC did not exist, "we would have to invent it today."

His report covered the breadth of the WCC's work related to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace between the assembly in 2013 in Busan, Republic of Korea, and the Karlsruhe assembly. He mentioned intersection of teams with people in visits around the world to celebrate gifts and visit places experiencing violence and injustice. The teams learned about wounds from the climate crisis, racial injustice, gender violence, world conflicts and human rights violations.

He said the pilgrimage demonstrated that the WCC is "a movement, not a static institution" and that "we are people on the way who walk together."

Ioan also pointed out that the pilgrimage is not just for the WCC, but for the WCC working with the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF), the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), the Roman Catholic Church, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, Al-Azhar and Human Fraternity, Religions for Peace, Shia Islam in Iran and other people of faith to address their common agenda of working for peace and justice.

The WCC fellowship of member churches is "growing, deepening and uniting" as an expression of common witness, working with regional and national ecumenical organizations and church councils, Christian world communions and specialized ministries. Churches once critical of the WCC are now joining it.

Since the 8th Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, the WCC helped create the Global Christian Forum with the Roman Catholic Churches, PWF and WEA.

Ioan also anticipates that the 1700th anniversary in 2025 of the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325 will be a major opportunity to celebrate unity.

Turning to the pandemic, he said COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges, taking countless lives, including many members and leaders of churches



Ioan Saucă

and ecumenical friends.

"The pandemic reminded us of our shared vulnerability and created a sense of solidarity among churches and with the human family," Ioan observed. "It also amplified existing inequalities, especially for vulnerable groups."

While it disrupted liturgical and pastoral lives for many churches, separating people physically, the pandemic brought people together spiritually as churches learned "new ways of working, using digital and online technologies to meet," he said.

"I am convinced that in the period before us, we must continue our ecumenical journey in a Pilgrimage of Reconciliation and Unity as a paradigm that guides the WCC's programs," he said. "Because reconciliation and unity cannot be achieved without justice and peace, this will be a natural continuation of the ecumenical paradigm that was coined at our 10th Assembly in Busan, but now is shaped in response to needs of a world longing for reconciliation and unity."

Ioan affirmed that care for creation is central to the witness of churches.

"It is a theological issue," he said. "God's plan in Christ is for the reconciliation and healing of the whole creation."

Racial justice is still an important program area, because racism continues as "systems dehumanize and pervert human dignity," especially for "indigenous and racialized peoples, Dalits, Roma, people of African descent and Asians," he said.

Churches more readily agree to challenge racism, but issues

of human sexuality, which is not new in the ecumenical movement, create divisions between and within some confessional families as some advance theological arguments and others reject those arguments, Ioan said, adding that the WCC does not have a position on this issue, but leaves churches to debate it.

"We do agree to respect the dignity of every human being, defend human rights for all, condemn any violence and affirm every human being is created in God's image, he said.

Related to Ukraine, he said the WCC consistently denounces violence as a solution to conflict, calling for protecting innocent, vulnerable people, maintaining dialogue with churches in Russia and Ukraine, and advocating for humanitarian assistance.

The Central Committee, after receiving three messages to expel the Russian Orthodox Church from the WCC, decided as they met before the Assembly, that based on its history, the "WCC was created as an open platform for dialogue, encounter, discussion and challenging one another on the path to unity," he said. "The WCC does not exclude anybody."

In the last three years, Ioan visited Ukraine, Syria and Lebanon, Israel and Palestine to reassure people that "they are not alone or abandoned," which he said underscored how essential ecumenical relationships are.

"I am convinced more than ever that the WCC remains an essential instrument for engaging the churches and amplifying their common witness as a fundamental expression of fellowship and togetherness," he said. "This can be achieved only by strengthen-

ing collaboration with ecumenical partners, including regional ecumenical organizations, national councils of churches, Christian world communions and specialized ministries."

In conclusion, Ioan thanked God for being a constant presence since he became acting general secretary in April 2020 after his predecessor, Olav Fykse Tviet resigned. Ioan had thought he would be in that role for a short time but, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it stretched into nearly three years.

A priest in the Orthodox Church in Romania, Ioan became a professor of ecumenical theology in 1998 at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute near Geneva, Switzerland, which he had attended in 1984-85. He became director in 2001. After earning a doctoral degree in the-

ology in 1987 at the University of Birmingham, UK, he taught ecumenical mission at the Sibiu School of Theology in Bucharest. He joined the WCC in 1994 as executive for the Orthodox Studies and Relationship in Mission.

Ioan concluded by saying that the WCC offers "support, solidarity, advice, prayer and pastoral accompaniment" to churches around the world. In times of struggles, wars, human rights violations and natural disasters, the WCC is a way Christians can advocate and work together based on faith values.

"The real captain of the ecumenical boat and the head of the church is none of us. It is Christ," said Ioan. "We are but humble instruments and can be successful if we follow his will."

For information, visit youtube.com/watch?v=1fH6tFLh3DQ.

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Kenyan sees delegates as ‘image of humankind in all its diversity’

Looking from the podium over delegates at the Aug. 31 plenary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly, Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC Central Committee since 2013, observed, “You are a living image of all humankind in all its diversity.”

She saw them as bringing stories of people struggling for justice and peace, and stories of communities working for reconciliation and unity.

Agnes was aware they bear the trauma of people suffering from violence and war, the burden of communities divided by hate speech, racism and ethnic tensions, and the effects of the climate emergency and economic exploitation.

“Cheap reconciliation and superficial unity are not enough,” she said. “We need to see the world as it is, broken and marked by sin.”

“Absolutely fundamental to the WCC and the ecumenical movement are relationships,” said Agnes. “That’s what makes experiences like the assembly so precious and formative. We encounter one another—in all our uniqueness—and recognize a neighbor in the stranger, and unity in the midst of our diversity.”

“We come to Karlsruhe as pilgrims to share our hopes and anxieties, accompany and support each other, set new directions for our journey and witness together to the love of the triune God,” said Agnes, urging them to bring good news and compassion to the poor and marginalized.

Delegates gathered because, even though they belong to different communions that are not in full communion with each other, they believe human beings, regardless of gender or skin color, are created in God’s image and have equal dignity.

They came to conduct business, evaluate the WCC’s work and guide its future work.

“At its best, the assembly is a spiritual celebration of God’s power of love to renew our minds and hearts, so we become a counter-cultural force driven by solidarity with the most vulnerable people and for God’s creation,” said Agnes, an Anglican from Kenya.

The assembly met Aug. 31 to Sept. 8 around the theme, “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity.”

Agnes recognized young people, “anxiously struggling for life” as they experience the first catastrophes of the climate crisis and as “the last generation that can take action to stop global warming.”

More than 400 had attended the pre-assembly Ecumenical Youth Gathering.

Agnes reported on Pilgrim



Agnes Abuom of Kenya has served as the WCC moderator.

Team Visits to various regions and on the convergence in the Faith and Order text titled “The Church: Towards a Common Vision.”

She recounted engagement with churches in the Colombian peace process and racial reckoning in the United States, closer ties with the Roman Catholic Church and World Evangelical Alliance, and innovative ways the WCC stayed together in mission and ministry through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“WCC themes are always about our mission, witness and unity in prophetic dialogue with a certain time,” she said.

The first assembly she attended was 1975 in Nairobi, in her home country, Kenya. Its theme, “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites,” spoke to liberation struggles and ending colonialism in Africa and the global South.

With hate speech normalized in social media, with xenophobia and racism fed by national populisms and politics of fear, and with the poor facing climate catastrophe driven by lifestyles of the few who are rich, Agnes finds it makes sense to call Christians “to re-envision prophetically their mission, witness and unity related to Christ’s compassionate love.”

She hoped the theme, the consensus procedures and the commitment to unity would help the assembly “address difficulties that divide humankind.”

Agnes said the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace since 2013 in Busan, Republic of Korea, was a time of praying, walking and working towards God’s reign of justice and peace.

It showed that doctrinal and

ethical disagreements should not stand in the way of collaboration and fellowship, she added. It was a way to integrate local, national, regional and global levels of the ecumenical movement to focus on marginalized people.

During the pandemic, the pilgrimage pushed the WCC to new ways of working together using new methods and technologies.

Agnes commended the pilgrimage approach of teams listening to and challenging people they encountered.

- In Israel and Palestine, they discussed the separation wall and water justice.

- In Nigeria and other places in Africa, women and interfaith partners told of their struggles.

- Colombian communities described scars they bear from the civil war as they begin peace.

- India and Dalits told of their struggle for equal rights.

- Koreans expressed their yearning for reconciliation.

- Refugees in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand shared about the support they need.

- Indigenous people in West Papua and the Philippines described of their plight.

- People in Fiji reported on being displaced by rising sea levels and mining.

- Indigenous peoples and those of African descent in North America discussed their struggle with the consequences of colonialism and slavery.

- The Sami people in Northern Europe, migrants in Italy, and people in Armenia and Ukraine also shared the injustices and violence they encounter.

The pilgrims focused on the climate crisis and care for creation; economic injustice and

an economy of life; violence, wars and work for peace; and racism, ethnic pride, oppression of women and human dignity.

Stories centered on five themes: truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, racial justice, and health and healing.

“In Christ’s love, we are free. We can and must be bold and prophetic, standing up for justice and peace,” Agnes asserted.

She called for an “ecumenism of the heart” to overcome divisions, see with the eyes of Jesus’ compassion and the eyes of common commitment to God’s kingdom.

“Within the foundation of unity in Christ, we can look at what separates us in matters of faith, ordained ministry and ethics,” Agnes said.

She also introduced seven new member churches to the WCC: the Dutch Reformed Church from South Africa, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod from Malawi, the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India, the Africa Brotherhood Churches from Kenya, the Community of Baptist Churches in Central Africa in the Democratic Republic of

Congo, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa and the First African Church Mission from Nigeria.

For information, visit [youtube.com/watch?v=1fH6tFLh3DQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fH6tFLh3DQ) and [youtube.com/](https://www.youtube.com/)



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Plenary reviews churches' response to war in Ukraine, to refugees

By Kaye Hult

The second thematic plenary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly was on Europe with a focus on Ukraine.

While not currently a part of the WCC, the Ukrainian churches were invited as guests.

Acting General Secretary Ioan Sauca expressed hope that the Assembly would build bridges for reconciliation and unity between Ukraine and Russia.

The plenary scripture was the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), "a story about neglect and hospitality, a story about how Christ's love moves us to love," said Ioan.

Two bringing greetings were **Metropolitan Theodosius**, Primate of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, one of the WCC's founding churches, and **Asa Kalam**, a Muslim woman professor.



Asa Kalam, a Muslim woman professor.

"We need our churches to be mindful in addressing the wider social issues in our wider Christian witness in today's fragmented and vulnerable societies. We need to lead fragmented communities to unity," Metropolitan Theodosius said, inviting WCC members to reaffirm their commitment to mission and witnessing Christ's love.

"We are diverse, but God's love leads us to unity with everyone," he said.

Asa Kalam, who has worked 20 years with the United Nations, observed that the challenge for faith leaders is greater than for secular leaders.



"They have to deal with spiritual, moral, political, emotional, mental and a big set of practical challenges," she said. "The power of faith leaders exceeds the power of political leaders."

"Christ's love is not meant only for people of Christian faith," she added. "As a Muslim, I believe that Christ's love was meant for me too. It's inclusive. If Christ's love is meant for all humanity, what would that mean for all of us in this room?"

"How do you overcome Christian differences? How much more of Christ's love can be spread when we work together multi-religiously to serve everyone?" she proposed.

Asa explained that Christians have a moral obligation to be the conscience of the political establishment and "say war is not an option," she said. "You can stand together in solidarity, regardless of your distinctions."

"Our world consists of so many who deserve Christ's love," Asa

concluded. "It is a faith that brings us all together! We can be believers. Let's act as believers."

Ioan agreed: "Christ's love is for all humanity and the whole of creation. The face of Christ is in every human being."

"Every human is my sister or brother," he said. "This is the basis of our Christian faith."

He then said that the guests from Ukraine included a variety of Christian expressions, not only Orthodox churches, but also representatives of the National Council of Churches of Ukraine and the Evangelical Baptist Church, plus an Armenian Apostolic bishop and a Greek Catholic priest.

Ioan introduced Archbishop Emeritus **Anders Wejryd**, Europe President of the WCC, to lead discussions on events in Ukraine and their effect on the world.



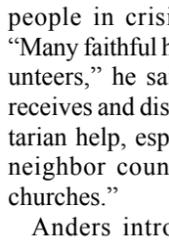
Archbishop Yevstratiy of Chernihiv and Nizhyn, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, said that "for centuries, Imperial Russia wanted

to deprive Ukrainian people of our identity. A goal of the war is de-Ukrainization of Ukraine, but we are successfully fighting for our freedom, for an independent future."

He expressed gratitude for all who have shown "the kindness of the Samaritan" to Ukrainians and asked for additional prayers and help. He thanked the WCC for supporting Ukraine when the war began, particularly for appeals to Russian Patriarch Kirill.

"No one has the right to bless aggression, or justify war crimes and acts of genocide," he said.

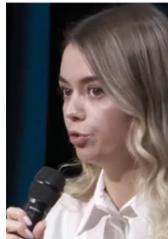
Sergii Bortnyk of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and a professor at the Kiev Theological Academy, said his church's goal is to help the Ukrainian people in crisis and in need. "Many faithful have become volunteers," he said. "Our church receives and distributes humanitarian help, especially from the neighbor countries and sister churches."



Anders introduced **Roman Sikov**, a former Bossey Ecumenical Institute student and observer from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and **Ivanna Illina**, a journalist with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. He asked them: "What is the mood

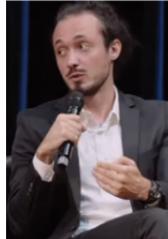
of Ukrainian society now and how can the world help?"

"War is scary," **Ivanna Illina** responded. Ukrainians are exhausted morally and financially. They need support and help from people all over the world."



Old people need help to stay in Ukraine, she said. Having lost homes, food and clothing, many have become refugees. Ukrainians hope for understanding, help and support from people all over the world.

Roman Sikov told how tired Ukrainians are after six months of war, yet expressed confidence.



"Whatever our tiredness, we still feel strong," he said. "Ukrainians are dying to protect our freedom and our homes. We need help. I believe every person here can help."

Anders asked them: "What is the reaction of the church in Ukraine and abroad?"

Roman said that the church is one body of Christ, who is right now being hurt. The natural response is to protect members in every way. Spiritual help is needed, he continued, along with practical humanitarian help, such as building temporary shelters for people who have lost their homes.

Ivanna added the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Ukraine's traditional, historical church, helps those in need and shelters 5,000 refugees in monasteries and churches. The church has provided uniforms for soldiers and mediates for the exchange of soldiers. She affirmed the need for hope, prayer, faith and support "to help us restore everything we have lost."

Anders Wejryd closed that



discussion with a prayer that all may be instruments of peace. He said the church should be like the Good Samaritan, seeking guidance to continue serving humanity.

Jorgen Skov Sorensen, general secretary of the Conference of European Churches, then said, "We have a global food crisis, global inflation and global deficit. Ukraine is a concern not only for Europe but also for the

world. Because of the recent European past, war on European soil evokes memories and challenges the "European trust that this part of the world has—or had—developed into a post-war continent of lasting peace."

Jorgen Skov Sorensen said the Conference of European Churches held a pre-assembly just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and set a program that accommodated fears, uncertainty and shock in Europe by listening and prayers.



Defining the church as "a worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement," the European churches activated such a fellowship to good effect.

He urged those gathered to see the Assembly as a concrete response to "the war-inflicted suffering we witness in Europe and all over the world. Let's go from here, moved by Christ's love, full of hope and dedicated to what has to be done as our response to the war in Ukraine, indeed, our response to any war now and in the future."

Dagmar Pruin, president of Bread for the World and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (Diaconia Disaster Relief) then reported that the war in Ukraine has



brought "great suffering, as millions face destruction displacement, torture and violent deaths."

She described challenges for church agencies to aid war victims when there is also much need from other catastrophes, like climate change. She believes churches' humanitarian aid must be rooted in the vision of diakonia.

Anders asked three young delegates: How can churches address the disparity between generous humanitarian response to refugees from Ukraine and migrants from Asia and Africa being less welcome in Europe?"

Annika Matthews, from the Church of England, urged churches to pressure govern-

ments to address the crisis and ensure that racism is not part of decisions about who can enter a country. The church should advocate for asylum seekers and refugees, so they can equally access accommodations and find work."



Simon de Giuseppe, from the Baptist Union in Italy, said, "Today's churches in Europe have an outside mission and an inside mission. The outside mission is to be with people on the margins. The inside mission is to lead and transform our communities to be intercultural, because many members are also migrants. We need to testify to our faith through the richness of our cultures and traditions."



The Very Rev. Archimendai Jacobus Andreopolis of Greece, said, churches have a unique opportunity not being government institutions. In Greece, churches follow an organized way of simply loving neighbors, caring when someone comes to the border and helping meet their needs.



"As a 2,000-year-old institution in the Greek faith, it's we consider the refugees as our children. We adopt them. If the mentality of the church is that they are our godchildren, then we give them support, so they don't feel alone and even the government treats them as a very, very old friend."

Concluding the Europe plenary, Anders said: "We've heard about the gravity of situations in Europe. We've heard about signs of hope, practical responses and possibilities. We know there are ways. What the Good Samaritan did is never in vain."

The full plenary can be viewed at youtube.com/watch?v=-Yp8ji2xrn5.

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Indigenous United Church of Canada leader acts to reduce climate change

By Gen Heywood

Carmen Lansdowne of the United Church of Canada (UCCan) was among the representatives from 352 member churches that are part of 250 denominations who gathered in Karlsruhe, Germany to sing, pray, discern, learn, listen, reflect and respond to the call of God in service to one another.

Carmen had just been elected July 23 and installed on Aug. 7 as moderator of the United Church of Canada.

After 30 years, she is UCCan's first ordained indigenous woman pastor and second indigenous leader in that role.

Carmen, a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation in the Central Coast region of British Columbia and life-long member of the UCCan, serves as a spiritual leader and public representative for all UCCan churches. She is open to how the role may evolve as the church embraces the change to being a medium-sized denomination.

Speaking with honor and humility, she expressed gratitude for the diverse experiences in the ecumenical movement and the UCCan that have prepared her to come into this three-year term with skills and connections to the wider ecumenical movement

A three-year term is a short time for a moderator to help Canadian churches move into a vision of what they can be together, but Carmen encourages church leaders to join her in big dreams focused in three areas:

- Change-making conversations, especially focusing on climate, inequality and reconciliation.
- Widening engagement inside and outside the church.
- Mentoring a new generation of leadership.

In response to the difficulty of meeting these goals in three years, Carmen said, "So often we look at the systemic changes we want as intractable problems, but Mariana Mazzucato, an Italian economist teaching at the City University of London, offers a perspective in her 2021 book, *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*.

"Mariana wrote that when we try to solve a problem, we have already committed ourselves to a certain mindset. When we set a goal to achieve the unachievable, like President John Kennedy did with the Apollo mission, we are more engaged in the prefrontal cortex, using curiosity, innovation, dreaming, iteration and moving to achieve a goal rather than fix a problem. We have run out of time to do this in our



The Rev. Carmen Lansdowne serves next door in Canada.

Photo by Gen Heywood

silos," Carmen said.

This need for the churches to engage the wider sectors of society on issues of moral concern is especially felt in relation to climate justice. The recent UCCan General Council passed a proposal that by 2030 the churches will reduce their greenhouse emissions by 80 percent.

The program, called "Faithful Footprints," helps communities of faith assess their greenhouse gas emissions, develop strategies and retrofit buildings, sometimes with the help of small grants from the UCCan.

The denomination has already divested from fossil fuels through "Fossil Free Faith." They partner with SHARE, Shareholder Association for Research and Education in Canada. Carmen notes that the power is in their pension plan, which considers when to hold shares in corporations that need to change. By having shares, the pension representatives have the power to voice concerns and direction. Corporations tend to listen when the voice is strong, she said.

The UCCan moderator sees how the church needs to be "more nuanced in our approach to the issues of our time. We must consider our external costs. Being thoughtful about the importance of cross-sector collaboration means that the church must be thoughtful and nuanced for us to be taken seriously," she explained.

"The church could be making more bridges between issues and corporations as part of our mission to the world. Mission is usually seen as bad, but the idea

that God is calling us to act in the world is still alive in our faith," Carmen noted. "We need to be thoughtful and discerning about what that looks like.

"We know that justice does not look like the ideology of trickle-down economics. It has been researched and proven to not work," she said.

"We do not have to accept that the current form of capitalism in North America is the only form of capitalism. The experience seen in the example of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Germany reveals another way," she pointed out.

"We in North America let go of our political power so quickly. Coming to Europe, not that they are perfect, we see that when the voters hold the politicians accountable to taking stronger action on climate, they do it," she said.

After just a few months in office, Carmen is still learning how her three goals will evolve.

Relationships between churches and those who have power offer the possibility to bring changes.

Many of Canada's concerns are also concerns for the U.S., which offers an opportunity for the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ to use their collective presence to model how to engage in more dialogue, set goals and work toward them.

"The need to collaborate across churches and all structures of influence in our society is critical in the time we live," she said.

"The climate emergency is

not waiting for political systems to catch up. We have elders who remind us that there were other ways of living, and youth demanding that we reorient ourselves to preserve any quality of life we can for their future" Carmen said.

"Those of us who make decisions about our elders and our youth have a moral obligation to take the climate emergency seriously and to call on our country to pivot in radical ways, ways that we know are possible due to the types of policy changes and leadership we saw during the Second World War and the Apollo Mission in the U.S., and in our global and collective responses, as imperfect as they were, to COVID-19," she said.

Carmen attended the Vancouver School of Theology (VST) from 2003 to 2007. After completing an internship at the Marengo Pastoral Charge in Saskatchewan, she was ordained and completed a master's degree in theology at VST before moving to Berkeley, where she completed another master's in theology in 2011 and a doctoral

degree in 2015.

Along with writing, speaking and serving in various church roles, Carmen served on the Executive and Central Committees of the World Council of Churches from 2006 to 2013, and as ex-officio corresponding member of the Executive General Council of the UCCan.

She chairs the UCCan Indigenous Candidacy Board and sits on Keepers of the Vision of the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Center.

Carmen's vision for the UCCan is to continue to define who they are, build new connections, rebuild old ones, work towards social change that cares for the world and honors human dignity.

She calls the church "to walk together in repentance and reconciliation, march and fight and change unjust systems together, and to pray, sing and discern together, because truly we are not alone. We live in God's world."

For information, email moderator@united-church.ca or visit united-church.ca/news/rev-dr-carmen-lansdowne-elected-44th-moderator.

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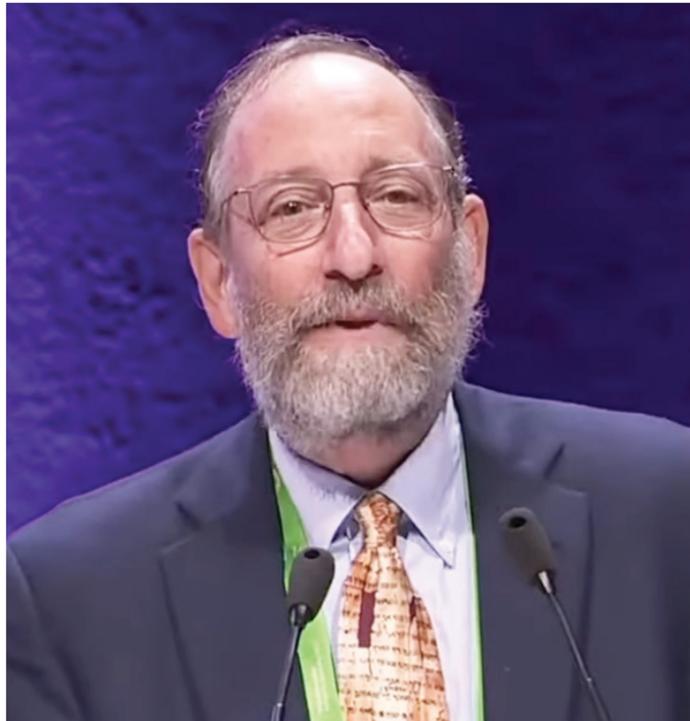
Rabbi elucidates understanding built in ongoing interreligious ties

Rabbi David Fox Sandmel, chair of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, greeted the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly Sept. 5 on behalf of the consortium of 11 Jewish organizations that engage with other international religious bodies, including the World Council of Churches, the Vatican, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and non-Christian organizations.

He connected the assembly theme on reconciliation that leads to unity to the Hebrew month of Elul, a time of spiritual and moral preparation for the Ten Days of Repentance beginning with the Jewish New Year and concluding with the Day of Atonement.

“Essential to the Jewish understanding of repentance is the imperative of reconciliation. During Elul, we are to examine ourselves, confront our moral failings, confess them before God and ask for forgiveness,” the rabbi said.

“We are to seek out whomever we have wronged, make amends and seek their forgiveness,” he said. “Indeed, our tradition teaches that reconciliation between people is a prerequisite for forgiveness from God. When we



Rabbi David Fox Sandmel chairs WCC Assembly.

are reconciled with God and with our neighbor, we reunite on both the human and the divine level.”

He pointed to the power of reconciliation in what took place between Jews and Christians after the Shoah, the Holocaust, he said.

“The repudiation by Christian theologians and institutions of antisemitism and rejection of the classical Christian teaching of

contempt for Jews and Judaism is unprecedented in human history,” Rabbi David said.

At its founding in 1948, the WCC called antisemitism “a sin against man and God.” Since then, it has repeatedly spoken out against anti-Jewish rhetoric and violence.

“This revolution in Jewish-Christian relations is something

to celebrate and should be an inspiration and model for overcoming prejudice and hatred. Many in the Jewish community are sadly unaware of the great progress in Jewish-Christian relations,” he said.

Concerned that Jews around the world continue to be the targets of hatred, he said that while people of goodwill can disagree strongly about Israel, some criticism is motivated by antisemitism, and some is not.

“We need to find vocabulary to discuss this sensitive issue to promote, rather than obstruct, dialogue,” he said.

Rabbi David sees reconciliation as an ongoing process.

“Despite progress in Jewish-Christian relations, anti-Jewish tropes still emerge in some Christian teaching, often the result of ignorance rather than malice,” he suggested. “Correcting embedded biases and becoming sensitized to what hurts and offends takes time, effort and courage to be honest with oneself and others, to build trust.”

He is encouraged that IJCIC and WCC leaders “engage in serious, substantial, respectful, productive conversations on sensitive issues, including our deep and abiding attachment to

the people and land of Israel and how together we can further the cause of peace in the region.”

He hopes understanding will grow.

“According to Genesis, all humanity is one family with a common ancestor. While we differ from one another in many ways, we share the imprint of the divine in our very being,” he said.

“In Genesis, God says that each of the elements of creation by itself is good, but only when all the work of creation is complete, including humanity, is it very good,” Rabbi David said.

“The human family is one, but strife and injustice abound. Our planet is one, but we fight over it and pollute it,” he said. “None of us alone can address the challenges our human family faces. The only answer is to work together in unity for peace, understanding, justice and reconciliation, with our common home and with the Divine so that, in the words of the prophet, all may sit under their vine and under their fig tree, with none to make them afraid.”

For information, visit oikoumene.org/resources/documents/greetings-by-rabbi-david-fox-sandmel-to-the-wcc-11th-assembly-in-karlsruhe.

Endowment started to support Maxey Center

On Sept. 20, the Innovia Foundation established a designated endowment in honor of Sandy Williams and her work in the community to provide ongoing support for the Carl Maxey Center.

The Innovia Foundation, Washington Trust Bank, Avista Foundation, Empire Health Foundation and the Cowles Company contributed \$50,000 to start the Sandy Williams Fund.

The Carl Maxey Center, named after Spokane’s first African American attorney, opened in February at 3114 E. Fifth Ave to promote advocacy, racial justice, culture, business, employment, economics, technology, community, equity and education as the circle of words surrounding the name in its logo say.

For information, visit innovia.org/sandywilliamsfund.

Youth plan spooky fundraiser

If You Could Save Just One, a nonprofit providing activities and resources for at-risk and low-income youth, teenagers and parents in Hillyard and Northeast Spokane, is presenting “Evening of the Unknown,” raising funds through three evenings of spooky, silly and spectacular surprises led by youth.

The events will include a silent auction and dinner catered by a local restaurant from 5 to 8 p.m. Fridays, Oct. 7, 14 and 21 at 4421 N Nevada St.

If You Could Save Just One

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“This is where I need to be. If I want to further myself in my dreams and education, I have to start somewhere.”

Leaders vow to continue Sandy William's work for racial justice

Community leaders shared reflections at a celebration of Sandy Williams' life on Sept. 13

• **Betsy Wilkerson**, Carl Maxey Board chair, said: "Sandy was a storyteller. She articulated a vision people bought into and united around."

• **Toni Lodge**, The NATIVE Center: "Sandy did good trouble, manifested by will and determination. We sat together—mothers, sisters and grandmothers—to figure out how to get the BIPOC community vaccinated. We partnered 12 weekends to vaccinate 10,000 people of color. We saved people's lives."

"We were a practical matriarchy of color, loving and nurturing communities and families.



We were truth-telling matriarchs of color building buildings and getting work done."

• **Kiantha Duncan**, NAACP Spokane president: "Sandy was not just a community leader, but a friend, educator, sister, mother, daughter and mentor. Sandy is the reason I am still here....She spoke to let black people not just speak but triumph."

• **Brean Beggs**, City Council President: "Sandy registered people to vote for a beloved community based on justice and not tolerating racism. She spoke the truth and had radical empathy."

• **Lisa Brown**, Washington State Commerce Department: "Sandy was a transformational leader and a skilled activist."

• **Theresa Cronin** of the Law

Office of D.C. Cronin described Sandy as "our storyteller. She created a place for us to belong. She prioritized the needs of her family and community."

After unveiling a portrait of Sandy beside a portrait **Dennis Cronin** commissioned Jacob Johns to paint of Carl Maxey, Dennis said: "Carl Maxey and Sandra Williams are two leaders of courage struggling against racism. Who is willing to carry on their struggle for justice?"

The portraits will hang on the wall of the Carl Maxey Center.

• **Rob Curley**, editor of the Spokesman-Review, made a commitment to carry on The Black Lens, because he and Sandy had applied for and received

a grant for a reporter.

"For Sandy, fairness mattered. At Cheney High School, she wanted to be in the shop class. She wrote the principal that it was stupid that girls could not take shop. She was the first to be in shop. She realized young that words matter and can bring change."

With the Black Lens, words matter, he said.

• **Curtis Hampton** of the Carl Maxey Board, who knew her growing up in their hometown, Greenville, S.C., named her a "Social Justice Warrior" and called for people to help continue her dream.

For information, visit carl-maxeycenter.org.

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Vanessa Waldref facilitates United Against Hate outreach to faiths

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

As U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Washington, Vanessa Waldref seeks to share resources with area houses of worship, community groups and individuals about ways to report hate crimes and strengthen civil rights.

In addition to prosecuting violent crimes and narcotics trafficking, Vanessa prioritizes community outreach on the hate crimes initiative.

She said Eastern Washington has been troubled by increasing reports of hate-motivated violence and sees a need for a multifaceted approach to combat hate and hate-based violence. She knows hate cannot be defeated by law enforcement alone.

“There is no quick fix in thinking that if we prosecute a hate crime the problem will be solved. Law enforcement and government have a role to play to protect the community, especially marginalized groups impacted by hate,” she said.

A key aspect of the U.S. Attorney Office’s community outreach is the United Against Hate Initiative that educates the public on potential hate crimes and encourages the reporting of hate incidents, she explained. That initiative is partnering with law enforcement, the Spokane Police Department (SPD), and the FBI to connect with houses of worship and community organizations to promote visibility for Crime Check and describe how to report an incident of hate to the SPD.

The Department of Justice has chosen the Eastern District of Washington as one of three districts out of 94 districts in the nation, to advance the United Against Hate outreach initiative.

Even if a situation is not a hate crime that could be prosecuted, it is still important for law enforcement to have information to help people feel safe, to monitor threats and to prevent future instances of hate and discrimination.

“Our efforts start at the community level with conversations to learn community needs,” said Vanessa, who believes in putting faith into action to respond to needs in the community.

She invites houses of worship in Washington to access virtual training and resources on security and hate crimes through her office.

She has already begun working with Temple Beth Shalom in Spokane, the Islamic Center in Pullman and a Sikh Temple in Eastern Washington to build trust with community members.

Growing up in Spokane, Vanessa’s family was involved in community organizations and St. Aloysius Catholic Parish.

“We were driven by faith to be engaged in the community and serve others. We were taught it was our duty to care for our neighbor and, if we saw a problem, to find a solution to create a healthier world,” Vanessa said.

Helping serve Thanksgiving dinners to homeless people at St. Patrick’s Parish instilled in her a



Vanessa Waldref meets Carla Peperzak at Holocaust event.

Photo courtesy of Vanessa Waldref

commitment to do something for the community because “I had a roof over my head and a warm plate of food to eat,” said Vanessa.

Those experiences also introduced her to experiences of crime victims and difficult life stories furthering her commitment to community work and activism, such as making sure workers receive fair wages.

As an undergraduate, she used persuasion skills to advocate on behalf of Students United Against Sweatshops, and began to see law as an opportunity to change inequities.

Her studies included worker rights, justice and peace, theology and sociology and social change movements. Vanessa wanted to use institutions such as the government and nonprofits to solve world problems.

In sociology, she focused on institutions promoting pragmatic ways to improve communities with the tools they have.

After earning a bachelor’s degree at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., in 2002, Vanessa served in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Seattle, running the Know Your Rights hotline for recipients of food or benefits from the state, to help them access childcare and educational resources.

“It was empowering to realize I was helping others navigate through systems where they had become stuck because they were told no. I saw how to advocate for them, help them find solutions, get education and resources to help their families,” said Vanessa.

After a year there, she went to Georgetown Law School, where she had opportunities to attend Supreme Court hearings that interested her.

“It was a dynamic learning environment to be close to where policy is made as judges interpret laws. I saw how important law is to social change,” said Vanessa, who graduated in 2008.

Seeing options to use law in

private practice, government and advocacy, she moved into public service after paying off school loans.

For two years during law school, she worked on the Georgetown Journal of Poverty Law and Policy. Then she practiced for a few years with a private firm, taking pro bono landlord-tenant cases in low-income D.C. neighborhoods. She also took cases about restaurants complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Subsequently, she did a clerkship for Federal District Court Judge John Bates.

“That opened my eyes to the high standards to which he held attorneys who represent the federal government,” said Vanessa.

The judge relied on government attorneys to provide complete, accurate, fair arguments in civil and criminal advocacy. As a young attorney, she drafted opinions for judges, and saw how important the role of a prosecutor and trial attorney were.

“That’s when I decided to work on behalf of the U.S. Attorney’s office and advocate for citizens,” said Vanessa.

Following her son’s birth, she wanted to be back in Spokane, closer to family, more connected to the community she loved and grew up in. Her husband, who is from Philadelphia, agreed to settle in Spokane.

After working for some law firms in Spokane, she became an assistant to the U.S. Attorney in the U.S. Attorney’s office. In civil and criminal cases, she represented the U.S. government in Federal District Court.

Since 2015, Vanessa has also taught courses in environmental law, labor and employment law, and conflict of laws at Gonzaga University School of Law.

As U.S. Attorney, her priority is to use the gifts of the prosecution team to create safe, empowered communities.

After Vanessa served nine

years in the Department of Justice, Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell recommended that President Joe Biden nominate her to the U.S. Attorney’s office. The Senate confirmed her and she was sworn in on Oct. 7, 2021, as U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington. She was the first woman to be appointed as U.S. Attorney.

“I bring an understanding of the work and my vision for what we can do to engage with the community in targeted ways to promote safety and strong communities,” she said.

Vanessa’s office also monitors domestic terrorism and extremism to help local, regional and national law enforcement detect, disrupt and deter threats that could lead to violence.

Priorities in this time of resistance and dissent include how to deter crimes and building awareness about organizations that pose a threat of violence.

Strengthening the U.S. Attorney Office’s Civil Rights Program is another priority in the United Against Hate Efforts as it educates law enforcement and community groups to understand the difference between a hate crime and a hate incident, and to distinguish between hate speech and free speech.

Vanessa said discrimination can also be because of a person’s disability or faith.

Her office has a civil rights web page, where people can report civil rights violations and complaints, and find civil rights lawyers to take cases.

It also handles cases related

to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Federal Housing Authority, the Educational Opportunity Association and the Fair Housing Act.

“We want to make sure those laws are faithfully executed,” she said.

“In a time of much disagree-ment in the public dialogue,” Vanessa said. “I am pleased that so many come together to recognize that hate has no place in Eastern Washington and to see that the role of government is in building trust, promoting safety and developing strong communities.”

For information, visit www.justice.gov/usao-edwa/edwa-civil-rights-webpage.

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Sandy Williams' words inspire commitment to carry on her legacy

Sandy Williams and her partner Patricia Hicks were among 10 who lost their lives in a plane crash Labor Day while they were visiting the San Juan Islands. *The Fig Tree* editor Mary Stamp shared her reflections and some of Sandy's words at a Celebration of Her Life on Sept. 13:

The Black Lens editor and Carl Maxey Center director Sandy Williams was a tireless, persistent visionary and advocate for equality, dignity, inclusion, justice, and human rights.

As a friend and journalism colleague, we collaborated in our newspaper and media literacy efforts, and in our challenge to all forms of bias.

I know how much effort it took for her to put together stories, photos, layouts, ads, and finances, deliver newspapers and build relationships.

Believing mainstream media news on diverse communities was inadequate, Sandy started The Black Lens in 2015. She wanted to cover positive stories and

counter negative, narrow news that stereotyped blacks. Her idea was to uplift the accomplishments of Spokane's African Americans.

By the first issue, that changed, because she felt the Spokane Police Department Use of Force Report had not been covered accurately.

Sandy said: "The black community needs to know what is happening. Someone needs to speak up. The community needs a voice."

In a 2016 panel on media literacy, Sandy repeated her concerns:

- Media under report positive news and focus on negative news of blacks.
- Media often use problems to frame views of blacks.
- They miss stories about black people's lives and experiences.

She said: "Repeated exposure to unbalanced reporting reinforces cultural biases and creates a hostile environment."

Building credibility with The Black

Lens, she has influenced coverage in the Spokesman-Review.

In a 2019 speech to Spokane's NAACP, she said

"People of color need strategies to fight racism, because there are strategies to keep up racial disparities that mean people of color have the lowest life expectancy in Spokane."

A "word wonk," Sandy looked up the word "war" in a Merriam Webster dictionary and found it is "a state of hostility, conflict or antagonism."

Then she said: "In this country, many are at war with people who do not look, act, believe, love or pray like them."

"We need to understand the strategies behind the conflicts."

When a jury acquitted the man who shot William Poindexter in the back, she didn't want her daughter to be resigned, believing there was nothing anyone could do.

Sandy said: "I decided that would not be my legacy for my child or anyone's

child."

Sandy was willing to do the lonely work of being visible and speaking out to give voice to people of color and work to overcome racism.

She wanted people to understand strategies of those promoting racism—build fear of violence; imply resources are limited; assassinate a person's character and divide to conquer.

Sandy gathered folks to form the Carl Maxey Center to challenge those strategies in a neighborhood gathering place, a cultural and educational center and a place offering resources to improve lives.

Sandy said: "We seek to uplift, empower and transform our community to design solutions that address challenges and bring healing to the trauma of racism."

We need her voice and vision to continue!

Let's partner with The Black Lens and Carl Maxey Center to keep her legacy alive!



Seven faith leaders challenge Christian nationalism as divisive

The following are excerpts from a press conference with faith leaders speaking out against the Christian Nationalist ReAwaken Gathering Sept. 16 and 17 in Post Falls. In conjunction with their gathering in Q'emlin Park, they gathered signatures and urged people to join in vigils in churches in the region.

Bishop Gretchen Rehberg, Episcopal Diocese of Spokane

"I'm concerned about the increase in divisiveness and polarization, and the assault on our democracy. Christian nationalism is not about patriotism. It's about one way of viewing the U.S. It's a viewpoint that is at odds with the Republican and the Democratic parties, Libertarians, Greens and everybody else. It is not the partisan politics of this country. It's a very radical way.

It is certainly not the way of following Jesus that invites us to love our enemies, do good to those who hurt us, bless those who curse us, pray for those who abuse us. These are not the words coming out of ReAwaken America.

As a Christian and as an American, I am distressed by this, but our response is to be in prayer and in love because that is what we are called to as followers of Jesus. We invite everyone to prayer and vigil services across the Diocese of Spokane.

Those who attend vigils may hear the love of God, so they may realize the dangers of Christian nationalism. I invite us to be in prayer and in love and to respond out of unity and connectedness, not demonizing, hate, violence or division.

Let us follow Jesus. We are Christians and let us remember that in this country, we are free to practice any religion or no religion. No religion is privileged over another.

Sr. Pat Millen, OSF, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Bishop Rehberg reminded us we who follow Jesus have a standard beyond our nation's laws, one that tells us to turn the other cheek and work for peace. As followers of Jesus, we are called to a different way, a way that strives for justice, works for peace, offers love.

I am a Franciscan, a follower of St. Francis. St. Francis' life mirrors Jesus' life. Both were insignificant men who wandered around small villages preaching to whomever would listen. They didn't have any political power or lead armies into battle. Francis' revolutionary way of thinking is so radically simple that anyone can do it! Just follow the Gospel, live

simply and show joy to the world.

Franciscans are heralds of peace and reconciliation. Francis said peacemakers preserve peace of spirit and body out of love of Jesus Christ. His greeting, repeated by Franciscans today, was "Pax et bonum," "peace and all good." Franciscans are called to build peace in their personal lives and society.

Not caring for my relationship with myself, others, God and the earth. When these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible says life itself is endangered.

St. Francis' nonviolence is a commitment we need at this time when millions if not billions of people think that the more guns or bombs we have the safer I'll be, but we should never have too many guns and bombs. This is a suicidal trajectory. We need a nonviolent spirituality.

We live as sister and brother with one another, the entire human family and all creation. This time challenges us to be diligent in our efforts to safeguard and nourish all of creation. The care for our common home that is rooted in our Franciscan spirituality must be rooted in all of us.

Pax et bonum, "peace and all good."

The Rev. Sheryl Kinder-Pyle, executive presbyter, Presbytery of the Inland Northwest

"I am in solidarity with my Christian siblings and folks of other faith traditions in opposing the fusing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with politics. I oppose the use of the Gospel for political gain.

Our nation's founders, including the Rev. John Witherspoon, who was a Presbyterian minister and signed the Declaration of Independence, envisioned a nation where church was separate from the state. We support that separation. We continue and value that ideal today.

The Presbyterian Church USA points to the teachings of Jesus Christ and in particular the teachings of Matthew 25. We seek to eradicate poverty, dismantle systemic racism and treat everyone—everyone—as a beloved child of God. May the peace of Christ be with us all.

Rev. Phil Misner, assistant to the bishop, Northwest Intermountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

An early poster for the ReAwaken America tour featured a quote from the host who said, "Jesus is King and with

him on our side, we will win this thing."

As a Christian, I agree that Jesus is King, but we have to ask ourselves, what sort of king might Jesus be and look to the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Throughout Jesus' life and ministry, he was given opportunities to step into positions of political authority and power. Each time Jesus rejected those opportunities. He was not interested in being that kind of king. He is not interested in "winning this thing."

Jesus is not on one side or the other. Claims like this make Christian nationalism dangerous. Looking to the life and ministry of Jesus, he called out those who used power and authority for their own benefit. He came to share God's love and proclaim God's forgiveness for all. Those are the words of the King of Love that is our Shepherd. That's the only king that Jesus is.

The Rev. Daniel Miranda, District Superintendent, Inland Missional District United Methodist Church

"My earliest memory of coming to know who God was came from a scripture that my parents and my church made me memorize. I wasn't crazy about it then, having to hope, I thought, why should I go to church and have to memorize things? That scripture still dwells in my mind, heart and soul. It begins, "God so loved the world." Right? I love it because it doesn't say God loved a special group of people, who speak a particular language or have a particular color or race. God just loved the world.

It breaks my heart when people who call themselves "Christians," are saying God loves Americans more than anyone else. It breaks my heart because I was born in Colombia, South America. I became a citizen of this country by choice. I am a member of anyone who calls themselves a believer in God. That is a bigger family than being an American or a Colombian or from anywhere else. We are bigger than petty separations.

Jesus calls us to be an inclusive people who love and care for each other, support each other and remember that we are so much better when we are together.

Naghmana Sherazi, Muslims for Community Action and Support

Peace upon you all. I am not part of clergy with the Muslim faith. I am just a representative. I am co-chair of Muslims for Community Action and Support, co-chair for Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom and represent Faith Leaders and Leaders

of Conscience, a group where I have many friends who are here. I'm standing in solidarity with them and speaking as a leader of conscience.

I am here today to make sure that everyone understands that there are many allies. We are all brothers and sisters in faith. In the Muslim faith, we can't be a true Muslim, unless we believe in Jesus. Jesus is mentioned 26 times in the Quran. We believe in the Virgin birth. We believe that he was taken up in flesh. We believe that he is the savior who will come to save us all on the day of judgement. If we don't believe that, we are not Muslims.

We have the same scriptures, the same God and the same beliefs. The love that exists between us cannot be denied. So, those who promote Islamophobia are telling me my philosophy is wrong or I am not welcome in the place I have chosen to live, bring up my child, and contribute to society.

We are united. We are together. We love one another. My friends here have chosen to put me in their hearts and are with me today. So, I stand in solidarity with all my sisters and brothers here, and I will continue to do so.

Rick Matters, priest at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Kennewick

"We have collected 1,023 signatures to date for a statement to stand for the values of the Gospel and for the human dignity of all people. I'm holding a cumbersome sheaf of papers that are full of signatures. In my arms are 60,000 signatures from across the country, people who stand in support of our challenge to the Christian Nationalist ReAwaken Event in Post Falls (Sept. 16 and 17). Our almost 1,000 signatures will be added to these to increase the message of support for love and peace.

At least 39 groups gathered in North Idaho and Eastern Washington for vigils to offer prayers during the event. Other people said prayers in their home. We thank those who participated and Christians Against Christian Nationalism and Faithful America, two national groups that support our effort. Those signing the statement represent a variety of expressions of the Christian faith, including Evangelical, Mainline, Conservative and Progressive traditions, uniting with people of other faith traditions, as well as those who espouse no religious faith, to affirm love for our neighbors and for our country.

The statement letter is at secure.everyaction.com/jQ4VzMGfe0yZdwJy7Ymttw2

Calendar of Events

- To Oct 1 • **Franciscan Film Festival**, West Central Abbey, 1832 W. Dean, 6-9 p.m., info@westcentralabbey.org
- To Oct 23 • **Leap of Faith**, Kroc Center, 1765 W. Golf Rd., Coeur d'Alene, 208-667-1865
- To Oct 29 • **Voices, Vibrance, Vision**, Shantell Jackson and Tracy Poindexter-Canton, Clack literature, Liberty Gallery, Auntie's Bookstore, 402 W. Main, potteryplaceplus.com/liberty-gallery
- Oct 1 • **Mennonite Country Auction**, Menno Mennonite Church, 9 a.m., booths open 10 a.m., auction at 12 p.m., 659-0926, mca@mennomennonite.org
- **Fall Fest**, River Park Square and Riverfront Park, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., downtownspokane.org/event/48701/2022-10-01
- **Oktoberfest Celebration**, German American Society, Deutsches Haus, 25 W. Third, 4 p.m., germanamericansociety-spokane.org
- **Spokane Symphony Pops 1: Classical Mystery Tour**, Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m., 624-1200
- Oct 2 • **Feast Fest**, Feast World Kitchen, 3rd and Cedar, 1 to 5 p.m.
- **Healing the Earth Vigil**, Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, Exit 39 off I-90, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 253-797-0168, pmillen@osfphila.org
- Oct 3-14 • **Carlo Acutis Eucharistic Miracles Exhibition**, St. Mary's Parish Family Center, 618 E. 1st St., Moscow, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. M-F, 208-882-4813
- Oct 4 • **Goodwill Community Resource Fair**, The Warehouse Athletic Facility, 800 N. Hamilton, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., teresab@giin.org
- **Persistence, Passion and Patience: An Evening with America's First Latina Military Pilot**, Lt. Col. Olga Custidio, USAF (Ret), Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, Gonzaga University, 7 to 8:15 p.m., gonzaga.edu/about/president-leadership/presidential-speaker-series
- Oct 5 • **An Evening with Iljeoma Oluo**, author of *So You Want to Talk About Race*, Idaho Central Credit Union Arena, Moscow, 7 p.m., uidaho.edu
- Oct 6 • **Spokane Homeless Coalition**, Camp Hope Tent, 2nd and Ray, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m., barrybarfield@gmail.com
- **The Fig Tree Benefit/Development and Board Meeting**, 12 to 3 p.m. 535-4112, mary@thefigtree.org
- **El Podar De Contarlo**, "The Power to Tell," Spanish film for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, EWU Wage Center, 3 p.m. endtheviolencespokane.org
- **Transitions "People Who Care"** Centennial Hotel, 303 W. North River, 12 to 1 p.m., help4women.org/pwc2022/
- **Finding Resilience in Nature**, Cathi Lamoreux, Shadle Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, 4 to 6 p.m. 444-5390
- To Oct 7 • **Americans in the Holocaust**, Gonzaga University, Foley Library, 502 E. Boone, 328-4220
- Oct 7 • **L.R. Montgomery Painting Sale**, Wilson Conservation Area, 6712 E. Willow Springs, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., 598-0003
- **Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition (SRDVC) Storytime and Activities**, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 12 to 2 p.m. endtheviolencespokane.org
- **Reception** for "Juventino Aranda: Aspere Mucho Tiempo Pa Ver" and "Our Stories, Our Lives: Irwin Nash Photographs of Yakima Valley Migrant Labor," Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, WSU, 1535 NE Wilson, Pullman, 4:30 to 6 p.m., 335-1910
- **Opening of Hanna Charlton Illuminated Manuscripts Show**, Spokane Art School, 811 W. Garland, 5 to 8 p.m., 325-1500
- Oct 7, 8 • **Standing Like a Tree: Spiritual Discovery Retreat**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 5:30-3 p.m., 993-2968
- Oct 7, 14, 21 • **Evening of the Unknown**, If You Could Save Just One, 4421 N. Nevada, 5 to 8 p.m. 703-7161, ifyoucouldsavejustone.org
- Oct 8 • **Cookie Festival**, Girl Scouts of E Washington and N Idaho, 1404 N. Ash, 747-8091
- **Filipino American History Celebration**, Filipino American NW Assn, Central Library, 906 W. Main, 6 to 10 p.m., 444-5336, facebook.com/filamnw
- Oct 8, 9 • **Spokane Symphony Masterworks 2: Lowe conducts Rachmaninoff**, Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat at 7:30 p.m., Sun at 3 p.m., 624-1200, spokanesymphony.org
- Oct 9 • **World Homeless Day** with Union Gospel Mission, Washington Trust Bank, 717 W. Sprague, 10-11 a.m., 353-4204
- Oct 10 • **According to Coyote**, Native American music, dance and theatre, Pavilion at Riverfront, 574 N. Howard, 625-6000
- **It's Fall Y'all**, Hillyard Farmer's Market End of Season Celebration, NE Community Center, 4001 N Cook, 3 to 6 p.m.
- Oct 11, 12, 13 • **Spocanopy Tree Plantings**, The Lands Council, West Central and Bemiss neighborhoods, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 838-4912, volunteer@landscouncil.org
- Oct 12 • **Hispanic Business Professional Assn, Fiesta Mexicana**, 1227 S. Grand, 6 to 7:30 p.m., hbpaofspokane.org
- Oct 12,13 • **Spokane Symphony Chamber Soiree 1**, Barrister Winery, 1213 W. Railroad, Wed at 7:30 p.m., Thurs at 7:30 p.m., 624-1200, spokanesymphony.org
- Oct 13 • **Community Celebration for Grant Project** Commencement, Spokane Regional Transportation Council, The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, 2:30 to 4 p.m., 343-6370, kjones@src.org
- **25th Anniversary, Unity Multicultural Education Center**, Julian Aguon, *No Country for Eight Spot Butterflies*, Gonzaga Hemmingson Ballroom, 4 p.m., 313-5836, UMEC@gonzaga.edu
- **Finding Our Place in the Inland Northwest**: Paycheck to Paycheck, Human Rights Education Institute, St. Luke's Episcopal, 501 E Wallace, Coeur d'Alene, 6 to 8 p.m., events.humanitix.com/finding-our-place-in-the-inland-northwest
- Oct 13, 27 • **Showing Up for Racial Justice Committee**, Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane, 5:30 p.m., slicity@pjals.org
- Oct 13, 19 • **American Democracy's Indigenous Roots and Future**, Humanities Washington, online, 6 p.m., humanities.org/event/online-american-democracies-indigenous-roots-and-future-11
- Oct 14 • **SRDVC Storytime and Activities**, Spokane Valley Library, 12004 E. Main Ave., 12 to 2 p.m. endtheviolencespokane.org
- Oct 14-16 • **Washington State Quilter's Show**, Spokane County Fair & Expo Center, 404 N. Havana, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. 477-1766
- Oct 15 • **Reforest Spokane**, The Lands Council, Thompson Creek near Newman Lake, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. 838-4912, volunteer@landscouncil.org
- **Over the Edge**, Habitat for Humanity Spokane, Bank of America Building, 601 W. Riverside, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 534-2552 x 245, gfebus@habitat-spokane.org
- **Art of the Renaissance Workshop**, Tom Quinn, Spokane Art School, 811 W. Garland, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., register, 325-1500
- **Shanthi Ragas, Indian Classical Music**, South Asian Cultural Assn, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:50 to 9 p.m., 467-5558 or sacaspokane@gmail.com
- Oct 16 • **According to Coyote**, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. 1st Ave. 456-3931
- Oct 17 • **Integrating Science into Climate and Environmental Policy**, Laura Peters, assistant director for Climate Resilience with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Gonzaga, Hemmingson, 702 E Desmet, 5 p.m., 719-464-5555
- **NAACP General Membership Meeting**, Community Building, 35 W. Main or virtual, 7 p.m., spokanenaacp@gmail.com
- Oct 19 • **EWU Faculty Concert**, Music Building Recital Hall, Cheney, 12 p.m., 359-2241
- **Silent Day of Prayer**, "Stunning Saints and Astounding Miracles," Mary Eucharista, SMMC, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 6910 S. Ben Burr, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 448-1224, kparker@ihrc.net
- **YWCA Domestic Violence Awareness Month** Pathways Forward: Centering Survivors, 12 to 1 p.m., virtual, ywcaspokane.org/event/pathways-oct19-2022/
- Oct 20 • **SRDVC Storytime and Activities**, Airway Heights Library, 1213 S. Lundstrom, 12 to 2 p.m. endtheviolencespokane.org
- Oct 21 • **Bedtime Stories**, Humanities Washington's Fundraiser, Jess Walter, Riverside Place, 1108 W. Riverside, 747-1200
- **Fig Tree's Fall Festival of Sharing** begins, continues to Nov. 29
- Oct 21, 22 • **Millwood Presbyterian Church Bazaar**, 3223 N. Marguerite, Spokane Valley, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. 924-2350.
- Oct 22 • **Impressionism Workshop**, Tom Quinn, Spokane Art School, 811 W. Garland, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., register, 325-1500
- **Happy Diwali Festival of Lights**, River Park Square, 1 to 5 p.m., **Rangoli Art Contest**, Spokane United We Stand and The Vedic Cultural Center, River Park Square, 808 W. Main 2nd Fl., 1 to 4 p.m., spokaneunitedwestand.org, charitydoyl@yahoo.com, 928-9664
- **The Pumpkin Ball**, Vanessa Behan Fundraiser, Davenport Grand Hotel, 333 W. Spokane Falls, 5:30 to 11 p.m., 981-8439 jennifer@jenniferevans.events, thepumpkinball.org
- Oct 22, 23 • **Spokane Symphony Masterworks 3: Fabio Returns**, Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat at 7:30 p.m. and Sun at 3 p.m., 624-1200
- Oct 25 • **Celebrate the Birth of the Bab**, Baha'i Community, Perkins Restaurant, 12 E. Olive, 6:30 p.m. dinner, deb.bisenius@gmail.com, 863-4461
- **Annual United Nations Day Dinner**, "Sharing Resources to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," Marijke Fakasieiki of The Fig Tree, UN Assn, Gonzaga, Hemmingson 201 or at facebook.com/UNASpokane, 6:30 p.m. taninchev@gonzaga.edu
- Oct 26, 28 • **Spokane Cemeteries Tour**, Southside Community Center, 3151 E. 27th, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., 535-0803
- Oct 27 • **Birth of Baha'u'llah**, Baha'i Community at North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 1:30 p.m., deb.bisenius@gmail.com, 863-4461
- **Displaced in One's Own Homeland**, Native American Tribes in this Region, Human Rights Education Institute, St. Luke's Episcopal, Coeur d'Alene, 6 to 8 p.m., HREI.org
- Oct 30 • **Dia de los Muertos**, Hispanic Business Professional Assn, Hazen & Jaeger Funeral Home, 1306 N. Pines, Spokane Valley, 3:30 to 7:30 p.m.
- Nov 2 • **The Fig Tree Distribution and Mailing**, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. 535-4112, kaye@thefigtree.org
- Nov 3 • **The Fig Tree Benefit and Board Meeting**, 12 to 3 p.m. 535-4112, mary@thefigtree.org
- Nov 4-5 • **Silent 24-Hour Retreat** "Living A Life of Gratitude," Fr. Max Oliva, SJ., IHRC, 4:30 p.m., 448-1224, kparker@ihrc.net

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World's bishops return from Lambeth with relationships and insights

The Rt. Rev. Gretchen Rehberg, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane had misgivings about joining Anglican bishops from around the world for the Lambeth Conference July 25 to Aug. 8, in Canterbury, England.

As she prepared to go to this Lambeth Conference—the first one held since her consecration as Bishop of Spokane in 2017—she wondered about the value of gathering bishops from around the world once every 10 years—14 years this time—because of expense, travel and climate concerns.

Gretchen found much value, however, in meeting with the other bishops face-to-face, hearing their stories, learning about their lives and building relationships that now give her direct concern about people who live in areas of conflict, injustice and disasters.

Now she prays for specific people who are experiencing the struggles she reads about in the news.

“I also came back with a sense of the importance and value of the global Anglican Communion itself and the witness it can provide to the world,” she said.

While colonialism meant that the communion was spread everywhere British and Americans planted their flags, the Anglican Communion is now in nearly every country, and in each place it has a flavor of the culture and society, she explained.

The Anglican Church is not like Roman Catholic, Orthodox or some Protestant churches. Each region has its own way of being the church. It is not a top-down hierarchy.

“The Archbishop of Canterbury is not our Pope. Our worldwide structure is as a connected church communion, with each region having its own governance, history, ways and languages,” Gretchen said. “The branches of Anglicanism are not in full agreement, but in the face of our disagreements, our real differences, we commit to stay together. That commitment is stronger than the need to be right.”

As about 700 bishops, plus their spouses, studied, prayed and worshiped together on the theme, “God’s Church for God’s World,” they found that uniting to follow Jesus is more important than being right.

Gretchen’s Bible study and prayer group included bishops from North India, South Sudan, Kenya, Canada and England.

In that group, a Maasai bishop from Kenya shared insight into a passage they were reading in I



Diocese of Spokane Bishop Gretchen Rehberg, right, meets bishops from around the world.

Photo courtesy of Bishop Gretchen Rehberg

Peter. It says, “Your adversary, the devil, is like a roaring lion.” That bishop has experienced the power of a lion roaring and shaking the walls of his house.

“It put that passage in a different light hearing from someone who has experienced a lion’s roar,” she said.

“In the group, we talked about the role of faith related to issues that face the world—such as climate and technology. We recognized that the way we use science and technology is a moral question. Do technologies benefit all or just the rich and powerful?” she asked.

Gretchen returned to Spokane with stories and the faces of bishops she lifts up in prayer regularly.

While each bishop focuses on his or her own location, and Spokane is her focus, “we also need to be aware of the rest of the world. We can learn from their examples as we continue our relationships.

Given the polarization in the world, it is important that I can work with, pray with and be in relationship with someone, even though we may disagree on some matters.” For example, some bishops came even though they did not agree on issues of human sexuality.

“Logically, the communion shouldn’t exist given the history of colonialism, multiple languages, cultures and economic systems, but we are united with Christ, and we stand together with one another in caring for creation,” she said. “We take

that and pray in our local and diocesan levels—working with, praying with and learning from people of different political views. If we do that, we will be changed.”

As Gretchen prays every day for the bishops who were at her table, she prays for a bishop whose diocese includes a refugee camp in South Sudan.

“I hear about something on the news, and I pray,” she said, adding that, when she heard news of the new president in Kenya being installed, she prayed for the bishop there. With the floods in Pakistan, she wondered how that affected the bishop in North India and prayed.

“Knowing people personalizes events worldwide, putting a face and name on what is happening,” she said.

Gretchen shared some examples:

- **The bishop from North India** told of being arrested on a Sunday morning with others after a tragic crime in the city. Authorities entered the church and took six, including him, to jail, beating them for four days because they blamed Christians for what happened in the town.

- “Christians are persecuted, tortured and killed because of the caste system, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the church being illegal,” she said, observing that interfaith relationships for Christians in the U.S. are different from what bishops experience in India, Jerusalem or South Sudan, where there is persecution and oppression.

“In the U.S., secularism and consumerism are challenges to Christian faith, but that is not persecution,” she clarified. “Here, we grapple with how to share the gospel in a society that is not listening. U.S. Christians, regardless of secularism, have power.”

- **Two bishops raised** climate issues. One from the Pacific Islands told how the islands that are his home will not exist because of the rising sea level. Another in Alaska told of people having to move their towns because the permafrost is thawing.

“How can bishops in wealthier lands help those who suffer from climate change? That’s a moral question,” Gretchen said.

- **Many bishops discussed** how to uphold human dignity related to the treatment of women: Are women named? Can they go to school? How are they treated in the workplace?

“We are responsible for human dignity, to let people flourish as God created them to be,” she said.

Of the bishops gathered in 2022, 97 were women, a sharp increase from 11 in 1998.

“With women bishops, there is more emphasis on relationships than being right and more importance given to being in community, doing things together,” Gretchen said.

“Having women as bishops normalizes women being leaders in authority in places where that is not the norm. That can give an impetus for change,” she said.

Some women bishops who attended earlier Lambeth Con-

ferences said some male bishops had told them to go home to their husbands and to have babies.

“At this Lambeth, I never felt questioned for being a woman,” Gretchen said.

Before Lambeth, bishops met in small groups on Zoom to study, pray and discuss issues facing the world to decide what the Anglican communion is called to do.

They worked on draft action plans on mission and evangelism, reconciliation and worldwide peace and justice, safe churches, environmental sustainability (climate change, science and technology and sustainable development), Christian unity, interfaith relations, Anglican relations, human dignity and discipleship.

Worshipping every day with bishops from South Sudan, India and Mexico, Gretchen experienced the joyfulness of the Sudanese bishop who sings and dances with refugees in the camps.

“Worshipping at Canterbury Cathedral where people have worshiped for 1500 years and with the singing of bishops and their spouses resonating was stunning,” Gretchen said.

The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of focusing on growth and development as bishops, on calling bishops to leadership that is humble yet strong.

He also said that not agreeing did not mean that they are unfaithful.

“We can be faithful and disagree,” she repeated. “We can’t say, ‘I have no need of you.’”

Gretchen added that videos of the Lambeth Conference are on the Lambeth Conference website and more will be added.

For information, call 624-3191 or visit lambethconference.org.

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