

41ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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

# Study recommends ideas for seminaries

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

David Gortner, an Episcopal priest, psychologist and practical theologian with academic and research work focusing on developing effective clergy leadership, uses his knowledge and skills both in his work at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Coeur d’Alene and as a national consultant.

His efforts support programs to help clergy become effective leaders who can develop thriving, vital congregations.

“I want to help people find how God is already moving in their lives. God loves us, has made us each uniquely and wonderfully in God’s own image and will not leave us alone,” he affirmed.

That is why he has taught and trained hundreds of clergy and lay people “to embrace the practice of sharing their journeys of faith, listening for signs of God at work in everyone’s lives, naming where they see God at work and inviting people to discover more.”

In 2018, David responded to requests from the bishop and the vestry—church council—to serve St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Coeur d’Alene.

“I first came to St. Luke’s as



The Rev. Dr. David Gortner is a priest, psychologist and practical theologian.

vicar during a time of congregational difficulty, to assist in re-stabilization, healing and setting a fresh course of direction. They asked me to remain as their rector,” he explained.

David, who has worked in many different places across the U.S., moved to the Inland Northwest with his wife, Heather VanDeventer, also an Episcopal priest and dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. They have two young adult children.

“For more than 30 years, I have served in seminaries, churches, campus ministries, church plants and interfaith organizations,” he explained. “All of my previous work, including my early work on farms and building houses and my work in various pastoral and mental health settings, has shaped me as a pastor and leader.”

Prior to coming to Coeur d’Alene, he was professor of evangelism and congregational leadership, director of the doctoral programs and associate dean for church and community engagement at Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), the largest of the Episcopal Church’s 10 seminaries.

During his tenure there, he was

Continued on page 4

# Visit to Thailand cemented members’ commitment to orphans and women

By Mary Stamp

Claudia Hamilton is coordinating the booth for the Prachakittisuk Orphanage at the Jubilee International Fair Trade Marketplace Friday and Saturday, Oct. 24 and 25, at First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar.

Claudia, who began attending First Presbyterian in 1985, has been involved as a volunteer with Jubilee for many years. She often helped with the Ten Thousand Villages booth, which sold fair-trade products from artisans

in various ethnic groups around the world.

Then she joined nine other church members for a visit in March 2010 at the Prachakittisuk Orphanage mission started in 1997 by Sirirat Pusurinkham, a Presbyterian pastor in Chang Rai, Thailand.

Sirirat has run the programs as a way to lead the community into healthful solutions to problems caused by sex tourism, the drug industry, poverty and child prostitution.

As a result, she first founded a Women’s Handicraft Project in 1997, a stitching project for women in her village to provide job training. The artisans hand stitch intricate designs on textile bags, vests and runners. She pays them a fair wage for their work and sells the items through outlets like the Jubilee Fair Trade Marketplace.

“Buyers, such as those in Spokane, enjoy one-of-a-kind items showing the creativity and skill of women there,” said Claudia. “The income supports the seamstresses so they can keep their children fed and in school. The more years of school they have, the more likely it is for the girls to escape the poverty that leads to prostitution.”

When the First Presbyterian group visited in 2010, Sirirat told them that when she was nine, her third and fourth grade friends were sold by their families into child prostitution to help them pay debts. Sirirat asked for help, because she was sad and angry to lose her friends. She vowed to do

Continued on page 6

# Fall Fund Drive stretches Fig Tree’s media outreach

The Fig Tree Fall Fund Drive is an opportunity for renewing and new sponsors to support and sustain the ongoing work of publishing The Fig Tree newspaper and annual Resource Directory and organizing educational events. It’s also an opportunity for volunteers to join the people making the life-changing publications possible.

The campaign runs from Oct. 21 to Giving Tuesday on Dec. 3, by mail, email and online.

Fig Tree Board members are offering challenge gifts to invite people to give. They will match the first \$4,000 given.

Supporters suggest reasons to give, saying The Fig Tree stories and resources: 1) transform lives; 2) show how God’s people work to improve the world; 3) weave people together in community; 4) are a catalyst amplifying projects; 5) bridge the gap between generations and cultures; 6) invite a sense of belonging and 7) use solutions and peace journalism to challenge the everyday narrative of reality.

This year, the goal is to raise \$16,000. Donations may be made by mail or online [thefigtree.org/donate.html](http://thefigtree.org/donate.html) or at give lively (see ad page 3). For information, call 964-5266 or email [development@thefigtree.org](mailto:development@thefigtree.org).

# Sustainability Fund adds new options

The Fig Tree Sustainability Fund was launched in April 2024 with the gift of \$10,000 from the family of Nancy Minard, a long-time Fig Tree editor.

“Our sustainability fund ensures we can pursue long-term planning and projects beyond the day-to-day operation to help us reach goals beyond our annual budget,” said Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate.

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Global media project calls for gender equality

Key findings and recommendations from the 7th edition of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) released in September provide an overview of gender equality and what can be done to address the gaps.

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), coordinator of the GMMP Network, organized a dialogue, “Half the World, a Quarter of the News,” with UN Women and the UN Correspondents Association.

Every five years for the past 30 years, GMMP surveys how women are represented, portrayed and engaged as subjects, sources and reporters, in comparison to men. The findings reveal the extent to which women have power, voice and visibility in global media—and where advocacy is needed to advance democracy, equality and accountability.

The GMMP 2025 findings come as the world marks 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Key findings are that progress towards gender equality in news media is flatlining, with women only 26 percent of the people seen, heard or spoken about in print and broadcast news—an increase of just two points in the last 15 years.

Despite its prominence in the lives of 50 percent of the population, gender-based violence is featured in less than two out of every 100 news articles. The report also revealed that women’s participation as sources continues to be primarily in ordinary roles, as popular opinion providers and interviewees giving eyewitness accounts.

The Beijing Platform demanded non-stereotyped portrayals, reinforced by the recent Pact for the Future (2024) which requires action to dismantle barriers for women and girls. In 2025, the report notes that gender stereotypes are more entrenched.

A recent United Nations General Assembly meeting is examining progress on the Beijing Platform and launching a new Beijing Action Agenda, said Kalliopi Mingeirou, chief of the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Section at UN Women. She pointed to GMMP 2025 findings as a “wake-up call and a roadmap” for action. That only one in four people seen and read about in the news is a woman reveals a “gap in democracy,” Kalliopi said.

Media are one of the most powerful forces shaping public discourse, democracy and accountability. When women are absent, democracy is incomplete and public discourse distorted. Without women’s voices, there is no full story, no fair democracy and no shared future.”

Closing the event, Sara Speicher, WACC deputy general secretary, commended gender justice activists around the world. “Gender parity in the people seen, heard or spoken about in the news will not happen without a radical shift,” she said, urging that this shift take the form of a broader look at how to factor in gender equality as an integral part of the media business models—as “a key element of quality journalism that strengthens public trust.”

She reminded participants of the UN Pact for the Future and its Global Digital Compact approved a year ago with extensive commitments to women and girls—including addressing representation and tech-facilitated gender-based violence. She called for a collective effort to reform structures.

“Sometimes it feels as if taking two steps back is easier than one step forward, but we have networks, expertise, leadership and commitment. Together we can push to reignite progress towards gender equality.”

For information on the full report, visit [whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2025-key-findings](http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2025-key-findings).

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Holy Names Sisters grant Fig Tree \$5,000

For 2025, The Fig Tree is among programs receiving a Ministry Grant in September from the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary U.S. - Ontario (SNJM).

It was one of 34 groups benefitting from a distribution of \$154,000 to groups that “carry on the charism of Mother Marie Rose in our world today,” according to the grant team.

The Fig Tree will use the \$5,000 grant 1) to publish the annual comprehensive Resource Directory that connects people with the resources to improve their lives; 2) to pay stipends for

college interns, and 3) to teach media literacy to help people understand dynamics of media that impact their lives, said Mary Stamp, editor.

Along with receiving SNJM grants for 17 years since 2009, local Holy Names sisters and associates continue the legacy of co-founder and co-editor Sister Bernadine Casey by serving on the board of directors and sharing in the ministry as volunteers.

For example, Ruth Safranek, an associate of the Holy Names Sisters, volunteers to assist with sorting newspapers for deliveries.

A Holy Names Sister who

works with a ministry applies for the grant. This year, Kay Herberling, SNJM, a long-time supporter and pianist for the 2025 Benefit Lunch submitted the application.

Catherine Ferguson, SNJM, supplements the grant with her services as a member of The Fig Tree Board, an editor and writer, and assisting in many advisory capacities.

“We appreciate that the Sisters affirm our ministry as an expression of their mission today,” said Mary.

For information, call 535-4112 or visit [thefigtree.org](http://thefigtree.org).

Volunteers from LDS stakes serve in area

Spokane area stakes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints joined in several projects as part of their JustServe Sept. 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance

Two years after the Oregon Road Fire in Elk burned more than 11,000 acres and destroyed more than 100 homes, hundreds of members of the Spokane Stake helped with recovery and clean-up on Saturday, Sept. 13. Youth had also volunteered at Elk burn sites in July.

The church’s JustServe program links volunteers with needs and encourages members and non-members to volunteer in their communities all year.

Members of the Mount Spokane Stake joined the Sept. 11 day by cleaning the banks of the Spokane River on Sept. 6.

About 400 members from 10 congregations in the Spokane East Stake cleaned several Spokane Valley cemeteries and playgrounds on Wednesday, Sept. 6.

In addition, the church deliv-

ered nearly 40,000 pounds of donated food to Latah County food banks on Aug. 29.

Adventist Community Services Food Distribution Center in Deary, Idaho, hosted the offloading of the shipment, sharing their facility with Troy Adventist Food Distribution Center, Potlatch Food Pantry, Moscow Food Bank, West Side Food Pantry and Vandal Food Pantry for the day.

For information, call 270-4950 or visit [justserve.org](http://justserve.org).

Healing the Earth Vigil meets at Cataldo

The Healing the Earth Vigil will gather faith and environmental folks from the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, Silver Valley Community Resource Center, church groups and environmen-

tal leaders at 1 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 4, at the Mission of the Sacred Heart in Cataldo, Idaho.

People living in the Bunker Hill Superfund site will gather to express love for Mother Earth and call for the closure of the tox-

ic waste repository across from the Mission to heal those harmed by pollution from the site.

“The vigil is a time to pray, reflect, mourn the loss and commit ourselves to concrete steps to heal and prevent future damage,” said Zoda Suryan, a member of Children Run Better Unleaded.

The date coincides with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of the environment. The vigil is on the 10th anniver-

sary of Pope Francis’ encyclical, Laudato Si’—“the cry of Mother Earth and cry of the poor”—connecting the environmental crises and the despair of those impacted by the contamination.

Those impacted are working to close the repository and seek funding for a Community Lead Health Center.

For information, call 208-784-8891 or email [svcommunityresourcecenter@gmail.com](mailto:svcommunityresourcecenter@gmail.com).

CDAIDE helps hospitality workers in need

CDAIDE, which provides funds for hospitality workers facing hardship, is presenting its fifth annual Chef Challenge on the theme, “A Night of Flavor and Compassion.” Six top local chefs will compete in cooking challenges and appetizer tastings in this fundraiser at 5:30 p.m.,

Thursday, Oct. 23, at Hagadone Event Center in Coeur d’Alene.

Guests will enjoy a buffet prepared by Chef Reannan Keene of Izzy’s Comfort Kitchen and support hospitality heroes in Coeur d’Alene, Hayden, Post Falls and Rathdrum.

The funds raised will help families stay housed, keep the lights on, pay medical bills,

repair their cars and make it through times of crisis.

“Our community takes care of its own, and that hospitality workers deserve the same care they give others every day,” said Jason Nye, executive director of CDAIDE, which provides confidential, referral-based assistance.

For information, visit [cdaide.org](http://cdaide.org).

Eco-Anxiety Café gathers folks

Eco-Anxiety Cafés of 350 Spokane’s Interfaith Committee and other groups offer places to share feelings and thoughts, find resources and connect with others with similar concerns.

A Parents and Children event is planned from 9 to 11 a.m.,

Saturday, Oct. 18, outdoors at Manito United Methodist Church, 3220 S. Grand Blvd.

For information, visit [action-network.org/event/October-parent-and-caretaker-eco-anxiety-café](http://action-network.org/event/October-parent-and-caretaker-eco-anxiety-café).

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# Pastor advises seminaries how to prepare clergy to lead thriving churches

*Continued from page 1*  
key to carrying out two important research grants related to effective clergy leadership.

From 2009 to 2014, he was the principal investigator for a Lilly Endowment grant entitled “Transitions to Ministry Programs Impact Study.”

**This study used** 40 in-depth interviews and more than 600 surveys of clergy across denominations who had participated in Lilly-funded Transition into Ministry programs after seminary to determine their growth and impact on congregations.

Related to that study’s goal, David asked questions about clergy growth: “Did we end up with better leaders because of the programs Lilly funded when the participants transitioned from seminary education into real-life ministry?”

**To determine that,** he asked participants questions he believed were at the center of the Lilly initiative.

- What enables pastors to thrive as pastoral leaders and lead congregations effectively?
- What common professional

and personal challenges emerge along pastors’ ministerial careers and present obstacles that impair their ability to lead well?

• What particular professional challenges confront pastors who serve in specific ministry settings?

• What wisdom from experienced clergy can help pastors negotiate these challenges?

**In the study, David found** that recently ordained clergy reported having the highest confidence in preaching, leading worship and acting as a role model. Not surprisingly, these topics had received the most attention in their seminary programs. They were also areas clergy said they devoted the most time in their work.

Similarly, participants in Transitions into Ministry said their programs emphasized strengthening preaching and pastoral care, already skills among most emphasized in their education. Their programs also emphasized self-development and self-management.

However, at the bottom of the rankings were skills such as objective-setting and pro-

gram planning, lay leadership development, conflict engagement, organizational leadership, congregational development and building community connections.

**These new clergy described** themselves as unprepared to provide leadership and ministry in supervision, youth work, finance and administration, and understanding and working with natural social networks.

“Seminaries are good at forming ministers who have the basic traditional—and expected—skills in preaching, pastoral care and sacramental ministry. Seminaries, however, are not nearly so adept at shaping leaders who can be agents of transformational change,” David said.

**While serving at St. Luke’s,** David continued for seven years at VTS as program principal for its Lilly-funded Thriving in Ministry project. This project used his learnings about effective clergy leadership to address gaps in clergy development. Employing mentor-coach training methods through individual consultations, peer learning ses-

sions, churchwide partnerships and an emphasis on focused in-place practice, it has aimed to strengthen Episcopal clergy in the weaker set of skills to make them stronger congregational leaders, he said.

David presented this work in a white paper to the seminary, which was later published and distributed widely to seminaries across denominations in the journal, *In Trust*.

**The paper recommended** that training include focus on essential leadership skills, in addition to the traditional skills of preaching, pastoral care and being a role model, which are already emphasized in the mainline Protestant seminary training.

The paper reported that what is missing in curricula across most mainline and evangelical seminaries “is a more robust emphasis on developing seminarians’ capacities in building communities and organizations.”

David noted that such courses are relegated to “elective” status and not even emphasized as part of field education.

When seminary graduates arrive in congregations, schools and other settings ready to do what

they have been trained to do, they come face-to-face with challenges and negative situations they were not prepared to deal with.

Those include congregations’ financial disarray, deep conflict or latent hostility, organizational malaise, absence of evangelism and mission, detachment from surrounding neighborhoods and communities, deteriorating buildings and weak lay support of ministries.

**David believes** “it is a high art to build and strengthen communities and organizations.”

Because the perspectives, skills and capacities for this art are not typically taught in seminary education, David suggests that traditional seminaries adjust their overall curriculum, field education and co-curricular programs to create specific paths for capacity development.

For information, email priest@stlukescd.org.

## SHIBA informs on Medicare enrollment

During Medicare’s open enrollment period from Oct. 15 to Dec. 7, Aging & Long Term Care of Eastern Washington’s Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) program will help individuals navigate Medicare decisions.

SHIBA is a free, unbiased and confidential service of the

Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC).

Their volunteers counsel people of all ages, adults living with disabilities and people preparing to retire about their Medicare choices.

SHIBA helps people understand their Medicare rights and options. It offers group presenta-

tions or one-on-one counseling to answer Medicare questions, make referrals and help people compare and evaluate health insurance policies, said Monica Kudrna, who is the SHIBA coordinator.

For information, call 625-4801 or visit altcew.org or insurance.wa.gov.

## Groups plan Candidate Housing Forum

Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium (SLIHC), Black Homeownership Spokane and Habitat for Humanity Spokane are hosting a City of Spokane Candidate Housing Forum at 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 7, at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, 500 S. Stone St.

It is a public forum for voters to hear candidates’ visions for affordable housing, homeownership and community development. It is also an opportunity

for them to ask questions about their priorities. It will highlight solutions and give Spokane residents the chance to participate in shaping local housing solutions.

“Spokane faces a housing crisis that requires community-driven solutions. By leading these conversations and bringing partners to the table, SLIHC is ensuring residents have the tools and information they need to shape a more affordable and equitable future,” said Ben Stuck-

art, executive director of SLIHC.

For information, call 710-9611, email ben@slihc.org or visit slihc.org.

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# Transitions uplifts power of stories to bring its programs to life

Building confidence and community among the women they serve are key to the Transitions drop-in, housing and vocational programs.

Transitions programs serve women and children through four departments—1) the Women’s Hearth Drop-in Center, 2) Miryam’s House and TLC Transitional Housing, 3) Home Yard Cottages and Offsite Permanent Supportive Housing, and 4) New Leaf job training and vocational services.

In connecting those programs, Sarah Lickfold finds that serving as executive director of Transitions uses an intersection of her skillsets along with her values of community, justice and respect as she guides the agency to tackle its mission of ending poverty and homelessness for women and children in Spokane.

She attributes Transitions’ values to the four founding communities of Catholic women religious—the Sisters of the Holy Names, the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and the Sisters of Providence.

For many years, a sister from each community served on the board of directors, but now there is just one sister on it.

There are still representatives of each community on its board of members.

While most funding is intact, Transitions lost its AmeriCorps administrative staff member, but Sarah said it’s “mind-boggling knowing that some funding sources could be taken out of the mix at any time.”

Given that uncertainty, she said the program looks for strong support from the community at its annual People Who Care Luncheon at noon, Tuesday, Oct. 7, at the Davenport Grand Hotel, 333 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

“The theme, ‘Community,’ is timely, because it’s where the future is for all of us in the nonprofit sector. It goes back to how relationships add value to life and strengthen organizations. Connections are what it takes. We all need each other,” said Sarah, who began working at Transitions seven years ago as development director and has worked the last two-and-a-half years as executive director.

After graduating from Omak High School, she completed a bachelor’s degree in 2018 in English with a minor in Spanish at Colorado State University in Pueblo.

Returning to Omak, she became a bank teller and then an assistant bank manager at a bank in Walla Walla for several years.

“I learned about people management and customer relations,” said Sarah.

When the bank eliminated that role, so, motivated by her inter-



Sarah Lickfold finds resilience in women’s stories.

est in international relations, she joined the Peace Corps as a community economic development volunteer in Jesus, Cajamarca, Peru, from 2015 to 2017. While there, she taught entrepreneurship to youth and started a community bank.

“I went into the Peace Corps with a heroism mentality that I would do something great for people, but that’s not what happens. Peace Corps volunteers are more changed by their experiences than are the communities we serve,” she said.

“The experience was about relationships and cultural exchange,” she said. “I learned to expand relationships without being fluent in the language. That helped me build relationships in English more readily,” she said.

The town of Jesus had a Catholic church on the plaza, but her host family was part of a large Evangelical movement there. Sarah grew up in a Baptist church. Even though she is no longer active, she understands the language of churches, which helps her work with Transitions’ church partners.

“I know the culture of faith,” she said.

After the Peace Corps, Sarah settled in Spokane where her brother and his family lived and where there were more career opportunities for her.

She began volunteering for nonprofits, which led her to learn about the opening at Transitions.

“The Women’s Hearth is our front door,” said Sarah. “The majority of women we serve are there. The numbers are up to thousands per year, with much of the increase in the last two years and after Hope House closed as a 24/7 shelter. Women previously could stay at Hope House all day.”

The hearth and other programs

rely on bras, underwear and hygiene items donated at Mardi Bras events in February, but those supplies have mostly run out. Previously, they lasted all year, Sarah reported.

“Not only are more women coming to Women’s Hearth, but also the women face more challenges, such as with behavioral health and substance use that require more staff,” Sarah pointed out.

Two case managers work with women who come to this safe, welcoming community to help them find housing and meet other needs. They refer women to housing programs and permanent supportive housing.

There are other changes happening in Transitions’ programs.

Sarah is excited that the Extreme Team program of KXLY TV has turned an office on the top floor of Miryam’s House into two more rooms for women, expanding it from 10 to 12 rooms.

TLC, which has 16 units, has changed from managing childcare internally with its Educare program on site to sending older children to Little Scholars nearby on North Monroe. Infants and toddlers are still on site.

Transitions Permanent Supportive Housing program now includes both the Home Yard Cottages, which Sarah said are “going strong and have a great retention rate,” and Sinto Com-

mons, with 47 units owned by Community Frameworks. Both are for individuals and families.

Since 2018, there have been 24 cottages built on the Transitions property on N. Hemlock with studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom units for single adults and families who are recertified annually based on income.

Coming from chronic homelessness, residents receive onsite case management, a food bank and support in goal setting for next steps, such as moving into homeownership.

New Leaf, which fosters skills and confidence to overcome barriers to employment, offers vocational services through two New Leaf Cafes, one at the Central YWCA for women trainees and one at the Central Library for men and women trainees.

It has closed its catering services.

“It’s about more than teaching people to make coffee,” she said. “Up to six trainees come in twice a week at each location to build their confidence and community.”

“It’s about trainees gaining the soft skills of learning to be comfortable with people, do customer service and work with others,” said Sarah. “Building confidence is key to New Leaf.”

“We have a great donor base and try to do better at stewarding support from the private sector, nurturing connections with partners,” said Sarah.

“Listening to people tell their stories gives me resilience,” she said. “There is power in the stories of changed lives.”

In addition to hearing those stories at the PWC Lunch, Sarah invites people to tour the facilities.

For information, call 328-6702 or visit [transitions.spokane.org](http://transitions.spokane.org).



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# Pastor in Thailand intervenes to end sex trafficking, serve orphans

*Continued from page 1*  
something to tell the world about the child prostitution problem.

Sirirat, a third-generation Christian and pastor's daughter, completed school at a missionary boarding school in Chang Rai and then went to college. She later went to seminary in San Francisco and wrote a dissertation on "Child Prostitution in Thailand: A Challenge to the World Christian Community."

"When Sirirat returned to her village to be pastor of her home church, many of her friends had returned and were dying of AIDS. She conducted many of their funeral services. They asked her to care for their children after they died," said Claudia.

In 2003, Sirirat, who is in the Taiya indigenous group in China and Thailand, founded My Thai Kids orphanage and added a second building in 2008, so they could serve 26 orphans. Presently, 10 orphans are in her care, along with many others who have grown to adulthood and continue to need assistance for education, food and daily needs.

In 2010 when the First Presbyterian group visited Sirirat, they met the children who were then teenagers.

"We supplied the women artisans with sewing machines, a washing machine and water filter," said Claudia. "When we were there, Sirirat was also receiving children fleeing from Myanmar (Burma) where the government was burning hill villages to drive indigenous people out. The sky was brown from the fires."

The church group learned that of Thailand's 67 million people, 800,000 children under the age



Claudia Hamilton displays some of the Thai crafts she sells.

of 16 were bought and sold for a profit greater than the drug trade, weapons sales, lotteries or sports gambling.

In a financial crisis, the Thai government had found tourism a quick way to earn foreign dollars, so they promoted the physical and cultural beauty of the country along with sex services of poor girls sold into prostitution by parents duped into believing their children would find jobs and a better life in the city.

Sirirat not only advises parents in her village to stop sending children to the city to be prostitutes but also provides scholarships to keep them in school.

In addition, she has traveled around the world talking about the sex trade, raising funds and promoting the fair-trade project.

She has spoken about human trafficking, water justice and racism at conferences of the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and more.

Sirirat has said her calling as a pastor is "to bring victims mercy, hope, healing and personal support along with job training."

Her travels have brought her several times to visit Spokane and other churches in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Claudia, who grew up near Syracuse, NY, "fell in love with the Lord" while attending a Presbyterian vacation Bible school in a small-town church. Her studies of nutrition led her to teach nutrition at the University of Missouri and then Utah State University. In 1977, she moved Spokane where she taught dietetics and retired after 20 years as dietitian

at St. Luke's.

At the booth, people can purchase items to support the mission and learn more about Sirirat's work with women who make the items.

Claudia reminded that most of Sirirat's work today is with women of the village, selling their products so their children are not sold into prostitution.

For information, call 747-8147 or email [pepsi3415@yahoo.com](mailto:pepsi3415@yahoo.com).

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## Thai Village booth has different items

First Presbyterian member Lance Potter will present another Jubilee Fair Trade Marketplace booth selling more items from Thailand.

He lived and taught in Thailand from 1999 to 2004 and 2008 to 2012. His parents had been missionaries there and ran a church guest house in Bangkok.

Friends, who are leaders of the ministry Thai Village, Inc., provide Thai handicrafts targeted to Western tastes—like tin Christmas tree ornaments, jewelry, nativity sets and woven purses and scarves—for him to sell.

They train artisans to make products on contract or as em-

ployees. They offer Bible classes and support people escaping domestic abuse and sex trafficking. They are building a center for their programs that include adult Bible education, vocational training, financial savings and community seminars. The center also trains church leaders, supports local churches and shares God's love in community.


Lance, a professor of education at Eastern Washington University, has been a member of First Presbyterian since moving to Spokane from Pennsylvania in 2014.

For information, call 230-4449 or email [deblanceplus4@gmail.com](mailto:deblanceplus4@gmail.com) or visit [thaivillage.org](http://thaivillage.org).

**Psyches, Personae, and Characters: Human Selves in Film**  
**Faith, Film & Philosophy**  
**2025 Public Event Series**  
**October 6-10, 2025**

**GONZAGA UNIVERSITY** | Faith & Reason Institute

Mon., Oct. 6 7:00 pm	<b>FACULTY PANEL: Compelling Cinematic Characters</b> WOLFF AUD JEPSON 114
Tues., Oct. 7 7:00 pm	<b>STUDENT PANEL: Human Selves in Film</b> HEMM AUD 004
Wed., Oct. 8 7:00 pm	<b>"Now Where Was I?: The (In)Capable Self in the Films of Christopher Nolan"</b> Joel Mayward (George Fox University) WOLFF AUD JEPSON 114
Thurs., Oct. 9 7:00 pm	<b>"Inescapable Moral Horizons: Kieslowski's Blue and Charles Taylor on the Self in Moral Space"</b> Tom Hibbs (Baylor University) WOLFF AUD JEPSON 114
Fri., Oct. 10 7:00 pm	<b>"We Are Not What Was Intended: The Failed Nihilism of David Fincher's Seven"</b> Vernon W. Cisney (Gettysburg College) WOLFF AUD JEPSON 114



**For further information**  
**<https://www.gonzaga.edu/ffp2025>**



**Shalom MINISTRIES**

**Dining with Dignity Gala 2025**  
**Saturday, Oct. 18 - 5 to 8:30 p.m.**  
**at the Southside Community Center**  
**3151 E. 27th Ave. - Spokane**

This event is the cornerstone of Shalom's fundraising and now, more than ever, as funding becomes more difficult to access, we must redouble our efforts to create a successful outcome.

**RSVP TICKETS:**  
**[fundraiser.support/ShalomMeals](https://fundraiser.support/ShalomMeals)**

View live & silent auction items there from Oct. 8

**Keynote - Pam Kohlmeier volunteers Mondays**  
**Guest speaker - Patrick Allen, social worker with CHAS outreach team**





# The 36th Jubilee Fair Trade Marketplace has a new coordinator

For 36 years, the Jubilee Fair Trade Marketplace, a ministry of First Presbyterian Church in Spokane, has been an opportunity to raise awareness on economic justice, while providing fair wages for artisans so they can feed, house, educate and provide health care for their families.

In 2025, the Jubilee International Fair Trade Marketplace will be held from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Friday, Oct. 24 and from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 25, at First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar.

Since it began, Jubilee sales have distributed more than \$1 million to artisans around the world and local immigrant/refugee artists.

**Suzie Smith first learned** about it last year when Mary Frankhauser, one of the founders, spoke at a book club Suzie attended. Mary gave her a flier and invited her to come. Then, a student in the English as a Second Language (ESL) class she teaches at Spokane Community College gave her a copy of the same flier and said she sold scarves there.

Not only did Suzie check it out, but she also volunteered last year, helping with cashiering at the mission table.

“I have a heart for people in different countries who come



Suzie Smith helps coordinate fair-trade marketplace.

Photo courtesy of Suzie Smith

here to make a better life for themselves,” she said. “I was impressed to learn about a church that walked their talk, building community locally and supporting efforts around the world.”

When Mary learned that Suzie did event coordination, she let her know she was looking to step back. So for the 2025 Jubilee Fair Trade Marketplace, Suzie is the coordinator.

“I was happy to take that role of keeping track of multiple moving parts,” she said.

“I believe in its mission and

I’m impressed with the church’s involvements and services,” said Suzie, admitting she was hooked on attending First Presbyterian after listening to a sermon online.

**Growing up in California** in a strict Christian background and later trying to be spiritual but not religious, she said she did not realize that she missed being involved in a community of like-minded folks who walk the talk.

She is impressed with how church members feel it’s important to be involved in service and good causes.

Suzie had visited the Northwest on a family trip when she was five, so when she married in 1994 and her then husband asked where she wanted to live, she said in the Northwest. They moved to Vancouver, WA, where she worked in health care billing and adjunct teaching.

During COVID, her hours were cut from 40 to 20, so she applied for work in Spokane, where her sister lived and the cost of living was lower.

**Suzie first worked** at the front desk for a primary care provider, then in the billing office and then remotely with Fred Hutch Cancer Center. Meanwhile, she was earning a master’s degree in education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at Eastern Washington University. On completing the degree in 2023, she was hired at SCC.

“I have a heart for folks who want to learn English to improve their lives. I meet amazing people. Last summer, I had students from 19 countries in my class. Each has a story of life before coming to the U.S.—escaping poverty, war or years in refugee camps,” Suzie said.

**She shared examples** of their stories.

• A medic had served the U.S. army in Afghanistan and would have been killed had he not fled with his family.

• Several women are involved in a local project, Mahima at Thrive, that enables women here who can’t work outside the home to make jewelry that will be sold at Jubilee.

• Two students from her summer class—whose house was bombed in Ukraine—are now here and selling art and hand-knit scarves.

“I did my Christmas shopping at Jubilee last year,” Suzie said. “It was affordable, and the dollars went to provide fair wages and compensation for materials for the local artists and international artisans.”

**Vendors in 2025** are Anuak Meer Ministry, Ethiopia; Conosur Imports, Chile; Feast World Kitchen, Spokane; Ganesh Himal Trading Co., Nepal; Hmong Community in the U.S. and Laos; Jasmine Crafts, Kashmir; Maya Earth Coffee, Guatemala; Milagros, Peru; Nari Boutique, Nepal; Resilient Threads, Guatemala; Sailor Soap, Colombia; Thai Village and Prachakittisuk Orphanage, Thailand; Ukrainian Artists in Spokane, and various groups offering various international handicrafts—Jeanette Rankin Peace Center, Kizuri, the Mahima Project at Thrive International and Trades of Hope.

For information, call 747-1058 or email [suz.smith34@gmail.com](mailto:suz.smith34@gmail.com).

## Faith Action Network plans Nov. 16 dinner

“A Night of Unbreakable Spirit,” Faith Action Network’s Spokane Annual Dinner, will be held Sunday, Nov. 16, at Gonzaga University’s Hemmingson Center.

Guests will gather for inspiring stories, food and music to celebrate achievements of this multi-faith advocacy agency.

The event connects two locations, Spokane and the SeaTac Hilton by livestream. It is also available for those who cannot attend in person. Speakers will participate from both locations.

There are opportunities to purchase individual tickets, host a table and sponsor the event.

“Together, we can ensure that we can continue the increasingly important work of promoting justice, compassion and sustainability in the halls of power,” said Joyce Del Rosario, executive director of FAN.

For information, email [fan@fanwa.org](mailto:fan@fanwa.org) or visit [fanwa.org](http://fanwa.org).

## LCSNW announces Gathered for Good lunch

Gathered for Good Luncheon fundraiser for Lutheran Com-

munity Services Northwest (LCSNW) begins with a social hour at 11:30 a.m., followed by lunch at 12:30 p.m., Saturday Oct. 18, at the Mukogawa U.S. Campus, 4320 Owens Ridge Rd.

“It’s an afternoon of fellowship, inspiration and impact, an opportunity to come together as church members, faith partners and community supporters to

share connections, celebrate the impact of working side-by-side, servicing and strengthening bonds across congregations and communities,” said Megan Eickmeyer, communications director at LCSNW.

For information, call 343-5060, email [meickmeyer@lcsnw.org](mailto:meickmeyer@lcsnw.org) or register by Oct. 10 at [bit.ly/GFGRRegister](http://bit.ly/GFGRRegister).

### CME event highlights Mental Health Day

Hands Across Spokane, a Community-Minded Enterprises city-wide campaign, seeks to make mental health and recovery visible, accessible and grounded in community connection.

It culminates on World Mental Health Day, from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Friday, Oct. 10, with a Hands Across Spokane Resource Fair at its North Central Mental Health and Development Center, 2001 N. Division St.

For information, call 666-4183, email [madia@community-minded.org](mailto:madia@community-minded.org) or visit [handssacrossspokane.org](http://handssacrossspokane.org).



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**Maji Rising opens access to healthcare at block party**

Pop Up! A Healthcare Block Party, hosted by Maji Rising in collaboration with service providers and community organizations will take place 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 11 and 12, at Raze Early Learning and Development Center, 6519 N. Lidgerwood.

It reimagines healthcare access by transforming it into a community-wide family reunion, building trust, addressing disparities, celebrating holistic health with joy, culture and connection.

It will feature dental exams, primary care, CPR training, a suture and phlebotomy clinic, housing support, voter resources, vision, hearing, speech, and cognitive screenings, financial resources, pharmacy outreach, healing through music, mental health resources, Naloxane training, Eastern Washington University and Spokane Colleges applications and same-day acceptance, a teddy bear clinic for kids and more.

For information, visit [majirising.org/rsvp](http://majirising.org/rsvp).

**40th Coats-4-Kids collects coats in October**

KXLY’s Coats-4-Kids celebrates its 40th Anniversary as it collects new and gently used winter coats from Oct. 1 to 31 at Goodwill, Papa Murphy’s STCU and Fred’s Appliances.

Goodwill is sponsoring a Glow for Good kick-off, 4 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 2, at 2927 E. 29th,

with an 80s/90s costume theme. People can meet KXLY chief meteorologist Kris Krocker.

Over the years, Coats-4-Kids has collected, cleaned and distributed more than 400,000 coats and sent them to community centers for distribution. They also take cash donations to buy

new coats. Distribution is in November. For donation sites, visit [kxly.com/features/coats-4-kids](http://kxly.com/features/coats-4-kids) or at [kxly.com](http://kxly.com), weather tab with a full list of locations. For information, call 435-8649, email [jfinafrock@kxly.com](mailto:jfinafrock@kxly.com).

**Fall Folk Festival is Nov 8, 9**

The 30th Annual Spokane Fall Folk Festival will be held from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 8, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 9, at the Spokane Community College Lair Center, 1810 N. Greene St.

On six stages, the festival includes hundreds of perform-

ers presenting music, dance and crafts celebrating various folk cultures.

The festival highlights talent that makes Spokane special.

For information, call 828-3683, email [director@spokane-folkfestival.org](mailto:director@spokane-folkfestival.org) or visit [spokane-folkfestival.org](http://spokane-folkfestival.org).

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# Practitioners find that centering prayer radiates through their lives

**Marijke Fakasiieiki**

Four Spokane churches—two Episcopal and two Catholic—host five groups that gather to offer Contemplative Practice in Centering Prayer, incorporating contemplative teachers such as Trappist monk Thomas Keating in finding a space to connect with the Divine.

**The churches are** St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral, St. Stephen’s Episcopal, and St. Aloysius and St. Francis of Assisi Catholic parishes.

Fifteen years ago, Mike and Jean Walters started participating in a centering prayer group facilitated by Gary Meisenburg at St. Aloysius. After four years, they developed a three-part program at St. Francis of Assisi Parish that includes a book club.

Jean LaBauve and Gary now facilitate a group at St. John’s.

Pam Strickland facilitates a group at St. Stephen’s.

Jed MacLaurin facilitates a group at St. Aloysius.

Jack Venbrux facilitates a second group at St. Francis of Assisi.

**“Centering prayer provides** the grace for participants to be open. It is more caught than taught. It is about surrendering,” said Mike, a retired electrical technician who “stumbled on” the practice at age 60.

“I realized in this practice, there are fruits. I seem to be calmer, more centered and focused, not striving to make things happen,” he said.

During COVID, Jack, a counselor who now facilitates the Sunday practice, shared that he was looking for a group that didn’t have all the answers and had an element of mystery. He wanted a place where it was okay to not have faith all figured out. He found it life-giving.

**Participants come** from all walks of life—common folks to university presidents, counselors and judges.

“Somehow, we find the divine within ourselves. We follow the teachings of mystics, who are humans like the rest of us, who remind us that what we are seeking, we already have,” said Mike.

Even though participants come from different backgrounds, they feel accepted as they integrate contemplative prayer into their Christian faith.

At a week-long retreat Mike attended, Laurence Freeman, the monk, was asked how long a person would need to practice this before seeing fruits. He said, maybe 15 to 20 years. The group laughed. He didn’t. He pointed out that in staying with contemplation, one finds something deeper that may be hidden in plain sight.

“Many people in church services are uncomfortable,



The Contemplative Practice in Centering Prayer leaders include Jed MacLaurin, Gary Meisenburg, Jean Labauve, Michael Walters and Jean Walters.

anxious or afraid of silence, but find energy by sitting in a group, hearing stories of how the practice deepens their faith and life,” Mike pointed out.

Jed, who has been in Spokane for 10 years, grew up atheist and later became Buddhist. While attending Portland Seminary in Tigard, Ore., a site of George Fox University, which was founded by Quakers in Newberg, Ore., he discovered centering prayer. For five years, he was a Quaker pastor in Vancouver, Wash., before coming to Spokane to pursue a doctoral degree in leadership studies at Gonzaga.

**Wanting to be more centered,** he explored meditation and gravitated to centering prayer and Contemplative Outreach, a spiritual network of individuals and groups, which he said helped him be more grounded in his private life.

“Centering prayer is international, and the contemplative practice is not linked to any denomination,” said Jed.

“It’s important to dial into the present moment and the world around us. The practice helps us become aware of how ‘unpresent’ we are most of the time,” he added.

**“Anxiety is a universal** feeling that drains people. Being at peace makes our efforts more effective. The heart of contemplation is listening, being still, making room for God’s presence and finding our deeper self. When thoughts and words fall away, we can be more present. Cultivating that presence helps

in other aspects of our lives,” said Jed.

“It’s a practice to observe ourselves and what is going on around us. It takes a while and can’t be mastered in a week. So, it’s important for new practitioners to set aside 10, 15 or 20 minutes a day to sit and connect with materials on contemplative prayer. Sitting together in a group provides participants with energy and helps us become more comfortable with silence,” he said.

**In his stressful work** as a realtor, Jed said, centering prayer has helped him to be more present with his clients.

“The more I am still and present in the moment with the people around me, the more I can make a difference in what I do,” he said.

“When I’m stressed and my mind is agitated, it’s hard to be still and meditate. I have a hyperactive mind. I’m not well-suited to contemplation, but I need it.”

In today’s turbulent times, he finds it helpful to gather with others to help him maintain his personal practice in daily life.

**Each of the facilitators** has a different focus for their programs, but it is based on the same kind of practice. That practice is to sit in silence for a period and choose a focus word with breath, which provides an opportunity to go deeper than thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories, with the goal of surrendering to the process.

“Some people struggle with having thoughts. The mind does not necessarily step aside when someone tries to stay silent,”

said Mike. “There is nuance to recognizing thought. If people do not engage, their thoughts quiet down. The same is true with memory and emotion, whatever sensation we are up against.”

Attendance ranges from two to 20. Some attend more than one group.

**“Meditative prayer isn’t** familiar to most Protestants and Catholics. I send a letter to new people covering the basics, like how long the prayer lasts. I recommend they read Keating’s book *Open Mind, Open Heart* and other contemplative resources,” said Gary, a retired nurse from Sacred Heart Medical Center who learned about the contemplative heritage from a Jesuit priest at Seattle University. Writings by mystics like Thomas Merton and yearly retreats at a Trappist abbey in Carlton, Ore., sustain his spiritual journey.

**At the cathedral,** participants gather like monastics when Gary rings a responsive gong. After a short reading of the *lectio divina* or another text, people can sit where they want. When Gary rings a gong a second time, the group comes back for a blessing. On Zoom, they start with silence and a teaching, then have group discussion and a blessing, said Jean LaBauve, who discovered 40 years ago that her lifetime prayer experience had a name.

Gary spoke of the value of centering prayer for people experiencing burnout.

“These times are stressful. This practice is unifying for those who come together. There

is a sense of peace and calmness that radiates from this practice,” he said.

Jean, who retired from a career as a learning specialist at Eastern Washington University, Spokane Colleges and Washington State University, said that “before action comes deep connectivity to the Divine. We begin by putting aside words, humbling ourselves and embracing the mystery of the Divine. All faiths are welcome.

**“Our loving actions** in the world are an outpouring of that experience of mystery,” said Jean.

The St. John’s group meets with Gary and Jean at 5:30 p.m., first and third Tuesdays in the sanctuary at 127 E. 12th Ave. and at 5:30 p.m., second, fourth and fifth Tuesdays on Zoom.

A second group meets from 9 to 9:45 a.m., first Wednesdays, at St. Stephen’s.

A third group meets with Jed at 10:30 a.m. Thursdays at St. Aloysius, 330 E. Boone in room A of the parish center.

A fourth group meets with Mike and Jean at St. Francis of Assisi School, downstairs in room 1 for Beginning Centering Prayer on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. in person and Thursdays at 7 p.m. on Zoom. Educational programs are at 7 p.m., Mondays and Fridays, and 6:30 a.m., Wednesdays, on Zoom.

A fifth group gathers in person at 2 p.m., second Sundays, in room 1 St. Francis of Assisi School Building, 1104 W. Heroy.

For information, contact Gary and Jean at 747-2942 or [jean-labauve@yahoo.com](mailto:jean-labauve@yahoo.com); Pam at [pas930@gmail.com](mailto:pas930@gmail.com); Jed at 808-0611 or [jedmaclaurin@gmail.com](mailto:jedmaclaurin@gmail.com), Mike at 939-2185 or [waltersmichaelh@gmail.com](mailto:waltersmichaelh@gmail.com), or Jack at [jvenbrux@gmail.com](mailto:jvenbrux@gmail.com), or visit [contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org) or the Center for Action and Contemplation at [cac.org](http://cac.org).



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# St. Michael's Mission installs solar system as it celebrates 140 years

Three events at St. Michael's Episcopal Mission in Yakima this fall recognize the church's past, present and future as it celebrates its 140 years of ministry.

At a Sept 28 worship service, it celebrated the mission's founding in 1885 in its present building. It is the oldest continuous congregation in Yakima still worshipping in its original building, said David Hacker, vicar at St. Michael's.

The Rt. Rev Gretchen Rehberg, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, joined the church for worship and a reception, in which attendees shared

stories of their involvement in St. Michael's over the years, looked toward the future and donated to the church's capital or operating funds in honor of the anniversary.

At 5 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 25, St. Michael's Mission will hold its annual Dinner and Auction raising funds to celebrate both its 140 years and its ongoing ministries.

St Michael's hosts a weekly food pantry, weekly and monthly community meals and daily AA groups. The Yakima Neighborhood Health Services shower trailer is there Wednesdays. Other community partners use

St. Michael's for programs serving the community.

On From 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday Nov. 8, St. Michael's will cut a ribbon to celebrate the completion of its Solar plus Storage Project.

"With funding from Washington State's Climate Commitment Act, St. Michael's installed 142 solar panels and battery storage to equip the historic building to meet current and future environmental challenges," said David.

"This system will handle our current electrical load and increase our capacity for expansion as we transition our old gas boiler

system to a heat pump," he said. "In addition, we seek funding for other energy efficiency projects."

The battery storage will provide St Michael's with a couple days of power in case of outages.

"With this system, St. Michael's seeks to model sustainable energy and efficiently operate this building that provides so much ministry to our community," David added. "In addition, we will grow our abil-

ity to be a resiliency hub in times of extreme weather and other emergencies.

"Washington's Climate Commitment Act (CCA) supports climate action efforts by putting to use cap-and-invest dollars to reduce climate pollution, create jobs and improve public health," he said.

For information, call 453-4881, email stmichaelsyak@gmail.com and visit climate.wa.gov.

## Vigil honors domestic violence victims

A community vigil to honor survivors and launch Domestic Violence Action Month begins at 5:30 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 1, at Riverfront Spokane, Snxw Menez Amphitheater, 617 N. Howard.

Guests may wear purple in solidarity with survivors. Domestic Violence Action Month (DVAM) is dedicated to awareness, education and action.

After the vigil, participants may walk through a StoryWalk exhibit, featuring survivor poetry and local art. It is open all month to spark conversations about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

The event includes remarks of Lisa Brown, Spokane's mayor; Jeanette Hauck, YWCA Spokane CEO, and representatives of local groups supporting survivors, including Kalispel Tribe Victim Assistance Services, Lutheran Community Services Northwest, Mujeres in Action Spokane, Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition, Stop the Silence Spokane and Yoyot Sp'q'n'i.

"Domestic violence is not a private issue. It's a community issue that requires a collective response," said Jeanette. "Spokane's rates remain among the highest in Washington. This vigil reminds us that survivors are not alone. Together, we can create a safer future for everyone."

According to the Spokane Regional Health District, one in

three women and one in 10 men in Spokane County experience domestic violence.

YWCA Spokane's 24-hour helpline expects to receive nearly 6,000 calls this year, 2,000 more than last year.

For information, call 280-2616, email erica@ywcaspokane.org or visit ywcaspokane.org/dvam2025vigil.

## Cheney churches do a Bazaar Day

Saturday, Nov. 1, is "Bazaar Day" in Cheney.

Four churches will host holiday bazaars, giving people the opportunity on one day to visit multiple bazaars with baked goods, craft items, Christmas gifts, raffles and baked goods.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) at 204 4th St., St. Paul's Episcopal at 625 C St. and St. Rose of Lima Catholic at 460 N. 5th St. will be open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and the Congregational Church at 423 N. 6th St. event is from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The UMC includes pie and coffee, and the Congregational Church serves a soup lunch.

For information, call 235-4600 or email djpeck71@gmail.com.



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# Retired pastor finds ways to have fun doing positive things in CdA

By Kaye Hult

In a variety of civic endeavors throughout his life, Mike Bullard, a retired pastor and former disaster recovery organizer, has stayed true to his intention to do positive things and have fun while working with people toward a common goal.

That has recently included his involvement with the League of Women Voters of Kootenai County (LWVKC) and restarting the Inland Northwest Opera.

**Reflecting on his civic engagement,** Mike observed that “politics must come back to being civil discussion about facts, not just an online stampede of political rhetoric on both sides.

“People are working from different sets of information from their computer bubbles,” he continued, “and have grown to hate each other.

“We need a chance to compare our sources of information. We need to be in conversation,” he suggested.

**“The church is involved,”** Mike affirmed. “We are not just bystanders in this whole thing. Parts of the church are part of the problem. We need to listen to the many sides of issues.”

Serving as president for the League of Women Voters of Kootenai County (LWVKC) is one of the fun ways Mike Bullard seeks to do “positive civic engagement with good people.”

The league came into being in Chicago in 1920, six months before the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, when women won the right to vote.

The LWV was formed by the suffragists of the National American Woman Suffrage Association as a “mighty political experiment” designed to help 20 million women carry out their new responsibilities as voters, according to the national LWV website.

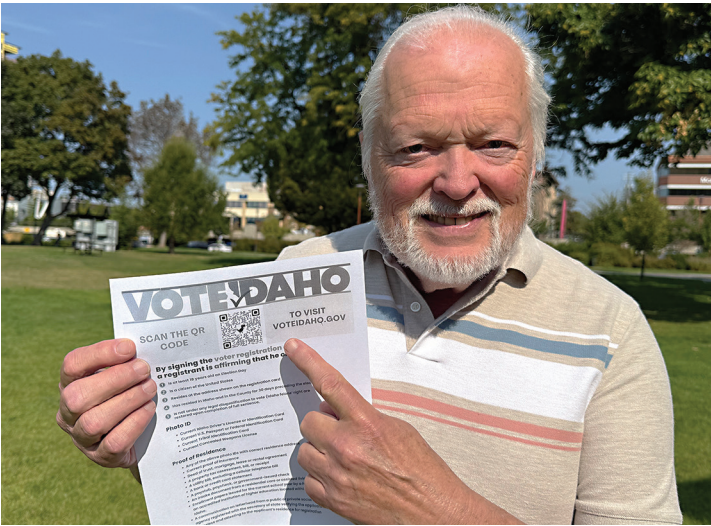
**“Over time, it turned to educating all voters,”** said Mike. “I have always appreciated the league for being independent and educational.”

**Mike became involved** with the LWVKC when they had a fundraiser using the book he had written about Louise Shadduck, *Lioness of Idaho: The Power of Polite*, for one of their monthly programs.

Louise, native to Coeur d’Alene, was the epitome of civic involvement, a quiet, good-natured woman who worked behind the scenes, he said.

She ultimately became a journalist, political activist, public servant, author, speaker and lobbyist and the first woman to serve in an Idaho governor’s executive cabinet as a department secretary.

Louise was a member of First Presbyterian Church in Coeur d’Alene when Mike was pastor. “I loved her civic attitude,”



Mike Bullard has volunteered several years with LWV.

he said, adding that when she died in 2008 at the age of 92, he officiated at her funeral.

**Of major importance** for the League during election seasons throughout the country, is VOTE411.org. The Kootenai County members, for example, contact all the candidates for the election, asking them a unified set of questions and then providing the candidates’ answers related to the platforms on which they are running for office.

The LWVKC serves the Kootenai County area, including the communities of Coeur d’Alene, Fernan Village, Harrison, Hauser, Hayden, Hayden Lake, Post Falls, Rathdrum and Spirit Lake.

The league is non-partisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties.

**In that mode, the LWVKC** and the Coeur d’Alene Press will sponsor a Candidate Forum from 2 to 4 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 5, in the Community Room of the Coeur d’Alene Library.

“Candidates for city council and the mayor of Coeur d’Alene are invited to attend. Each has received two questions ahead of time, so they can prepare their answers,” Mike said.

“They will be given three minutes each to answer each question. There may be time at the end for questions. With 10 candidates potentially attending, there may not be enough time to field everybody’s questions at the end,” he said.

**LWVKC provides** such opportunities so voters will be able to vote intelligently, according to their best understandings, come Election Day, which is Tuesday, Nov. 4, this year.

Also coming up in November, LWVKC will host a forum on The Need for Women’s Healthcare in Idaho. It will take place from 2 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Nov.

9, in the CdA Library Community Room.

**“In two years,** Idaho has lost 35 percent, over a third of its OB/GYN doctors,” he said. “These doctors specialize in the female reproductive system and are critical for diagnosis, preventative care and emergency services to keep women and babies safe through pregnancy and childbirth, especially when there is any sort of large or small complication,” he said.

“Idaho already had the worst percentage of all doctors to population ratio of any state in the union,” he went on. “We are 51st in the nation.

“We don’t feel it as much in Kootenai County, because 85 percent of the remaining OB/GYN doctors are concentrated in the most populated seven counties, which means the availability of doctors in most of the rest of Idaho is worse than some third world countries,” he said.

**“With cuts in Medicaid** and legislators trying to cut the University of Washington School of Medicine (WWAMI), the scene is deteriorating for everyone, especially women and babies,” he concluded.

Mike’s love of having fun through civic involvement doesn’t stop with his LWVKC participation.

In 2014, he was involved in disaster relief through the Presbyterian church, Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA). For a while, that included chairing the interstate Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) for Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

Recently, Mike has teamed up with new board members to restart the Inland Northwest Opera.

“Opera tells the human story with human voices,” he com-

mented. “There is something about hearing the human voice without electronics in between. Also, the stories are timeless,” he said.

**“I became involved** with opera in college, he reminisced. “It grew on me. Now, I’m involved in its organizational side.

“There are so many good singers in this community who have worked hard,” he continued. The community deserves to hear them, many nationally and internationally known artists, who live right here in the Inland Northwest.

“It’s only right that we have opera, to have them onstage, hear them and let them practice their art,” he finished.

**Mike’s civic involvement** began when he was a teenager.

“I used to work for politicians of a variety of parties,” he reflected. “I’ve been involved all my life.”

He grew up primarily in Tennessee, with a small stint in Florida. He attended Maryville College, a small Presbyterian school in Tennessee.

Though not from a church-going family, Mike found friendships in the church when his family moved from city to city. Between that and an inner-city ministry internship while he was in seminary, he came to feel that the church had a message of hope.

“It sits right in the neighbor-

hood with people, so can give them hope right where they are,” he said.

He attended McCormick Seminary in Chicago, where he received a master in divinity degree. His first church was an inner-city church in Cleveland in 1974. Mike continued his studies at Chicago Theological Seminary, where he studied pastoral care. His doctoral thesis dealt with assisting victims and survivors of domestic violence. He graduated with a doctor of ministry degree in pastoral care in 1987.

**After pastoring in Illinois,** he went to Indiana, where he met his wife Betsy, and then to Twin Falls, Idaho.

From there, he moved to Coeur d’Alene to become pastor at First Presbyterian Church, where he served for 16 years.

For information, call 208-659-2491, email mabullard@gmail.com or visit facebook.com/LWVKootenaiCounty.



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# Gonzaga University relaunches Environmental and Climate Law Clinic

Gonzaga University School of Law, in collaboration with the Gonzaga Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, relaunched its Environmental and Climate Law Clinic this fall with the leadership of the former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, Vanessa Waldref, and former Department of Justice environmental crimes

coordinator, Dan Fruchter. This addition to Gonzaga Law's Clinical Legal Programs—now in their 50th year—will provide students with real-world legal experience to address some of the most pressing environmental and public health issues facing communities today. **The clinic's return comes** at a pivotal moment for public

health and for environmental and climate advocacy. Amid need for meaningful legal interventions in these areas, the clinic will empower students to make a tangible impact through public interest litigation, policy development and community advocacy. Brian Henning, founding director of the Institute for Climate, Water and the Environ-

ment, shared that the Climate Institute looks forward to collaborating with the law school. **"The climate crisis is the most pressing challenge facing our planet,"** he said. "Using the tools of law and policy, the Environmental and Climate Law Clinic will meaningfully advance structural changes needed to promote the flourishing of Inland Northwest communities, waters and lands in the face of a rapidly changing climate."

**Students and faculty will** work on cases that defend public health, protect public lands, promote clean air and water, and advocate for the enforcement of environmental regulations. It will help legislators draft environmental legislation and provide research on best practices.

The clinic will provide free or low-cost legal representation to individuals, nonprofits and community groups facing environmental challenges, including disputes over pollution, land use and resource management.

Meetings and workshops will be facilitated with community members to raise awareness about environmental issues and help them understand their rights and responsibilities.

**Law students**, supervised by clinic directors, will engage in legal research on environmental issues, analyzing existing laws and regulations to identify areas needing reform, said Sarah Guzmán, executive director of the Gonzaga Law School Foundation.

For information, email [guzmans@gonzaga.edu](mailto:guzmans@gonzaga.edu) or visit.

## National Council of Churches reviews its 75 years of working for unity and racial justice

The National Council of Churches (NCC), founded in 1950 in a time of tumult after World War II, celebrates its 75th anniversary in another time when Christian unity and witness for justice are important.

The NCC celebration and Governing Board Meeting will be Monday to Thursday, Oct. 13 to 16 in Boston, Mass., on the theme, "Christ is Risen: A Transforming Witness from Generation to Generation."

**In May 1908**, 32 Christian communions met in Philadelphia to form the Federal Council of Churches seeking immigration and labor reform, the abolition of child labor, improved conditions for the poor and temperance.

Despite being regularly accused of being socialists, they continued their zeal for unity.

In November 1950, U.S. churches that formed that council joined with more ecumenical bodies to establish the National Council of Churches at a Constituting Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

The new council and the churches' theological and public witness on social justice issues, continued, taking stands against wars of the late 1900s and early 2000s—Vietnam, Iraq, Korea, Middle East and more.

**The NCC has adopted** policy statements on social issues such as gun violence, reparations and affirmative action. In 1963, it created a Commission on Religion and Race to establish a new role for its churches in the racial conflicts and joined the March on Washington for Jobs and Free-

dom on August 28, 1963.

**The commission helped** end segregation in Mississippi. Church leaders attended the 1963 funeral of Medgar Evers in Jackson and in 1964 sent minister-counselors to lead the Delta Ministry. Everyone in the ministry experienced threats and harassment like those that were part of the daily life for Black Mississippians. Its efforts for voter registration and political education continued until 1974. In 1986 the first African American was elected to Congress in Mississippi since Reconstruction.

As a young man, Andrew Young interned for the NCC in this period, and later was president of NCC from 2000 to 2001.

After Bloody Sunday in Selma, Ala., on March 7, 1965, the NCC heeded the call from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to join the march from Selma to Montgomery and asked for Christians across the nation to join. In the aftermath of brutal attacks by state and local police on Black demonstrators, the commission and national church leaders brought religious leaders to Washington, D.C. to support the Voting Rights Act.

**In 2018—50 years** after King's assassination—the NCC re-committed itself to eradicating the entrenched racism that grips the U.S. by launching the Awaken, Confront and Transform Now (A.C.T. NOW) to End Racism initiative on the National Mall in Washington, DC. It urges the NCC, its members and partners to awaken to the

many manifestations of white supremacy and racism especially in the church, to confront the need for change, and to work to transform church and society into a reflection of the inclusive and equitable reign of God.

**The membership** and scope of the NCC have evolved since 1950, so that today 37 member denominations are committed to proclaiming God's word and expressing the Christ's love for all persons at every level of society and to live as a community of communions called by Christ to visible unity and sent forth in the Spirit to promote God's justice, peace and the healing of the world.

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## Casa Mia builds new housing

Casa Mia, a project of Mujeres in Action Spokane (MiA) in Northeast Spokane, will be Eastern Washington's first culturally responsive permanent housing for survivors of violence.

It will feature 13 cottage-style homes and a communal clubhouse on two acres, providing stability for families and individuals in a permanent housing community offering trauma-informed care, gathering spaces and culturally responsive services.

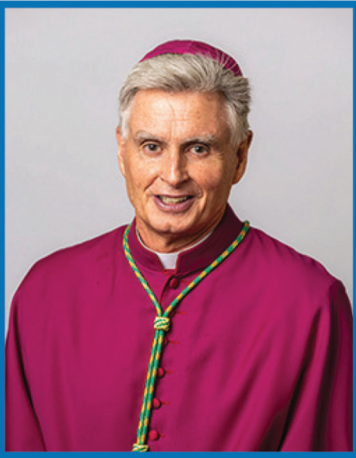
The project prioritizes safety, dignity and community integration, ensuring survivors can rebuild their lives in a nurturing

environment, said Ana Trusty, executive director for MIA Spokane.

Construction begins in summer 2026 and leases start in fall 2027. Casa Mia will bring economic and social value to Spokane, offering survivors a path to stability while enhancing neighborhood infrastructure and community safety, said Ana.

"We're not just building homes, we're building a future where survivors thrive as neighbors and community members," she explained.

For information, e-mail [casamia@miaspokane.org](mailto:casamia@miaspokane.org) or visit [miaspokane.org/casa-mia](http://miaspokane.org/casa-mia).



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Feb. 22	Mar. 29	April 26	May 31



# World Relief Spokane continues to serve refugees who live here

Christi Armstrong, executive director of World Relief Spokane, said she is often asked what World Relief is doing now that the refugee pipeline has stopped and funding for services has been cut.

She points out that it currently has an impact on the lives of 1,151 who are in Spokane.

“World Relief is committed to serve the refugees who are here, revising the way our 42 staff work, despite having no new arrivals,” she said. “We are going strong as we are changing our thinking from welcoming refugees to focusing on including and belonging.”

**Christi shared several** examples of recent efforts.

- Donors recently gave funds for bikes, helmets and classes for a BMX camp that taught eight teens bike skills and helped them gain confidence on a BMX track.

- As schools open, more than 550 youth are assisted with challenges they face as they adapt to the cultural and school expectations, establish community and build friendships.

- One man, Balinda, from Congo was hosted by a man in law enforcement. The impact of their interactions led Balinda to become a police officer two years ago. A year-and-a-half ago, his wife and daughter came, and they have a baby on the way now.

A big piece of what World Relief offers is education that helps people adjust to the society and life here. They have served 144 people in the last three quarters.

“I love to see people gain skills and confidence,” Christi said.

Classes at both of World Relief Spokane’s two locations, called friendship centers—at 11707 E Sprague and 512 S. Bernard—include basics of computers, budget basics, job skills and financial management.

CHAS clinic, which offers a monthly mobile clinic at the sites, also provides nutrition clinics and education on vaccines, health issues and women’s health.

In addition, World Relief provides English (ESL) tutoring to help people adjust and communicate.

**World Relief’s economic** empowerment department has a team of seven who do employment coaching and assist clients with job placement working with hundreds of employers in Spokane/Spokane Valley and placing 226 in jobs in the last year.

Their career advancement program works with Spokane’s community colleges and Eastern Washington University to help people access education and training to move ahead in their careers.

Christi, who became executive director three years ago, has been at World Relief Spokane 12 years, starting as an employment specialist and then the director of the economic empowerment department.



Christi Armstrong tells how World Relief serves refugees now.

“I came on staff with World Relief not knowing much about refugees or that there were refugees in Spokane,” said Christi, who studied business and previously worked as the director at Union Gospel Mission’s Anna Ogden Hall and for 20 years as a pastor in Open Bible churches in Spokane.

Christi lived in Minot, ND, until she was nine and then lived in several cities in Montana. She met her husband in Missoula.

She came to Spokane with her husband Paul, 30 years ago from Missoula, Mont., where she focused on raising their two sons.

In 2002 she earned a diploma in Bible and theology from the Institute of Theology by Extension (INSTE) Global Bible College in Des Moines, Iowa. In 2012, she earned a degree in human services management from the University of Phoenix.

**She has served** at Open Bible churches for the 30 years she has been in Spokane, beginning with doing volunteer work in recovery ministry at The Intersection Church.

“I felt called to a place in leadership in the church, motivated by my personal journey in overcoming hurdles in my life through recovery ministry,” said Christi.

**“In World Relief, I realized** people were working on survival issues as they transition from places they fled because of war and persecution,” she said. “I work with refugees who suffered a loss of trust with people.”

World Relief, she said, is a place that offers compassion to help people build relationships so they can rebuild trust as someone helps them navigate the new society and culture.

“In the process, they learn that people care, and they belong,” Christi said. “They learn they do not just live in a city, but the city is a place where people care about and help them.”

When she was first on staff with World Relief, she worked with Sudanese refugees and now

has many Sudanese friends who call her “Mom.”

“We have a family relationship,” said Christi, pointing out the importance for staff who develop relationships to have “good boundaries.”

**Some work with refugees** as professional counselors. There is one clinical therapist on staff. The relationship with refugees depends on the role of staff and volunteers with people they serve.

The case managers help refugees navigate life as Americans, finding the medical help and resources they need.

**Community ambassadors**, who are from different refugee communities, speak the language, understand the refugees’ culture and know gaps for their communities.

There is an Arabic speaking community ambassador working with Sudanese and Syrians, a Swahili speaking ambassador for Congolese, a Ukrainian speaking ambassador, a Pashto- and Farsi-speaking ambassador for Afghans and a Spanish-speaking ambassador for the Latino community from South and Central America.

Christi said she doesn’t know the number of refugees who live in Spokane, because some settle here and then move to other communities, and some move to Spokane from other cities.

**A critical factor** with funding cuts in the next year is that it’s hard to know what cuts there will be to federal and state grants.

“As cuts come, we are grateful for the overwhelming generosity of the Spokane and Spokane Valley communities that welcome refugees,” Christi said, adding that there are more opportunities for volunteers as funds are cut and there are fewer staff.

Christi is also enthusiastic about working with other refugee agencies through the Eastern Washington Refugee Coalition, because each agency has different areas of expertise.

“We can do more work together

to serve the people better,” she said. “We have learned the value of collaborating to provide quality services. It’s a value to know we are not alone. We can call each other leaders to share wisdom and advice.”

**“When I came on staff** with World Relief, I had a typical Western mindset and limited experience with other cultures,” said Christi. “My work with World Relief has radically changed my worldview in ways just travel or even mission trips can’t do.

“Here, I have met refugees who have very different experiences than I have. They fled their homes and left all they had,” she said. “It changes the way I view the world.”

**Hosting a Muslim** Sudanese man for two years, Christi has shared with her two sons and seven grandchildren, her connections with the Sudanese community.

As a result, both Riverside Real Life, where her son Kelly is pastor, and Foundation Church, where her daughter-in-law is pastor, are now both active with World Relief.

Christi has found in talking with people of other faiths, such as from Muslim countries, that “we have a lot in common. They are ordinary people, not Islamists. When we build on our commonalities it makes us better people.”

**Christi values the faith** conversations she has with Muslim friends.

“It’s not only okay to have conversations with people outside of Christian faith, but also it has enhanced my faith,” she clarified. “I have a deeper understanding of why people of other faiths believe what they believe. I have intelligent, productive conversations with people of different faiths who care.”

In conversing with people of other beliefs, she and they experience “ahas,” such as her learning that the Quran includes much of the Bible.

“We are all human beings and have the same desire to be loved, to belong and to be safe,” she said.

For information, call 953-0544, email [carmstrong@wr.org](mailto:carmstrong@wr.org) or visit [worldrelief.org/Spokane](http://worldrelief.org/Spokane).



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Editorial Reflections

Democracy requires that skilled, active citizens work together

In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. said: “Mass nonviolent demonstrations will not be enough. To produce change, people must be organized to work together in units of power. These units may be political, as in the case of voters’ leagues and political parties. They may be economic, as in the case of groups of tenants who join forces to form a union, or groups of the unemployed or underemployed who organize to get jobs and better wages. More and more, the civil rights movement will have to engage in the task of organizing people into permanent groups to protect their own interests and produce change on their behalf.”

**This is the story of thousands** of trade and labor organizers, civil rights groups, civic associations, churches, unions, uni-

versities and other pro-democracy forces in South Africa that formed the movement which overthrew apartheid, dismantled the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines and threw out Pinochet in Chile.

**We’ve swallowed a myth** that the only change worth pursuing is national, that the only fights worth paying attention to play out in the vicinity of Congress and the White House.

We’ve forgotten that when national change has been won in the past, it has only come when built on a rolling tide of robust local victories, fought by local groups, unions, churches, neighborhood alliances and civic associations.

**We forget the passage** of the 19th Amendment wasn’t the primary objective for many of the women’s groups involved

in the suffragette movement who were far more focused on the conditions in their local community, but when the time came for them to unite, they turned out in mass.

Starting in the 1970s, citizens abdicated much of their power in favor of something known as “liberal philanthropy,” which advanced a theory of change that prioritized lawyers and specialists advocating on behalf of others.

**It’s time to realize** that this approach has not led to the kind of widespread, lasting change long hoped for.

People did not achieve access to fair pay, the right to vote, pensions and better healthcare because wealthy philanthropists donated money to a certain cause or, in King’s words, because the government became so “infused with such blessings

of goodwill that it implored us for our programs.”

None of the most important gains for equality in the last century would have been possible without workers building strong labor unions, civil society groups and other forms of well-organized people.

**The ongoing success** of organizations like Reclaim Idaho is a testament to the fact that where this approach is still employed large-scale victories are still possible.

Democracy, it turns out, requires skilled and active citizens working together at the local level. If we want to level the increasing power of organized money, we need the power of organized people. Because when communities organize strategically, people really can—and often do—win.

**Cameron Conner - columnist**

Water protector calls for all to participate in keeping water in river

This summer, parts of the Spokane River ran alarmingly low—some stretches completely dried up. For those of us who cherish this waterway, it was shocking. This isn’t just a momentary problem—it’s a warning. How we respond determines whether the Spokane River continues to thrive or suffers permanent harm.

**The river and Spokane Valley**—Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer are part of a single, interconnected system. When we pump water from the aquifer for homes, lawns or businesses, it can reduce the water feeding the river. In summer, when flows are naturally lower, even small changes in pumping or groundwater levels can have outsized effects, leaving stretches of river vulnerable to drying.

Climate change is making the challenges worse. Warmer winters bring less snow. More rain not snow reduces the river’s storage. Snow that melts too early or runs off fast leaves the river dry in late summer. Low flows are more frequent and severe, threatening fish, wildlife and communities that rely on the river.

**Human management** of the river plays a role. The Post Falls Dam manages Lake Coeur d’Alene levels for recreation, hydropower and fish habitat under a 2009 license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. In dry years, limited snowmelt means there isn’t enough water to meet all needs. In August, flows at the Post Falls Dam were reduced to 500 cubic feet per second to protect lake levels.

The dam’s license requires these reductions under extreme conditions, but what used to be a response for drought is becoming an annual occurrence. In 2015, flows were also dropped in the last week of July, yet the river did not run dry. Today, the combination of lower snowmelt, groundwater pumping and changing climate is making low-flow events more severe, leaving stretches of river completely empty.

**This is not a crisis we can ignore.** We are at the tipping point. Protecting the Spokane River requires action. We must rethink how we use water, from efficient irrigation and household conservation to land use and development that respects natural water cycles.

Local policymakers and water managers need to prioritize flows that support the river’s health. All of us can raise our voices, advocate for stronger water protection and support organizations working to keep the Spokane River flowing.

The Spokane River is more than water. It is a home for fish and wildlife, a place of recreation and a vital part of our cultural and community identity. When it runs dry, we all feel the loss. When it flows, it brings life and connection to our region.

**By taking action now**—through advocacy, conservation, and stewardship—we can ensure the river continues to run strong for generations to come.

**Katelyn Scott - Water Protector for Spokane Riverkeeper**

Comments from Vigil

Sounding Board

Letter to the editor

St. Ann’s members share messages at vigil, reader reflects, editor adds words

*St. Ann’s Matthew 25 Ministry held an interfaith peace prayer vigil Sept. 14, at the Federal Building Plaza in Spokane in solidarity with refugees and immigrants. Several share their comments here.*

**I have had the privilege** of teaching English to refugees and immigrants, as well as other newcomers to Spokane, for 30 years. This year, everything changed. People are afraid. They are all here legally, but that doesn’t matter. People’s rights are being trampled upon.

We gathered to pray for our brothers and sisters who are living in fear of our government. We came to pray for our leaders that they might recognize the suffering that is being inflicted upon innocent people.

We need to take a moment to calm our minds and hearts, to open ourselves to our loving God.

There was a powerful sense of community at the vigil. There is hope of redemption when we all work together for social justice in a non-violent manner. Love is powerful and can make a difference in people’s hearts when we approach those who believe in hate with love.

**Luisa Orellana**

“On Peace, Hope and Love”

**PEACE:** After his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his disciples who were hiding behind locked doors. He said to them, “Peace be with you!” He said this not only to calm their fears but also to give them the moral courage they would need to carry out his mission—a mission captured in the Beatitudes and in such passages as Matthew 25:31-45. Especially pertinent in today’s world are his words, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.”

**HOPE:** For Christians, hope is based in the resurrection of Jesus. It is a living hope anchoring our faith to a certain future despite present difficult circumstances.

German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) wrote: “We are caught between two ages of human existence, between the past that was and the future that is not yet. We live in a condition of radical expectation and anticipation. Hope is central to our existence.” Symbols—such as the monarch butterfly, signifying transformation and resilience, and candles displayed in South Africa homes during Apartheid as an expression of resistance— can help us maintain hope.

**LOVE:** Love is the glue that connects peace and hope. Love is the motivation to listen to the cries of those in need and to have the courage to do something about it. Love keeps us going when hate tries to drag us down. Love fulfills Jesus’ great commandment to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves.

And who is my neighbor, you might ask? We are back to Matthew 25!

**Father Max Oliva, SJ**

**When the advantages** of immigration are enumerated, economic benefits—immigrants doing jobs others won’t do or keeping social security afloat—top the list. While such factors are important, natural sciences say a diverse community is more resilient than a monocultural one. It is better able to recover from threats, such as a virus or insects that prey on one species of tree in a forest but not others.

**Different cultures bring** different ways to look at and relate to the world. Some societies cling to their own vision of the world at their peril. History is filled with examples of societies clinging to outdated ideas, only to collapse under the weight of those ideas, which were no longer relevant in a changing world.

There is a positive spiritual outcome to the presence of immigrants in our lives.

In scripture, God’s promise, revela-

tion and truth are most often brought not through what’s familiar or those we know and are like us, but through a stranger or angel, which is more foreign than a stranger.

Sarah and Abraham receive the promise of a son from a stranger who has wandered into their camp.

Jacob meets God by wrestling with a stranger.

Christ is visited in the crib by the Magi, strange foreign kings.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the wounded man is helped not by his kin, but by a Samaritan, a stranger.

With the stranger lies surprise, new possibility, contact with that part of God and reality we have never experienced before.

**Would it not be logical** that God should speak to us most deeply through that which is familiar to us? The familiar is important. Charity begins at home. Because it is home, it is familiar, not where we are likely to have our hearts stretched.

God is not familiar. God is other. Those who are other to us, strangers, are in a position to reveal God to us.

We are afraid of and un-welcoming to strangers—be they different vis-a-vis race, color, creed, gender or sexual orientation. We fear what is different, but within our circles the otherness of God cannot be revealed. There is too little promise or newness. God can speak only a limited word. Nothing is impossible with God. That is only true when we move outside our circles. Welcoming the stranger benefits not only the stranger, but also ourselves.

**Greg Cunningham**

Letter to the editor

I just read your editorial in the September Fig Tree, and I had to thank you for your comments. You accurately describe the state of the country, and it is truly dire. As a student of politics, I never dreamt

we would have national leadership that cares so little for the Constitution and the rule of law—and is at war with the American people.

Your call to not feel helpless and encouragement to engage in one’s community in positive ways was spot on as an antidote for the feeling of helplessness. Thank you for the inspiring words!

**In addition, the article** on the Spokane Alliance was also wonderful. I am proud of the work they have done the last 20+ years. I remember the excitement I felt returning to Spokane from 10-day training in San Antonio in 1998 with the Industrial Areas Foundation. I was with 136 ordinary citizens from across the country, learning how to build a broad-based organization in our communities.

That excitement I felt was my antidote for the sense of helplessness I felt then with our local government. Your article captures the essence of the alliance’s commitment to the region’s common good.

Thank you for highlighting their work and Laurel’s leadership. Their commitment to leadership development within the alliance is a significant reason for its longevity and ability to produce things that benefit the community.

**Tom Robinson  
Covenant United Methodist**

A few thoughts for October

Those in power intend to overwhelm us with so much happening that we are confused and don’t act.

The goal is to divide and conquer, not just left and right but top and bottom.

While billionaires *need* more money to buy power, what’s the cost to the least?

A widow forgives the killer, but a leader commits to continuing to hate.

Now, as always, is the time to defend free speech. Not capitulating works.

**Mary Stamp - Editor**





# Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed  
Submit events to [development@thefigtree.org](mailto:development@thefigtree.org) by 3rd Fri

- Oct 1** • **Community Vigil for Survivors**, YWCA Spokane and other providers, Snxw Mene? Amphitheater, Riverfront Spokane, 5:30 p.m., 385-6623, [ywcaspokane.org](http://ywcaspokane.org)
- **Spokane Candidates Climate Change Forum**, Gonzaga, Cataldo, 6 p.m., [gonzaga.edu/climatecenter](http://gonzaga.edu/climatecenter)
- Oct 2** • **Fig Tree Benefit/Development** meeting 12 p.m., **Board Meeting** 1 to 3 p.m., Zoom, [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto:mary@thefigtree.org)
- **Glow for Good**, South Hill Goodwill, 2927 E. 29th, donate to Coats4Kids, 4 to 8 p.m., [discovergoodwill@giin.org](http://discovergoodwill@giin.org), [kxly.com/features/coats-4-kids](http://kxly.com/features/coats-4-kids)
- **Into Africa Auction**, Partnering for Progress, Gonzaga Hemmingson Auditorium, 5:30 to 8 p.m., 720-8408, [anna@partneringforprogress.org](mailto:anna@partneringforprogress.org)
- **UnGala for Family Promise** of Spokane, Mirabeau Park Hotel, 1100 N. Sullivan, Spokane Valley, open 4:30 p.m. program 6 p.m., [familypromiseofspokane.org](http://familypromiseofspokane.org)
- **Whitworth President's Leadership Forum**, Francis Collins, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7 p.m., 777-3732, [iaevents@whitworth.edu](mailto:iaevents@whitworth.edu)
- Oct 2, 9, 16, 23, 30** • **Taizé Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., [bartletts@gonzaga.edu](mailto:bartletts@gonzaga.edu)
- Oct 3** • **Terrain 16, Multimedia, Art & Music**, 314 W. Riverside Ave, 5 to 11:45 p.m., [team@terrainspokane.com](mailto:team@terrainspokane.com), • **First Friday Art Walks**, in Spokane and in Sandpoint
- Oct 3, 4, 5** • **Climate Change Action Plays**, Gonzaga Magnuson Theatre, 502 E. Boone, Fri 8:30 p.m., Sat 6 p.m., Sun 2 p.m., [gonzaga.edu/climate-institute](http://gonzaga.edu/climate-institute)
- Oct 4** • **Healing the Earth Vigil**, Cataldo Mission, 1 p.m., (208) 784-8891, [svcommunityresourcecenter@gmail.com](mailto:svcommunityresourcecenter@gmail.com)
- **Witches' BYO Boat Paddle**, Spokane Riverkeeper, 1 to 4 p.m., [spokaneriverkeeper.org](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org)
- **Fall Family Weekend Concert**, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7:30 p.m., 313-4776, [gonzaga.edu/music](http://gonzaga.edu/music)
- Oct 4, 5** • **Spokane Symphony Masterworks 2: Landscapes** – The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat 7:30 p.m., Sun 3 p.m., 624-1200, [info@spokanesymphony.org](mailto:info@spokanesymphony.org),
- Oct 5** • **Spokane SOUP**, The Scale House Market, 4422 E. Eighth, Spokane Valley, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., [spokanesoup.com/rsvp-for-oct-5](http://spokanesoup.com/rsvp-for-oct-5)
- Oct 6** • **Innovia Foundation Annual Reception**, Spokane Convention Center, 4 to 5:30 p.m., register by Oct 2, 624-2606, [innovia.org/events/2025-annual-reception](http://innovia.org/events/2025-annual-reception)
- Oct 6-10** • **"Psyches, Personae and Characters: Human Selves in Film,"** Public Event Series, Gonzaga Faith and Reason Institute, [faithandreason@gonzaga.edu](mailto:faithandreason@gonzaga.edu)
- Oct 7** • **Spokane Regional Transportation Summit**, CenterPlace Event Center, 2426 N. Discovery, 8 to 10 a.m., 343-6370, [screasey@src.org](mailto:screasey@src.org), [bit.ly/25-summit!](http://bit.ly/25-summit!)
- **People Who Care**, fundraiser, Transitions, Davenport Grand Hotel, 12 to 1 p.m., [slickfold@help4women.org](mailto:slickfold@help4women.org), [help4women.org](http://help4women.org)
- **City of Spokane Candidate Housing Forum**, Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium, Black Homeownership and Habitat for Humanity, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, 500 S. Stone, 5:30 p.m., 710-9611, [ben@slhlc.org](mailto:ben@slhlc.org)
- Oct 7, 21** • **Passage Meditation Group**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 590-3512, [spokanebuddhisttemple.org](http://spokanebuddhisttemple.org)
- Oct 8** • **ED Coffee Hour**, Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA), online 9 to 10 a.m., [nonprofitwa.org](http://nonprofitwa.org)
- **Silent Day of Prayer**, "Archangel Raphael and the Angels," Sr. Mary Eucharista, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 448-1224, [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- **Strategic Planning in Nonprofits**, NAWA, Walla Walla Regional Airport, Terminal Conference Rooms, 45 Terminal Loop, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., [nonprofitwa.org](http://nonprofitwa.org)
- **"Bridging the Divide: Tools for Courageous Conversations,"** Rachelle Strawther, Covenant United Methodist Church, 15515 Gleneden, 5 to 6:30 p.m., 998-9858, [grantrials@gmail.com](mailto:grantrials@gmail.com)
- **Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics**, film and panel, Spokane Riverkeeper, 1314 S. Grand Blvd., Ste. 2, 6 to 8 p.m., [spokaneriverkeeper.org](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org)
- Oct 8-11** • **Women Build**, Habitat for Humanity, 534-2552, [habitat-spokane.org](http://habitat-spokane.org)
- Oct 9** • **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733, [facebook.com/spokanedup](http://facebook.com/spokanedup)
- Oct 10** • **Hands Across Spokane Community Resource Fair**, Community Minded Enterprises, North Central Community Mental Health, 2001 N. Division, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 242-3405, [info@community-minded.org](mailto:info@community-minded.org)
- **Harvest Dinner**, River City Youth, 411 N. Nettleton, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., [rcyouth.org/events](http://rcyouth.org/events)
- **Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan**, The Podium, 511 W. Joe Albi Way, Spokane, 8 p.m., 279-7000, [thepodiumusa.com/events/mariachi-vargas](http://thepodiumusa.com/events/mariachi-vargas)
- Oct 11** • **Socktober Dash**, Teen & Kid Closet, Mirabeau Point Park, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., 534-1151, [contact@teenkidcloset.org](mailto:contact@teenkidcloset.org)
- **Walk to End Alzheimer's**, Lilac Bowl Amphitheatre, Riverfront Park, 9 a.m., 321-4538, [act.alz.org/spokane](http://act.alz.org/spokane)
- **Run 4 Freedom**, for Helping Captives, Shelley Altmeyer Park, 311 W. Emma, Rockford, 10 a.m., [helpingcaptives.givevirtuous.org](http://helpingcaptives.givevirtuous.org)
- **Ignite the Light**, Spark Central Pre-Salon Gathering, 1314 W. Summit Pkwy, 4 to 6 p.m., [spark-central.org](http://spark-central.org)
- **Spokane River Roll**, Spokane Riverkeeper and 350 Spokane roll seven miles on Centennial Trail, 1 to 5 p.m., [spokaneriverkeeper.org](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org)
- **Second Friday Artwalk**, Sherman Ave., Coeur d'Alene,

- 5 to 8 p.m., (208) 415-0116, [artsandculturecda.org](http://artsandculturecda.org)
- **Raices Fashion Show**, "Moda con Orgullo. Honoring Our Heritage in Style," Nuestras Raices Centro Comunitario, 1214 E. Sprague, 5 to 10 p.m., [raiceswa.org](http://raiceswa.org)
- Oct 11, 12** • **Pop Up! A Healthcare Block Party**, Maji Rising, Raze Early Learning & Development Center, 6519 N. Lidgerwood, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., [majirising.org](http://majirising.org)
- Oct 12** • **Sharing the Dharma Day**, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Ln, Newport, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 447-5549, office. [sravasti@gmail.com](mailto:sravasti@gmail.com)
- Oct 14** • **Threads of Care**, fundraising luncheon & silent auction, Mission Community Outreach Center, Spokane Valley United Methodist, 115 N. Raymond, noon, 536-1084, [mcoc.spokane@gmail.com](mailto:mcoc.spokane@gmail.com)
- **Artist Lecture: Epiphany Couch**, Native artist, Whitworth, 5:30 p.m., 777-1000, [Whitworth.edu](http://Whitworth.edu)
- Oct 15** • **"Still We Rise: 50 Years of Resistance and Resilience,"** PJALS 50th Anniversary Benefit Luncheon, location TBA on registration, 12 to 1 p.m., [slicity@pjals.org](mailto:slicity@pjals.org)
- Oct 16** • **Inland Northwest Development Council**, Grants and Funding Strategies, Anna Marie Martin, in person and online, 12 to 1 p.m., [inlandnwdevcouncil.org](http://inlandnwdevcouncil.org)
- Oct 17, 18** • **Jugalbandhi: North Indian Classical Concert**, 7 p.m. Fri workshop Shadle Park Library, 211 W. Wellesley; 6:30 to 9 p.m. Sat Concert Unity Spiritual Center Spokane, 2900 S. Bernard, 467-5558, [sacaspokane@gmail.com](mailto:sacaspokane@gmail.com)
- Oct 17-19** • **Collective Awakening Retreat**, "Open to Divine Love, Accelerate your Awakening," Lindsay Daehlin, 6 p.m. to 12 p.m., Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, [harmonywoodsretreat@gmail.com](mailto:harmonywoodsretreat@gmail.com)
- Oct 17-26** • **Hamlet**, Kroc Center, 1765 W. Golf Course, Coeur d'Alene, Fr-Sat 7 p.m., Sun 1:30 p.m., [kroccda.org](http://kroccda.org)
- Oct 18** • **Eco-Anxiety Café**, Manito United Methodist Church, 3220 S. Grand, 9 to 11 p.m., [actionnetwork.org/events/october-parent-and-caretaker-eco-anxiety-cafe](http://actionnetwork.org/events/october-parent-and-caretaker-eco-anxiety-cafe)
- **Gathered for Good**, Lutheran Community Services Northwest, Mukogawa U.S. Campus, 4320 Owens Ridge, register by Oct 10, [bit.ly/GFGRRegister](http://bit.ly/GFGRRegister)
- **Dining with Dignity Gala**, Shalom Ministries, Southside Community Center, 3151 E. 27th, 5 to 8:30 p.m., [fundraiser.supportshalommeals](http://fundraiser.supportshalommeals)
- **The Pumpkin Ball**, fundraiser-dinner-dance, Vanessa Behan, Davenport Grand Hotel, 333 W. Spokane Falls, 5:30 to 11 p.m., 800-918-9344, [vanessabehan.org](http://vanessabehan.org)
- Oct 22** • **Weyerhaeuser Speaker Series**: Kristin Kobes Du Mez, Whitworth, 300 W. Hawthorne, 4 p.m., [Whitworth.edu](http://Whitworth.edu)
- **Malala Yousafzai: Finding My Way**, memoir, 4 p.m., [sclcd.org](http://sclcd.org), [library.org/sclcd/98909/register](http://library.org/sclcd/98909/register)
- **A Community Practice: Black Liturgies for Staying Human: Fear & Doubt**, Liberty Park Library, 402 S. Pittsburgh, 5:30 p.m., 444-5300
- **Colville National Forest: Forest Health**, Diversity and Productivity, Climate Institute, Gonzaga Hemmingson, 702 E. Desmet, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 315-6548
- **Cooked: Survival by Zipcode**, Gonzaga Institute for Climate, Water, and the Environment, Hemmingson Auditorium, 6 p.m., [gonzaga.edu/events](http://gonzaga.edu/events)
- Oct 23** • **CDAIDE Chef Challenge**, fundraiser, Hagadone Event Center, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., [cdaide.org](http://cdaide.org)
- Oct 23-26** • **4-Day Ignatian Retreat**, "Getting Unstuck: Ignatian Spirituality and Internal Family Systems," IHRC, [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Oct 24** • **Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition** Movie Night, Garland Theater, 6 to 9 p.m., [srdvc.org](http://srdvc.org)
- Oct 24-25** • **Jubilee Fair Trade Marketplace**, First Presbyterian Church, 318 S. Cedar, 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 747-8147, [suz.smith34@gmail.com](mailto:suz.smith34@gmail.com)
- Oct 25** • **WSU Health Fair**, Shadle Library, 211 W. Wellesley, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 444-5300
- **El Mercado**, Latino cultural market, A.M. Cannon Park, 1920 W. Maxwell, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., [latinosenspokane.org](http://latinosenspokane.org)
- **"Dancing through the Decades,"** Lake City Meals on Wheels, fundraiser, 6 to 9 p.m., [lakecitycenterticketgoat.com](http://lakecitycenterticketgoat.com)
- **Spokane YFC: Keys of Hope**, fundraiser, Spokane Youth for Christ, Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls, 6 to 9 p.m., 327-7721, [spokaneyfc.org](http://spokaneyfc.org)
- Oct 26** • **Day of the Dead Celebration**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, place photos on altar, 9:30 a.m., celebration, 10 a.m., [unityspokane.org](http://unityspokane.org)
- **Taizé Prayer Service**, IHRC, 6:30 p.m., [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Oct 28** • **Hear the People, Heal the River**: Action Hours for Salmon, Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition, online, 12:30 p.m., 5:30 p.m., [wildsalmon.org/salmon-action-hours](http://wildsalmon.org/salmon-action-hours)
- **The State of Women & Children**, Women Helping Women Fund, NW MAC, 5 p.m., [secure.qgiv.com/for/whwf/events/swac](http://secure.qgiv.com/for/whwf/events/swac)
- **Re-Cast: Invoking the Past** in Contemporary Expression with Native artists, Epiphany Couch, The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, 5:30 p.m., 444-5300,
- Oct 29** • **Plateau Basket Weaving**, Julie Edwards, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, NW MAC, 5 to 8 p.m., 456-3931
- Oct 30** • **Artist Talk**: Inanna McCarty, Makah and Tsawout Coastal Salish Nations, NW MAC, 6:30 p.m., 456-3931
- Nov 1** • **Sons of Norway Annual Lutefisk & Meatball Dinner**, benefit for local charities, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 12 and 2 p.m., [sonsofnorwayspokane@gmail.com](mailto:sonsofnorwayspokane@gmail.com)
- **Newby-Ginnings Ball & Gala**, Kootenai County Fairgrounds, Jacklin Building, 5 p.m., 294-2080, [newbyginnings.org](http://newbyginnings.org)
- Nov 4** • **"Hope, Peace and Healing,"** IHRC Fundraising Dinner with Bishop Thomas Daly, 5 to 9 p.m., [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Nov 6** • **Fig Tree Benefit/Development**, 12 p.m.; **Board** 1 to 3 p.m., Zoom, [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto:mary@thefigtree.org)
- **Campfire Stories: Rail Magic**, The Lands Council, Wildland Cooperative, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., [landscouncil.org](http://landscouncil.org)

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# Four Reardan churches find ways to continue to feed, serve town

By Caleb McGeever

Four Reardan churches come together to meet community needs, providing essential services and outreach in this rural town with a population of about 600 about 30 miles west of Spokane.

We C.A.R.E., which stands for We Care About Reardan Edwall, is a nonprofit that serves the Reardan-Edwall School District with a food pantry, weekend food for school children, clothing and school supplies for school children, holiday food and gifts, emergency assistance and nondenominational gatherings. The gatherings include a vacation Bible school, community worship services, a community youth group and cooking classes, said Katie Thirupal, pastor of First Presbyterian.

**We C.A.R.E. encourages** other residents to join them in serving others.

The organization is run by the four churches working with local volunteers.

The churches, Emmanuel Lutheran, St. Michael's Catholic, Reardan Presbyterian and Reardan Bible Fellowship, which each have about 30 to 50 people attending regularly, each have food collection boxes.

Katie said that the congregations each "have their own traditions, liturgy and worship services," and many of the clergy also lead another congregation in a nearby town.

**"The churches come** together to serve the one God we all worship. We're different denominations coming together to be the hands and feet of God. We like to believe that we're four congregations serving in one church," said Virginia Henderson, the coordinator for We C.A.R.E.

The cross-denominational effort began decades ago as the Reardan Ministerial Association. Run by representatives from each of the churches, community members and pastors, it focused on the food pantry.

In 2019, Reardan Ministerial Association reorganized as We C.A.R.E. as pastors in leadership retired, were reassigned or passed away, said Virginia.

This gave the community members involved a chance to come together and pick a new name, select a new council and register as a nonprofit that provides food, supplies and services.

We C.A.R.E.'s primary function is to operate a food pantry a few times a month, she said. About five to eight families come each time it is open.



Virginia Henderson describes We C.A.R.E. in Bite2Go video.

Until September, Reardan's local grocery store housed the food pantry in a storage area that had an outside entrance.

"We were able to give folks vouchers they could use at the store to buy things the pantry didn't have, like milk and bread. It gave the store some business, too," Virginia said.

**In September, the food pantry** was given 72 hours of notice to move their food, because the grocery store that hosted it lost its lease and had to close.

"It was the only grocery store in Reardan," said Virginia. "The nearest grocery stores now are 15 miles away in either direction—in Airway Heights and Davenport.

"That means we are in a food desert," she said.

**The only food services left** in Reardan are a tavern that serves food—which limits options for families—and a drive-up coffee stand.

Senior citizens and others who are not able to drive have no options," she added.

The food pantry is now temporarily in a private residence shop at 310 S Lake St. and actively pursuing options for a new permanent location. They have shelves of nonperishable food and personal care items, plus they have farm eggs, frozen chicken and ground beef available.

**The pantry operates** the same times as it did before moving. Those hours are from 1:30 to 3 p.m. on second Wednesdays and 5:30 to 7 p.m. on fourth Thursdays. People can pick up the usual two bags of groceries, but the pantry can't provide grocery store vouchers.

In addition to the food pantry, We C.A.R.E. also organizes the Reardan-Edwall school's Bite2Go weekend food program with the Second Harvest food distribution center in Spokane. It provides students with weekend meal kits.

**"Bite2Go really makes** a difference in the kids' lives," Virginia said. "The school came to us and said, you already do the food pantry. Would you help us with this? We have too many kids who are going hungry, and it's affecting their schoolwork."

"So, we decided to do that. We work at fundraising to keep it going so all kids needing extra food on weekends have it," she said.

In addition, Second Harvest works with the local American Legion post to bring a Mobile Market to Reardan nine months a year. It is not held in the winter because there is no drive-through location available, Virginia added.

**We C.A.R.E.'s outreach** for students extends beyond Bite2Go.

It provides for the emergency clothes closet at the school, sponsors school supplies and helps families with rent or water bills when it can.

"We can't do it all the time, but we can help in emergencies," said Virginia, who moved with her family from Spokane to Reardan when she was in grade school and has been involved with First Presbyterian since then.

After being active in Sunday school, youth group, summer

camp and as a youth elder on the governing board, she was away about 10 years for college, a first job and starting her family. She returned to Reardan and has been involved with the church since then.

**Virginia retired** a few years ago after a career as a medical technologist.

"I feel God wants us to support each other and feel that if we see something that needs to be done, we should jump in and do it, not do nothing or wait for someone else to take care of it," she said.

We C.A.R.E. churches also hold events and worship services, inviting other local residents to join them for worship and outreach.

**The churches come** together on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter for worship, which We C.A.R.E. helps organize.

On the first Sundays of summer months, members of Emmanuel Lutheran, St. Michael's Catholic, First Presbyterian and Reardan Bible Fellowship host community gatherings.

They are out in the park with their blankets.

**Communal worship** at the parks is casual and serves two purposes, explained Virginia.

The first purpose is that it allows the churches to join together in worship with easier access for more casual believers.

The second purpose is to give pastors a "day off" without having to pay someone to cover the pulpit.

The next communal worship is planned for Thanksgiving.

Over the summer, We C.A.R.E. hosts a free vacation Bible school for kids in preschool up to ninth grade. Each church hosts a different activity like crafts or Bible stories.

Volunteers from each congregation meet to pick the curriculum and run the camp for the community.

**The grocery store's closure** leaves local people with one less gathering place for building community.

"There used to be a little coffee shop in the store where many farmers would go every morning to discuss world politics and everything else," Virginia said.

With few community spaces left, she said We C.A.R.E. will highlight opportunities for people to become involved in serving.

**"As they serve,** they benefit the community and gain friendships along with a sense of belonging and identity," she said.

Despite the struggle to keep people engaged, she feels positive about the future.

"God put us here for a reason and wants us to keep helping take care of this community," she said. "Maybe what we're doing isn't the primary need now. Maybe something else will surface that we can help with. People just want to be in a position where they can help, so we're going to let them."

**While We C.A.R.E.** is largely funded by people in Reardan, she believes outside funds and business benefactors would help the organization to expand.

Virginia invites members of Reardan and Edwall to join We C.A.R.E. at the park for worship services and to help them do community outreach.

"We try to make We C.A.R.E. visible so people know anyone can be a part of it and will recognize the people who are part of it," said Virginia.

For information, call 818-0146 or email [wecareaboutreardanedwall@gmail.com](mailto:wecareaboutreardanedwall@gmail.com).

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