Book tells how Community Building is building community in Spokane

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Nestled in the block on W. Main between Division and Browne in downtown Spokane is the Community Building, a complex of five buildings owned by Jim Sheehan, who envisioned them as a hub where nonprofits work during the day, and people come for entertainment, food and nightlife.

To tell the story of the complex, Summer Hess compiled contributions and edited a book, One Block Revolution: 20 Years of Community Building, for the 20th anniversary of the Community Building. In a chapter Jim wrote, “The Antidote Is Community,” he turns the noun “community building” into a verb. Formerly a public defender, he inherited an unexpected gift that made it possible to think about giving back to the community.

Considering himself a Zen Catholic—raised and educated in Buddhism for 30 years—he believes in the mystical arm of Catholicism. In one paragraph he considers his “experiences of enlightenment” and awareness expressed by Catholic theologian, Thomas Merton, who speaks of all faiths emerging from the same source. From that, Jim struggled with how to engage the world around him, while honoring what he calls the “wisdom of emptiness.”

He explained that he wanted to reach out and act “with courage and honesty, and to be present to what is there, to go into silence, to the place there can be no differences between people.”

His first goal was to found the Center for Justice, while at the same time look for a building to “translate truth and justice into action,” he writes in the book. From that core set of beliefs and practices, finding the place was kismet. He was driving around looking at buildings and saw a building he was interested in. The owner did not want to sell, but said the owner across the street wanted to sell.

Then Jim walked across the street and bought the building, turning the noun “community building” into a verb. In a chapter Jim wrote, “The Antidote Is Community,” he turns the noun “community building” into a verb.

By Mary Stamp

Paul Benz leaves an imprint on the State of Washington in the influence he has had turning priorities of the state’s faith communities into laws that improve lives.

Over his 10 years with the Faith Action Network, he has marched with people in the streets and halls of power related to a $15 minimum wage, farmworker safety, cutting gun violence, addressing climate catastrophes, fighting a Muslim ban, welcoming refugees, declaring that Black lives matter, challenging policies that perpetuate poverty, assuring food security, increasing affordable housing, standing with the voiceless, caring for neighbors, improving health care, reforming immigration policies, caring for children, seniors, women and more.

Through his political savvy, he has promoted compassionate justice.

On Dec. 31, Paul retires, but he intends to continue to advocate for issues, because there is and always will be so much more to do.

“There are two sides to the coin called advocacy,” he said of his work for 11 years as executive director of the Lutheran Public Policy Office (LPPO) and 10 years at the co-director of the Faith Action Network of Washington (FAN).

One side of the coin of advocacy is how well “we care for our neighbors” in terms of feeding, sheltering and visiting the imprisoned—as in Matthew 25—and the other side is being a voice to bring about change in systems on behalf of neighbors who are oppressed and suffering from systemic injustices—as set forth in Exodus 3.

Paul offers this reflection because he is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as well as being a long-time social justice leader addressing numerous issues in FAN’s legislative agenda.

Rather than acting alone, Paul combined lobbying and meeting elected officials with organizing faith communities around the state.

He has helped FAN nurture a growing network of Advocating Faith Communities that partner with FAN to advocate in the halls of power. He has traveled around Washington to meet clusters of communities into laws that improve lives.

Fr. Pat Conroy is keynote speaker on Saturday, Jan. 22, the keynote speaker is Fr. Pat Conroy, S.J., who has been working with Gonzaga University’s Office for Mission and Ministry since he retired as the 60th chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives, serving from 2011 to 2021.

Fr. Pat, along with participants on an interfaith panel and workshop leaders will address the theme, “Mobilizing for Our Future.” The conference will be from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., on Zoom as a way to involve more people from faith communities in the Inland Northwest.

An interfaith panel with people from various faiths will tell how their faith communities mobilize for action, what their priority issues are, what challenges they face and how they need solidarity.

Workshops will address the climate crisis, housing and homelessness, food security, refugees, human trafficking, racism and securing democracy.

Advocacy leaders from the Faith Action Network of Washington, the Washington State Catholic Conference and Earth Ministry-Interfaith Power and Light will present issues coming before the 2022 Washington State Legislature of concern to members of faith communities.

The event is organized with by The Fig Tree, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, Faith Action Network, Earth Ministry, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and NAACP Spokane.

For information, call 535-4112, email event@thefigtree.org or register at https://secure.givelively.org/event/the-fig-tree/mobilizing-for-our-future/2022-legislative-conference.

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German American Christmas service set

The annual German American Christmas service will be held at 3 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 19, at St. Mark’s Lutheran, 316 E. 24th Ave. St. Mark’s pastors Lori Cornell and Kate Leppard will officiate for the service.

The Concordia Choir will perform traditional German Christmas carols for the ecumenical service, which will be in German and English.

After the service, there will be coffee and Christmas cookies at the Deutches Haus, W. 25 3rd Ave.

For information, call 230-5017 or email easgeois@comcast.net.

Winterfest displays celebrate cultures

To brighten up the holiday season, the annual Northwest Winterfest runs this year at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center from 5 to 9 p.m., seven days a week Nov. 26 to Jan. 2.

It offers a space where people can wander through the ADA-accessible, outdoor path of lighted holiday lantern displays to celebrate the magical holiday season.
Habitat-Spokane transfers keys to new homeowner in West Central

Volunteers of America (VOA) will move their overnight young adult shelter from their temporary location at 3104 E. Augusta Ave. The shelter will operate from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., seven days a week with a 44 bed capacity. “The placement of this shelter is strategic in our service model and lack of affordable homeownership opportunities,” said VOA CEO/president Fawn Schott. “We are moving the youth we serve out of the downtown core and closer to educational resources. The proximity to Spokane Community College is ideal as we provide wrap-around case management to overcome homelessness for the youth in our community.”

VOA opened the shelter in May, operating at a 15-bed capacity at Women’s Heath until the building purchase was completed. In the past few weeks, VOA has seen an increase in need and staff had to turn away people each night. The move will help provide more beds ahead of the winter months. A few building renovations are scheduled for next spring that will allow the shelter to operate 24/7 with onsite case management.

In addition, VOA’s Crosswalk youth walk shelter is scheduled to move to a new building this fall of 2023 on land purchased off Mission Ave. “Focusing on early interventions and the unique needs of young adults takes us upstream in efforts to prevent the next generation of homelessness,” stated city of Spokane Mayor Woodward. “This resource expands the capacity to provide young adults with wrap-around services and specialized training, and is another example of what can be accomplished with a plan that is executed through partnership and collaboration. Volunteers of America is perfectly suited with the right expertise to make a difference at a critical stage in life.”

Habitat for Humanity-Spokane’s transformation of abandoned, derelict homes in the West Central neighborhood celebrates as another future homeowner accepts keys to their safe, decent and affordable home at 11:30 a.m., Friday, Dec. 10.

They will be in their newly rehabilitated home in time for the holidays, said Habitat-Spokane CEO Michelle Girardot. Habitat for Humanity acquired the home as part of the Derelict Housing Acquisition and Homeownership program, a collaboration between the City of Spokane and Habitat for Humanity to revitalize neighborhoods and increase homeownership opportunities for those experiencing low incomes. “Funded through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Habitat and its partners have focused on acquiring units in neighborhoods at the highest risk for displacement, gentrification and lack of affordable homeownership opportunities,” she said. By partnering with the city to identify possible acquisitions, Habitat-Spokane could leverage its volunteer base, sponsors and homeowner readiness activities to breathe new life into these homes while creating access to homeownership. Those activities also ensure the homes are affordable at purchase and remain affordable for generations. “Programs like CDBG are crucial to creating a sustainable future for Spokane by building more affordable homeownership opportunities. Every revitalized ‘zombie home,’ completed with partnerships, promises to be an affordable homeownership option now and forever,” said Michelle. “Shared equity homeownership programs and revitalizing abandoned properties like these directly correlate with positive job creation and thriving mixed-income neighborhoods.” This home is especially unique, as it was the first home acquired with this partnership. According to the Federal Reserve, one abandoned property in Spokane diminishes by $60,000 the value of nearby properties. The financial burden doesn’t end there. Derelict units in Spokane represent a municipal expenditure in excess of $2M every year as the responsibility of cleaning, marketing, or even demolishing these properties falls on the city taxpayer, further depressing these areas and Spokane as a whole, Michelle said. “While the work to rehab blighted properties in Spokane is powerful to witness, the transformation during a future Habitat homeowner’s journey to homeownership is even more so. Habitat seeks to put God’s love into action by bringing people together to build homes, communities and hope,” she said.

The partnership requirements for qualified home buyer families earning 90 percent below the area median incomes are rigorous but ensure each home buyer is more than prepared to be a successful homeowner.

“At the West Central home dedication, supporters of Habitat for Humanity-Spokane will come together to witness two families unlock strength, stability and self-reliance through the keys to their new future,” Michelle said. For information, call 534-2552 or visit https://habitatspokane.org/dedications.

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Paul Benz retires after 20 years with LPPO and FAN, but will still advocate

Continued from page 1 representatives of faith com- munities, labor, agriculture, and to report back on successes in the spring.

His roots as the son of a small farmer in southwestern Min- nesota during the 1950s set him on the walk for social justice. His father engaged in grassroots organizing for economic justice in the form of fair prices for farmers. He sought to organize farmers to withhold products and hold protests.

His paternal great-grandmother, Sophokab, re- belled against the U.S. treaty with the Sac and Fox tribes, now in Oklahoma.

She was in a group led by Black Hawk that crossed the Mississippi in 1832 in violation of a treaty. The group of men, women, children and elders with Black Hawk drew the attention of the U.S. military, which chased them through North Central Illinois, and Southern Wisconsin, for six months.

They ran out of supplies and were desperate. Many died of malnutrition. Their only way to survive was to cross the Mis- sissippi into Iowa, which was not a state, but then the military attacked and killed many beside the Bad Axe River, in what is now called the Bad Axe Massacre.

Sophokab, then six, was put on a log canoe that floated to East Dubuque, Ill., where she was picked up by Jordan’s Ferry as a military boat taking survivors to safety. She was adopted by a family, and called Indian Kate after her mother, Katequah.

She married an Eberle, whose daughter, Katherine, married a Fishnick. Her daughter, Pauline, her grandson, married a Benz.

“She remember my father’s re- spect for Native Americans and his social activism. I did not understand then, when farmers had milk, that farmers were independent and resisted unifying for higher prices, like chokeholds, he said.

Another social justice seed was planted in Paul during high school when his pastor ran for school board in Pipestone, Minn. When Paul went on to college, he majored in political science and religion.

He has helped with political campaigns, including Minne- sota Senator Hubert Humphrey’s 1972 run for U.S. President. That was related to his partici- pation in a summer institute in political and economic systems at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

After graduating from high school in 1971, he worked on the farm for two summers. His father decided there was no future in farming, sold the farm in 1973 and moved to town.

Paul did studies in D.C., Texas and Seattle, and youth ministry in San Jose in 1975-76, before coming to Seattle Pacific Uni- versity, where he graduated in 1979 after two years there. In 1980, he worked on the cam- paign of Senator Warren Mag- nuson.

Then he went to seminary at Pacific Lutheran Theological School in Berkeley, where he earned a master of divinity degree in 1985.

His first church in Appalachia in Northeast Kentucky engaged him in social justice issues as he saw the disparity of the wealth of a few and the poverty of most people. He engaged with the NAACP and Kentucky Council of Churches.

His wife Linda’s work in domes- tic violence led them to return to Seattle where Paul was execu- tive director of the King County Domestic Violence Agency. Paul was called to serve a Lutheran parish and then to direct the Lu- theran Public Policy Office.

In that role, he worked eco- nomically on a common agenda for public policy with the Wash- ington Association of Churches with former directors Loren Arnett and John Boonstra.

“Realizing the two organiza- tions were of one heart, they merged to form the Faith Action Network: A Partnership for the Common Good,” Paul said.

Alice Woldt and Paul served at first as part-time co-directors. Three members of each board and three others—one each from the Jewish, African-American and Hispanic communities—formed the governing board.

Its 30-member advisory coun- cil included other members of the former Washington Association of Churches and LPPO boards, as well as diverse faith groups.

“Our vision was to bring to- gether two organizations with limited resources and a common purpose to be a strong interfaith organization to do public policy advocacy,” he said.

The new organization brought together the two agencies’ staffs and constituencies in “a state- wide partnership of faith com- munities striving for a just and sustainable world through com- munity building, education and courageous public action.”

Now 162 faith communities are involved in the network. The dominant tenet in the state is and was Christian, but we chose the name, Faith Action Network, specifically ‘faith,’ rather than ‘Christian’ or ‘church’ to build a larger tent for social justice as a faith organization,” Paul said.

In 21 years of lobbying in Olympia, he has worked on many bills, but he said part of his advocacy is still being accom- plished. That is to make known the progressive faith voice in Olympia.

“When many in the U.S. think of religion and the political realm, it is usually dominated by the religious right,” he said.

“HOW THE LPPO, WAC, FAN and advocating partner the Church Council of Greater Seattle view faith is different from that. Always our purpose and purpose are to have those in power and the broader public realize there are many faith com- munities, not just the religious right,” he said.

What have his efforts and those of FAN accomplished? There is a long list over the years of successes related to priorities of housing, hunger, child care, minimum wage, health care, the safety net and more.

In the last legislative session, the main issues were police reform and tax reform. For years the religious and secular civil- communities spoke of Washington having the most regressive tax structure and have challenged the built-in racist structure of the criminal justice system, Paul said.

“The 2021 session adopted a capital gains tax on wealth.

“Wealthy businesses need to pay their fair share to the state treasury. To whom much is given, economically, much is required,” Paul said. “It’s not enough for them to donate to a good neighbor fund.

“Religious equity called for po- lice reform and accountability regarding training law enforce- ment officers on de-escalation tactics to reduce violence, like chokeholds, he added.

After he retires, Paul plans to volunteer to add his hands bendering the moral arc of history towards social justice and racial equity via his new consulting, lobbying, advocacy organiz- ation, Partners for Social Change.

So he will be lobbying on social justice issues both in Olympia and in Washington, D.C., in 2022.

“I look for greater impact. There are always more people who can be involved and there will always be more issues requiring advocacy,” he said, noting that the work of advocacy is never done.

FAN’s recent Annual Dinner honored Paul, presenting him with the Justice, Leadership Legacy Award for his work put- ting faith into action. The dinner raised more than $122,000 in Nov. 21 towards a goal of reach- ing $150,000. For information, call 206-625- 9790 or visit fanwa.org.
Community Building has served Spokane nonprofits for 20 years

Continued from page 1

street, talked to that owner, and then the next door. Expansion came naturally. He bought the 35 W. Main Ave. building, then the smaller one next door, then the Saranac, the Pub, the Saranac Commons and the Main Market across the street.

Gratified that the venture has lasted 20 years, he said he had “never thought how long it would last. We just go with what we have and try to stay in the now and do what we do.”

He attributed it to the dedication and commitment of the people who work or worked there, some of whom wrote chapters. His vision included prioritizing the whole person to be involved in the community, not just work there.

“Writer Ken Wilber talks about being an integrated person, cognitive, spiritual, emotional and relational. Those things come together to make the person,” said Jim.

Summer Hess and Jim Sheehan collaborate to create a book about the Community Building in downtown Spokane and its venture in building community in a green space.

Photo courtesy of the Community Building

Summer Hess and Jim Sheehan collaborated to create a book about the Community Building in downtown Spokane and its venture in building community in a green space.

Photo courtesy of the Community Building

 says Summer. “Initially we started telling the story with Jim’s voice and at the end that didn’t feel right because so much of his philosophy is about getting out of the way and letting people act,” said Summer. In addition to Jim’s chapter, “The Antidote Is Community,” some of the other chapters are “Beauty and Inclusion: People Centered Space” by Patsy O’Connor, “The Rise and Sunset of the Center for Justice” by Breean Beggs, and “Childcare as Social Justice” by Anita Morgan.

Jim and Summer also sought to communicate dynamics of a “green” building infrastructure, the groups that show up every day, the mix of the stewards of the space, the tenants and behind-the-scenes people who make it happen.

On the green technology and materials used in remodeling and designing the spaces, Jim said, “We have problems in different areas. The seminal issue is climate change, which leads to diaspora, war and destruction. We can only do what we can do.”

Aiming to have a small carbon footprint, he wanted the building to be capable of current conditions and the future.

Jim considered how to heat and cool space, what kind of materials to use and how to put spaces together. Breean, former director of the Center for Justice, said that when it started, there was need for space where nonprofits could thrive.

Being in proximity, relationships formed in the Community Building as local leaders talked about what the community needed, he said. It was easier to coordinate, create and launch new plans, such as beginning smart justice initiatives and finding alternatives to a new jail.

Summer captured other examples of leaders in proximity initiating changes they had not anticipated.

The theory is that if people came together they would have good ideas to change the city.

Warrin Bazzile, who is on the Community Building staff, writes in his chapter, “Building Stewardship,” that he seeks to treat people in the neighborhood, including those who are down and out “just as well as the people who come to work here every day. I see every encounter as a chance to show people the love of God.”

Jim said that in coming into the neighborhood and building something, it was important to connect with neighbors so they knew what the building was about and so “we knew what the neighborhood is like so we can be included in the community.”

Latah Books and the Community Building are hosting a book launch party to celebrate the publication of the One-Block Revolution: 20 Years of Community Building from 5 to 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 3, at 25-35 W. Main Ave. There will be appetizers, music, tours and conversation with neighbors and book contributors.

For information, call 232-1950 or visit latahbooks.com.

We’re looking for youth ages 10 to 17 interested in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Math (STEAM) and environmental projects to join a fall cohort of ‘STEAM in the Garden’

classes in East and West Central neighborhoods

For information and registration call or email 509-842-6958 • hwood@legacylearners.org

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familypromisefospokane.org/give
Young Activist Leaders Program (YALP) begins on Wednesday, Dec. 1. It’s a program of the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) for young people interested in social justice and community organizing.

YALP is a cohort-based program for young people aged 12 to 20, both experienced and new to PJALS, from around the region.

It will be a four month long intensive session, running from 4 to 5:30 p.m., Wednesdays through March 2022.

Youth organizers Sarah Hegde and Ivy Pete will collaborate and teach alongside youth in the community for workshops, speakers, projects, connections, activism, change-making, strategizing, art, snacks, games and good times.

Participants may come every week or once in a while, they said.

The Young Activist Leaders Program within the PJALS engages young, change-minded individuals in grassroots organizing through workshops, networking and collaboration, Sarah and Ivy said.

Participants will abide by COVID guidelines and operate based on guidance from the Spokane Regional Health District meaning an online or hybrid model with Zoom is likely for the year.

“We are working to accommodate our ever-growing participation from geographically diverse populations of young people,” they said.

For information, call 838-7870, email pjals@action.pjals.org or visit pjals.org and click link for YALP.
Kristen Clarke, assistant attorney general for civil rights at the U.S. Department of Justice, pointed to the importance of centers for hate studies in higher education because they deal with marginalized communities—bounty, bias, freedom, compassion and inclusion.

Speaking at the International Conference on Hate Studies Nov. 4 to 6 at Gonzaga, Kristen said the theme, “Justice and Equity: Challenging Hate and Inspiring Hope,” sounds like the call to action expressed by the late Thurgood Marshall: “Where you see wrong, speak out. This is your country.”

“He reminded us that everyone is responsible to make a difference,” said Kristen, concerned about the rise in hate crimes.

“We work to uphold every person’s civil rights so they can live free from violence and hate,” said Kristen.

Responsibility requires that people be proactive on hate crimes, which have risen for Asian-Americans and Black Americans.

“The Department of Justice is not waiting to deploy its tools against hate crimes,” she said. “Prosecution of hate crimes will be swift and effective.”

The 20-year-old who killed Black people in a Kroger store admitted he shot them because of their race. He is just one of many who have shot Asian women, transwomen, and people attending Jewish and Muslim services.

“There are too many stories,” she said. “Our department stands by victims of hate.”

Kristen said that, however, is hard because of the underreporting of hate crimes. In Miami, with a population of 3 million, there were just five cases reported. If hate is not reported, it is hard to act.

Kristen called for training new police officers to investigate and report acts of hate.

“The state of Washington has one of the highest rates for reporting hate crimes,” she said. “A low rate comes from a lack of trust between communities and law enforcement.”

“Hate takes many forms—online attacks, burning churches, physical assaults—but are all intended to terrorize communities because of race, ethnicity, ability, sex and gender identity.”

“To revitalize civil rights, we need to facilitate dialogue, mediation and training,” she said, telling of multi-million-dollar grants for awareness, healing, reconciliation and resource development to improve civil rights reporting.

Kristen added that law enforcement needs to make it possible for complaints to be made in different languages to make reporting easier.

She thanked Gonzaga University’s Institute for Hate Studies for encouraging a comprehensive approach to hate and justice.

“Because of advocates like those gathered for the International Conference, I have faith that justice will win,” Kristen said.

“We promote a passion for the American dream. Our work strengthens our democracy, protecting people’s rights to be free from violence and intimidation. Bringing together educators and others to converse fosters collaboration, a key element in inspiring justice and hope,” she said.

More than 450 people from 15 countries, 30 states, 51 organizations and 60 institutions of higher education participated in a keynote speech, four plenary panels, 39 paper presentations, and 20 workshops or roundtable discussions—including 137 presenters—during the conference.

Human rights advocates, faith leaders, university professors, high school teachers, librarians and other community leaders involved in challenging many forms of hate and bigotry gathered to explore and share their research on hate and how its impact on people and communities is being addressed around the world.

The themes of the sessions included teaching strategies, hate crimes, attitudes toward victims, Holocaust memorials, language and lies, teaching diversity and equity, weaponizing hope, rethinking Nazism, ex-extremists, root causes of hate, recovering from racism, connection and stories, fascism in academia, extremist ideologies, anti-bias lessons, depictions of migrants, combating extremism, hate crimes, hate groups, hate speech, challenging hate, conflict and inclusion, corporate responsibility and human rights champions.

For information, call 313-3665 or visit Gonzaga.edu/ichocs.
Four women recognized as 2021 Spokane Human Rights Champions

The 2021 Spokane Human Rights Champions awards were presented along with the Eva Lamson Take Action Against Hate awards at the closing of the International Conference for Hate Studies on Nov. 6. Nia Wong, evening anchor and reporter for 4 News Now/KXLY-7, was emcee.

The Spokane County Human Rights Task Force (SCHRFT) and Spokane Human Rights Commission joined the Gonzaga Institute for Hate Studies to honor “neighbors who not only saw a need but found a way to satisfy it,” Nia said.

Nia said the Spokane Human Rights Champions Awards started a few years ago after “horrible events in Pittsburgh and Christchurch where sanctuaries of love and faith were rocked by violence driven by hate.”

While those incidents did not involve people in Spokane, gatherings at Temple Beth Shalom and at the Spokane Islamic Center brought faith and community leaders, even political adversaries “together to unite in healing and reweaving the fabric that invisibly binds us all,” she said.

The Spokane County Human Rights Task Force, decided to celebrate the good that happens every day but is overlooked.

So the government-based Spokane Human Rights Commission and the volunteer-based Spokane County Human Rights Task Force started the Spokane Human Rights Champions Awards.

Because of COVID-19, the awards committee chose to do a live streaming event with prerecorded award presentations.

Excerpts of their stories are below.

Jennyfer Mesa brought information and resources to the Latinx community by starting a Facebook page to translate news and a gathering movement in 2017 in response to anti-immigrant sentiments that left families fragmented.

It grew into a nonprofit, Latinos En Spokane, to help Latinos and immigrants access resources, develop community and participate in civic life through events, education, activism and partnerships.

In nominating her, Guillermo Espinoza, said she and her family faced obstacles immigrating from Colombia, seeking a safe place, but they did not give up.

In COVID isolation, knowing Latinx community likes to gather, he said, Jennyfer built our small local business as we grow! Construction of Spokane office at 1502 N. Monroe Ave., so they can gather and celebrate. He said, “Jennyfer opened the Latinos en Spokane office at 1502 N. Monroe, as a center to empower Latinx and immigrant families with local, state, insurance, technical, cultural and other resources. She also started a monthly cultural and fresh food summer market, El Mercadito.

“When I think of human rights, I think of how we are all born free and should have the right to be who we are with access to clean air, clean water, food, health care, education, a home and safety,” said Jennyfer.

Angel Tomeo Sam uses her experiences to call others to re-enter productive society.

Moving through personal adversity of domestic violence, addiction, homelessness and incarceration, she became chair-elect for the Racial Equity Committee of the Spokane Regional Law and Justice Council. She also works with the Health and Justice Recovery Alliance, the Bail Project, the Spokane County Domestic Violence Coalition and the Spokane County Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Work Group.

Her advocacy to change the name Ptl. George Wright Dr. to Whistalks Way led Spokane to name her a Woman Warrior.

Other involvements include the Equal Justice Coalition, Native American Alliance for Policy and Action and Peer Reentry Navigation and Community Bail Fund. As acting director of Salish for Strong Spokane, she works with Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women and People.

Angel said that work for human rights “comes from a place of love of humanity and my neighbors.” She said many faiths speak of love. A favorite is “love casts out fear,” because “when we are fearless we can be bold and when we are bold we can get stuff done.”

Having been impacted by many experiences, she advocates for the “things next to me.”

“My life would be different if someone had not reached out and given me a hand up,” said Angel, who seeks to do that for others.

Katie Urbanek took what many families struggled to accept and created the opportunity for parents to be proud of their gay and lesbian children, said Gene Otto and Ted Clark, who nominated her as “a pioneer.”

The SCHRFT recognized her for helping start a local chapter of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). In another community, her son, Hal, came out as gay, when it was less accepted than now.

She and her late husband, Harry, were proud of him. They joined a PFLAG group and held meetings in their home. At first just five came, then there was standing room only.

When they moved to Spokane in 1994, Katie and Harry brought PFLAG with them, changing the conversation here by helping families understand, accept and also be proud of their gay or lesbian children.

PFLAG also works with schools to help children who are bullied and have no one to talk with, to prevent suicides and to inform counselors.

“I soon found that there were people all over the place who were glad to know that there were other parents like them, and they could join together and learn to be able to support their children,” said Katie, now 97.

Jan Baker has changed many lives through her involvement with organizations that promote democracy, guide young people, teach gardening and support LGBTQ people.

She has registered voters, recruited candidates and organized advocacy events through the NAACP Spokane Political Action Committee before and after retiring from 39 years as a medical technologist and educator in the clinical lab at Sacred Heart.

As a master gardener, she has taught organic gardening to youth at Riverfront Farms, now Youth Ops, which divert youth from drugs and jail to complete high school and college. She also taught gardening to women at the Growing Hope Program of the former Women’s Drop-In Center, now the Women’s Hearth.

Jan’s worked to enact legislation for the GLBTQ community. She was the first to register voters for the Democratic Party at the PRIDE event, and she invited the NAACP to march in the parade and Mountain Gardeners to have a booth at the event.

City Council member Betsy Wilkerson said, “I embraced me early on and started educating me on human rights from a different perspective. We talked about race, but more discrimination than race.” She considers Jan a “great ally with a heartfelt commitment” and “a servant leader vested in the community.”

Jan said that “human rights is never done in a vacuum, it’s essential to start at the grassroots level and move from the bottom up, not the top down. The umbrella uniting us in human rights is to do unto others as we would like others to do to us, a concept from the Bible, and other religions and spiritualities.”

For information, email jj@humanrightsmail.com.

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International Conference on Hate Studies at Gonzaga University
ADL education leader suggests tools for anti-bias lessons for educators

Scotland (Scottie) Nash, director of education for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Pacific Northwest region, presented three sessions on Anti-Bias I Learning with Scottie for the International Conference on Hate Studies in November. Those sessions offered tools for people to explore their identities and connect with others as means to build understanding and empathy.

In the first session, “Growing Up Culturally,” she offered practical suggestions for teachers committed to doing anti-bias work in their classrooms. She is herself a community educator on now having in-person classes that there is more conflict in their communities or at the pandemic shutdown.

Using the example of a woman describing herself in the New York Times, Scottie solicited information from participants about what they heard her say about her race, ethnicity and culture.

The point of the exercise was twofold: first, to clarify assumptions and use her self-description as a model for teachers to explore their own identities and connect with others as means to build understanding and empathy.

In the second session, “Anti-Bias Education: Unpackaging Race, Ethnicity and Culture,” Scottie shared experience from 20 years as a high school history teacher and as education director with the 100-year-old ADL.

“We as an organization fight hate through education, investigation, and advocacy,” said Scottie, who works with K-12, universities, religious institutions, communities and work places.

Her work focuses on anti-Semitism and bias in general.

Doing anti-bias education since the 1990s, she offers a four-part framework: 1) Identifying or understanding oneself to understand one’s relationship to bias, power and society; 2) Understanding diversity/difference through being able to connect across differences; 3) Understanding bias, implicit vs. explicit, and how it presents itself individually and externally; and 4) Championing justice with education as a call to action.

In the third session, “Youth in the Spotlight,” she showed participants videos in a “Being 12” series on how students understand their identity through the lens of race, ethnicity and culture. She offered the video as a tool for starting discussions on www.educationevolution.org/story/people-sometimes-think-im-supposed-talk-ghetto-whatever they can.

Youth on the video include an Indian British girl, an adopted African-American with two dads, an Afro-Irish American, a Hispanic girl telling of shopping, a white privileged person and a boss.

“In showing the video, we work with teens on identity, talk about white privilege and encourage building empathy muscles. We ask students to write what they see, hear and feel in the video and rewrite it constructively,” Scottie said.

Students in history, reading or science classes responded to a prompt and talk to connect.

“We assure their voices will be heard, as they have an opportunity both to speak and to listen,” she said. “It takes bravery to tell their stories, to build listening muscles and build bridges as they discuss examples of stereotypes, bias and racism they hear in the video.

“We ask: What person do you relate to? Who? How? How does it make you feel? If it was filmed at your school, how would it be the same or different? How can you be an ally to students?”

“For me, it’s about empowerment,” said Scottie.

As a teacher, she worked on projects for social justice and anti-racism. Then she worked with adults, collecting data to make sure there were equitable practices for every student in a classroom.

She worked with principals and coached teachers to be more equitable in the classroom.

After doing that, she wanted to do more self-reflection to talk about race, ethnicity, culture and belonging. It’s been a journey of self-discovery and growth for her, drawing on her experience and connecting with others differently.

For information, email jijohnsonhome@msn.com.

Pui-Yan Lam and Rowena Pineda accept the recognition. (APIC) of Spokane’s Rhyan Lourie of the coalition said they “built a team of energetic, talented, progressive folks to work in solidarity with their communities of color for civil and human rights.”

Tia Moua, who shared information for the nomination, wrote: “Rowena and Pui-Yan guided me to see the importance of coalition-building, multi-racial solidarity, lobbying and activism work, and cooperation with other anti-racist organizations. Ever since I joined APIC, I saw their clear passion and commitment to serving our community, especially the Asian American and Pacific Island communities.”

Pui-Yan started speaking out during graduate studies when she saw racism on campus.

“I decided to speak up and do something about it because it was happening in my community. I didn’t care if my face was red or my hands shook when I spoke in public, I just had to do it,” she said.

Now, she realizes that for any social justice movement it’s not about waiting for a perfect charismatic leader, but it’s about the power of ordinary, imperfect people, who despite their flaws, fears and insecurities, step up and do what they can.

Rowena, as a young community organizer, learned that those impacted need to be at the forefront. While she liked being in the background, “the time came when my community was impacted and I had to step up and be up front.”

Both are members of the advisory board, welcoming a new generation stepping up in APIC in the fight against racism.

Amanda Haynes and Jennifer Schweppe give award to student.

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Rowena and Pui-Yan Lam, and Tia Moua, are named for Eva Lassman, a community educator on the story of the award, which is named for Eva Lassman, a team of energetic, talented, progressive folks to work in solidarity with their communities of color for civil and human rights.”

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Amanda Haynes and Jennifer Schweppe give award to student.
Human rights groups bring cumulative experience to counter extremism

By Kaye Hult, Mary Stamp

In the session on “Countering Extremism: The Role of Community Human Rights Task Forces” at Gonzaga’s recent International Conference on Hate Studies, Kristine Hoover, director of GIU’s Institute for Hate Studies, moderated and four individuals presented. The presenters were Tony Stewart from the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Rights, Dean Lynch from the Spokane County Human Rights Task Force, Brenda Hammond from the Bonner County Human Rights Task Force and Travis McAdam from the Montana Human Rights Network.

Tony said the Kootenai County Task Force for Human Relations (KCTFHR) continues to assist law enforcement on behalf of victims, to consult with people who face bias, to have a speakers bureau and to offer human rights education.

Tony himself continues to write guest opinions in local media and provide materials for scholars.

A political scientist, lecturer, author and activist, he taught political science and was a pre-law student at North Idaho College from 1994 to 1998.

During those years, he also produced the “North Idaho College PBS TV-Public Forum” and documentaries, including a 10-week series in 2006 on the then 25-year history of the KCTFHR from 1981 to 2006.

“Our address how some use fear tactics to manipulate segments of the population to gain political power,” he said. “Fear was used during the Jim Crow era. Our history includes policies during the Civil War and the Migration to Europe to discriminate against Irish and Italian Catholics, and Jewish immigrants, and more recently the LGBTQ community.

“Some on social media label social justice and diversity as communist doctrine, rather than seeing them as establishing democratic principles to guarantee freedom and justice,” Tony said, quoting former South African President Nelson Mandela: “To denigrate someone’s human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

In his four decades teaching college students, he did not see education addressing historical injustices used to create guilt, but rather try to use it to encourage a new path toward social justice.

Tony is impressed with the intelligence, wisdom and compassion for human beings by college students as the path to understanding social justice and embracing diversity.

“Our public education system is key to keeping a democratically representative government,” he said. “To challenge hate, we need to be informed and to advocate.”

For information, visit idahohumanrights.org.

Dean told of the Hate Documentation project of the Spokane County Human Rights Task Force, which began in 2016, has 21 directors, who represent diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion and ability. Directors also represent nonprofit agencies, higher education and local governments.

“Our mission is to guard and advance human rights so people feel safe, welcomed and included,” he said. “We promote positive human relationships and monitor hate in all its forms.”

Its Hate Documentation Project was created to monitor hate crimes, as nationally only 25 to 42 percent of hate crimes are reported to law enforcement.

A hate crime is an action that causes injury, damage or threat. It is an incident where the motive is to attack an individual or an individual’s community. It can come from speech used or a comment made.

When gathering information for the report, it is important to collect data that is specific. To help that happen, a person can file a report anonymously.

The reporter answers: Is the person reporting the victim, a witness or a third party? What is the address and the setting? On what date did it happen, and at what time? What was the motivation? Who were witnesses? Were police present? Describe the crime in detail.

The information shared is entered into the database. Privacy of the person filing the report is maintained, Dean said. If the person wishes a follow-up, contact will be made.

A compilation of the information in the Hate Documentation Project’s database is shared annually with the community and is made available on the task force website in English, Spanish and Russian. Other languages will be added.

Hate crime documentation is necessary to assure appropriate community response. Hate crimes may be reported at www.reportthebias.org.

For information, visit spokancountyhumanrighttaskforce.org.

Brenda said that the Bonner County Human Rights Task Force, which was founded in 1992, celebrates its 30th year in 2022.

She spoke of the importance of being organized to stand against hate groups. The task force formed to counter a vision by some in the 1990s to create an all-white Aryan homeland in the Pacific Northwest and inform people of the agenda tactics of white nationalist groups who chose the area because it lacked diversity.

The task force now has more than 500 members.

“We vow never to be silent in face of hate,” Brenda said. “It’s important to create opportunities for people to speak out and take a stand.”

The task force disseminates information and gives people a voice, empowering them to feel safe in accordance with their values. They are proactive, using the framework of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration on Human Rights. They support educational activities in schools and collaborate with other human rights groups.

In this time of increased polarization, the task force seeks to be approachable and aware of the agenda of some on the far right to take over governments on all levels. Task force members learn to talk to people whose beliefs differ from their own.

“We need to speak less from lecterns and pulpits, and have the ability to speak with and listen to people across the kitchen table, seeing them as human beings beyond labels,” Brenda said. “Each person is due respect.”

“Our goal is not to act out of anger or fear, but to build bridges instead of walls,” she said.

For information, visit bchrtf.org.

Travis McAdam said the more than 30-year-old Montana Human Rights Network seeks to work in two directions: from the state level down and from community members up to counter white nationalism and paramilitary groups.

They research and monitor extremist groups.

“That is to say we do opposition research,” Travis said. “Extremists work hard to spread a sanitized version of their beliefs.”

The information they gather helps educate others on what “the real, unfiltered views of groups in our area are,” and influences how the press describes them.

The press and public want verification of the research, so they double check on accuracy and triple check word usage and labels. They ask: Will the information create good or harm? They need to be thoughtful about how and when to use their research, Travis said.

The information they share helps inform actions that are taken. Concerned people who come together to counter the far right need information that’s real and guidance on how to use it.

The monitoring and research not only help do that, but also create relationships with new allies, who can offer connections to others with their research.

“Different groups and activists can play different roles in working for human rights,” Travis said. “The dynamics in rural areas can be different from urban areas.”

This statewide organization can help remove pressure from local groups as it provides research that helps people understand what they see and process it for future events, he said.

As he closed, Travis advised, “never underestimate the power of people coming together to do good to push back against extremism.”

“It only happens when people find each other,” he said.

For information, see mhrn.org.
Global Neighborhood provides training, employment for refugees

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

Brent Hendricks started Global Neighborhood 14 years ago and Global Neighborhood Thrift Store 10 years ago out of a desire to provide long-term support to people coming to Spokane as refugees.

Initially, the program matched volunteers with refugee families for educational resources, cultural events, community support and tutoring efforts.

“In the first four years, as we spent time with people in the community, it became apparent that the biggest need was employment,” he said.

“We offered classes and English tutoring, but most people came to us saying that they needed help with English homework, job applications and finding jobs.”

The pressure refugees feel about providing for their families was overwhelming, Brent said.

“When they felt stress from financial instability, it was hard for them to focus on anything else or think about the future.”

So they pivoted the organization’s focus to employment. In 2011, they opened the Global Neighborhood Thrift Store to provide jobs and training for refugees. They started with two men, who learned how to operate a business to help people.

“They were not sure if they could grow beyond that, but they tried. The thrift store has been operating for more than 10 years now. Now they have paid $800,000 in wages to refugees and provided job training to more than 150 people. They plan future training to help refugees find jobs.”

“We keep pushing on that and see how big an impact we can have when people have jobs to support themselves,” said Brent, who started volunteering right out of college, working with refugee families in the community.

“After studying theology at Whitworth University, I stumbled into my work with refugees,” he said. “I didn’t leave college knowing what I would do. I didn’t even know what a refugee was.”

“When I formed relationships with refugees, it transformed my beliefs rather than my beliefs motivating the work,” said Brent.

He worked at World Relief for a year as a resettlement case manager, “getting my feet wet, learning about the resettlement process. I realized I wanted to focus on something that would provide ongoing support for stage two in resettlement. That’s how I got introduced to the world of refugees,” said Brent.

Global Neighborhood has had 151 refugees complete job training and gain English skills. The training includes showing up on time, customer service, receiving feedback in the job setting and knowing all aspects of the job. Global Neighborhood work also includes how to use a clock-in and clock-out system with computer skills, recycling textiles, certification to operate a forklift and having cashier experience with American money.

Trainees take the skills to other jobs. Global Neighborhood currently has 31 people on payroll, 20 of whom are former refugees from Iraq, Syria, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Marshall Islands, Sudan, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Other employees work in management.

The thrift store accepts any donations in good condition—clothing, household items, home decor, furniture, electronics and books. In reselling donations, they provide jobs. They recycle donations they cannot sell.

Global Neighborhood is conversing with other refugee service providers about the wave of refugees from Afghanistan. He said they are ready for the influx. They did a clothing drive and told other service providers they would give free shopping vouchers for the thrift store, so refugees can come to “shop” for items in a dignified way.

Brent realizes they will need to offer as many jobs as possible and help people find jobs, so they can support themselves. In the last four years, there were fewer refugees and less demand for job training.

“We hire former refugees, who work in the store for one to six years. We provide training, referrals and case management to help them set up,” said Brent.

“I consider myself a spiritual person. We approach this work with a belief that we are all interconnected and rely on one another,” he said. “We are spiritual beings, so we are trying to provide a safe, uplifting environment for people, a place to support people where they are. People need a job to earn money to pay rent, but we also understand that a job is just one part of who we are,” he said. Brent sees people holistically, whatever their tradition or beliefs. He wants Global Neighborhood to build people up so they can support themselves.

“We seek to empower people so they have dignity. That starts with meaningful work and earning a paycheck. Where people want to go with that is up to them,” said Brent.

“Since I stumbled into the social enterprise business, I’ve become a strong believer in the power of a job to have a transformational impact on communities. We are going to keep doing what we can to keep writing paychecks,” said Brent.

“We are figuring out logistics to bring people in after hours to shop with gift certificates. We are able to do that with donations from the community,” said Brent.

For information, call 509-868-0001 or email info@global-neighborhood.org.
Thank you to our volunteers, donors, customers and the Spokane community for sticking with us during this difficult year. We are so grateful to still be able to serve our community with the generous donations we have received.

1906 E. Mission Ave.
509-536-1084  -  www.4mission.org
To stay updated please follow us on facebook or visit our website at www.4mission.org

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Mission Community Outreach Center

Immaculate Heart Retreat Center offers one-, two-, and three-day individual Advent Silent Retreats through Dec. 21. The center at 6910 S. Ben Burr Rd. provides opportunities for people to pray and reflect.

Advent means “Coming.” The mystery of Christmas invites silence to remember what’s important in life, said Kristen Parker, administrative assistant. For information, call 448-1224 or visit www.ihrc.net.

NAACP seeks to change the narrative
The Spokane NAACP has presented eight episodes of “Challenging the Narrative,” an online series highlighting what is happening behind the scenes and the issues facing the Black, Indigenous, People of Color community in Spokane.
Episodes are presented at 2 p.m. on the last Sunday of each month on Facebook Live.
Speakers examine prevailing mindsets about issues that impact people of color in Spokane. They examine facts and stories behind what has occurred and what needs to be done to shift the narrative around civil rights and social justice.
For information, visit facebook.com/spokane.naacp/videos.

Tree display benefits Symphony
The 39th annual Christmas Tree Elegance was postponed in 2020, so the 2021 event with a display of 15 decorated trees and gifts includes 11 trees from the 2020 event and four more for this year. It will be held Nov. 30 to Dec. 12 at the Historic Davenport Hotel at 10 S. Post.

The Spokane Symphony Associates will raise funds to support the Spokane Symphony through a raffle for trees and prizes. The event draws more than 400,000 visitors. For information, call 998-2262 or email annie@matlow.org.

Walk-through funds UGM camps
At a Contemplative Christmas through Trees, guests reflect on the meaning of Christmas as they walk through Undercliff House mansion at 703 W. 7th Ave.
They view 25 Bible-themed trees that tell the story of humankind and God through the Christmas story to Revelation.
The event, from 4 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 15, to Sunday, Dec. 19, raises funds for Union Gospel Mission Youth Camps.
For information, call 994-6305 or visit contemplativechristmas.com.

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IHRC invites people for retreats
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EWU’s Multicultural Center creates welcoming, safe environment

By Marilyn Urness

Vanessa Delgado strives to create a safe space for the students of Eastern Washington University (EWU). She works closely with a student staff and attends EWU’s community events to meet and talk to new students. She strives to be open and friendly to connect with students and create a welcoming environment in the Multicultural Center.

The Multicultural Center, known as the MCC, is part of the Division of Student Affairs. It was founded in 2017 to provide student support for diversity and inclusion at the university.

While EWU had individual programs, such as the Pride Center, Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies, there was no central program or space for students of color to gather in community. Students, advocating for an office to represent marginalized students, brought this concern to EWU’s administration. The students felt that their voices as students of color were not being heard and considered by the university.

“Vanessa was a high-first-generation population. Many are from underrepresented backgrounds,” Vanessa explained.

In response, EWU established the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2016. It works with the Pride Center. In 2017, the office then established the MCC.

It was first located in a temporary room in an office and a lounge space. When renovation of the Pence Union Building (PUB) was completed in 2019, the MCC gained a location in PUB 329, with a full-size student lounge, kitchen, office space, meditation room and windows.

“Since student advocacy started the MCC, we really try to listen and respond to the community,” Vanessa stated. “We do this by hiring students as equity educators. They learn about the MCC via social media, the website and advertising events, and by attending EWU community events to engage with students.”

It hosts workshops, events and discussions to broaden perspectives of students and faculty.

The MCC has two main functions:

One is to provide a welcoming environment for students of color and marginalized identities.

“Some EWU students have never experienced such a diverse population before coming to EWU, and this gives them the chance to explore and learn more about different cultures and people,” Vanessa explained.

A secondary role is to invite white students to engage in learning about other cultures.

During COVID, the MCC moved some content online, doing virtual programming. Engagement was down compared to pre-COVID, she said.

“Growing up in El Paso, Texas, Vanessa didn’t experience minorization until the latter part of her life.”

Her mother was a translator and the population included people from both sides of the border. Mexico was on one side of the city and New Mexico was on the other.

“I grew up in brown America, not white America. I didn’t experience being a minority until I moved to Arizona,” she said.

“Vanessa went to Texas A&M University to earn her bachelor’s in psychology. Because students there were predominantly white and conservative, she experienced culture shock. Being a Latina coming out as a lesbian, Vanessa felt out of place and alone for the first time in her life.”

“I looked around and thought, ‘Oh wow, this is what it’s like to be a minority,’” she said.

Vanessa didn’t feel out of place for long, because she found a home away from home when she became a student employee for the Women’s and Gender Equity Resource Center. The center then became two offices: LGBT Resource Center and Women’s Resource Center. In this space, she felt safe and accepted. Then she flourished in college, and helped other people find a sense of community and belonging.

“I was 17 and coming out. By all accounts, I should not have been happy at A&M, but I was because I had that safe place, a place of belonging,” she said.

When Vanessa moved to North- ern Arizona University, she was a part of the LGBTQ+ Task Force responsible for needs of LGBTQ+ students. The task force later founded the Office of LGBTQ+ Resources and Support.

“I loved working with a community and helping impact a whole community all at once versus one person at a time,” she explained. “It was a way, psychology was helpful when trying to connect with multiple people versus just one.”

One day Vanessa was talking to a friend about finding job opportunities. Her friend asked what she liked doing. Vanessa said she loved working with communities at colleges.

“I realized I wanted to work in higher education,” she said.

Vanessa moved to the University of Kansas to manage the Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity, working to provide a safe place for students to feel at home. She was able to direct the program as it grew.

“Since student advocacy started the MCC, we really try to listen and respond to the community,” Vanessa stated. “We do this by hiring students as equity educators. They learn about the MCC via social media, the website and advertising events, and by attending EWU community events to engage with students. They reach out to the community and engage with students.”

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“I’ve often been part of the start of the programs, the ground zero,” Vanessa explained. “It gives me the ability to be flexible and grow with the program.”

When Vanessa was hired as the director for the then new Multicultural Center at EWU, she and her wife found a welcoming place to settle down and start a family, she said.

For information, call 359-4121, email mcc@ewu.edu or visit https://inside.ewu.edu/
We’ve got to be carefully taught to hate and fear from year to year

The concern raised about critical race theory—learning about the impact of racism on systems and people—calls us to look at how, as a song from the musical “South Pacific” puts it, “We got to be careful out there. We got to be carefully taught to hate and fear.” “From year to year” about people whose eyes and skin are different from our own. Teaching impairs empathy and impedes love. What might happen if “we’re” not taught? What might happen if we are taught to hate and be afraid of people who are different from “us?”

For those who have been carefully taught, it’s necessary to teach more than one point of view about what, as Leonard Pitts Jr., columnist for the Miami Herald, says, “is as amazing as it is mundane: the world being unhinged, enslaving the Africans, killing the indigenous, deporting the Mexi- cans. A small portion of that history—how can we do it without justice making white children feel, well…bad?’

As such children are fragile to have their empathy and solidarity with suffering people aroused, to have their indignity about injustice and oppression awakened.

Leonard goes on to tell about his daugh- ter at age five putting her arm beside his and asking, “Mommy, was this ‘tarn, not black.’ I remember a five-year-old in a black fam- ily I visited in 1968 near Boston—probably was six—sitting next to me. His mother was visiting—asked me what color I was. I looked at my arm and said, “pink.”

By the way, it had been involved in 1960s civil rights protests and growing aware- ness that my great-grandfather was part Irish/Portuguese/Indian. I learned two years ago he was sold by his white father as an indentured “servant.”

My journey to inter-racial, inter-cultural and inter-religious empathy has been for that learning. In eighth grade, I sat for weeks right next to a bulletin board with photos of those who died. I saw pictures. Those wanting an iron grip on power, however, lost. Churches opened doors to worshippers. The people knew. They wanted to be free. They broke through the walls that divided their soci- ety and families. Those in power had to let the wall fall—then claimed they did it.

We’ve got to be carefully taught to hate and fear from year to year.

What we have learned about being the church and engaging in ministry during this time of COVID will shape us for generations to come. We have learned that Episcopalians can make changes quickly and effectively when we need to. We have been reminded that the church is the people, not the building, and we have also learned that all of our buildings are for facilitating our congregations’ ministries.

This year started with the promise that I now call the winter of our discontent, then into a spring of hopefulness, and the burning off of hopes in the heat of summer. We experienced congregations going into and out of, and into, and out of, in-person worship.

We urged our people to get vaccinated. We talked about it. We did it. We had the challenge of the mask mandate returning to those who live in Washington. Currently we see our hospitals packed with severely ill patients who have COVID. Clearly, we are in this for the long haul and so the process of engaging in our ministries while keeping our people safe and healthy is ongoing.

Ministries are alive and well in the diocese. Women had an online retreat with more than 60 from around the diocese. Men had zoom Bible study in three groups during the year, joining one another across congregations and are planning a virtual retreat for next month. These experiences have brought our members together in new ways to deepen their life in Christ.

Our Creation Care working group and Beloved Community working group continue to meet and are looking forward to doing more with the larger diocese.

This year we launched four regional groups of the Beloved Community of Hope is a Benedictine based pastoral care training. There were already three groups in the diocese. With this initiative, we were able to have groups in every region, with congregations joining for the training. It’s great to have more people with the skills and ability to provide pastoral care, to support one another.

These ministries are beautiful examples of our church embracing the challenges of this time to walk together, study together, worship together and serve together.

Bishop Gretchen Renberg
Episcopal Diocese of Spokane
Women’s Hearth creates compassionate space for women downtown

By Catherine Ferguson, SNJM

Women’s Hearth celebrates 30 years of presence to women in downtown Spokane. It provides activities, classes, social-service referrals and housing-search case management in a compassionate and supportive environment seven days a week.

Participants have access to phones, computers, internet, healthy food, hygiene supplies, free showers, and a respite room. None of these makes the Hearth a unique program. The fact that so many participants feel accepted as regular persons and for who they are are leads them to recognize the Hearth as a community where they are safe, secure and belong. That makes it a unique program.

The current program director, Susan Tyler-Babkirk, speaks warmly of the program, its history and memories.

“The women talk about their memories in both the new and the old building. I have only been here for a few years and was not in the old building, but I love to hear their stories,” she said.

In December 1990, she then Women’s Drop-In Center was begun by Holy Names Sister Cathy Beckley, who had a heart for needs of women on the streets. No one could have known that 30 years later it would need to be and continue to be a place of safety, security and community for women in the city.

At first, the Drop-In Center was housed rent free on the first floor of the Jefferson Hotel.

“Our beginnings were very humble,” said Sister Cathy. “My phone bill was paid by another woman who participated in a prayer group I directed and everything else was done by volunteers or given to us.”

Today, two moves away from the Jefferson Hotel, the Hearth is in its own permanent space at 920 W. 2nd Ave. It has also changed its name from Women’s Drop-In Center to a more inviting name, Women’s Hearth and has become a program of Transitions.

It remains as it was in 1990, a safe space for women who have experienced poverty, trauma and/or homelessness, offering women a “hearth” of welcome, respect and community as a drop-in day center in downtown Spokane.

In the last year, 900 women accessed the Hearth and 33 of them found permanent housing.

Sarah Lickfold, Transitions development director, describes the Hearth as a unique program in the United States.

“One reason for this is the access women who are homeless have. Hope House, an overnight women’s shelter, is now only a few minutes’ walk from the Hearth. This means women who stay overnight at Hope House have a safe, secure and family-like place with many resources to come to during the day,” she said.

Over and over during the recent Transitions “People Who Care” fundraiser, which featured the Hearth’s 30-year anniversary, the women, staff and volunteers emphasized their sense of belonging and the sense of community that made such a positive difference in their lives.

Sister Patty Beattie, the Hearth’s second director, while it was still the Drop-In Center and on Howard St., described a serendipitous event that helped build a sense of community in her time.

“A woman who was living on the third floor of the hotel where we were, came to us one day because her apartment was being renovated and they were going to start charging her an extra $300 because she had a pet—a parakeet. She wanted us to take the parakeet because she couldn’t afford that extra charge.”

At first Sister Patty didn’t want to take the bird but she eventually did only to find out that it gave great comfort to some women who were troubled when they came in.

“A woman would come and sit down in front of the bird, begin talking with it, and it would talk back to her. After a time, I could see her visibly relax, and then come in the rest of the way and engage positively with others.”

The bird is no longer there but many other special things take place that help everyone feel that the Hearth is a community where they belong: an annual spring prom, a knitting and crochet circle, a snow event in the middle of a hot summer, birthday celebrations and as many creative events as staff and volunteers can provide.

In her keynote at the fundraiser, Anjali Dutt, a one-time volunteer at the Hearth, described learning from the women there.

“I learned from them about resilience in the face of compounded moxie, solidarity with others who have experienced harm and deep pain. I learned from the women every day about the joy of feeling that you are part of a community,” she said. In 2020, Anjali, now a college professor and researcher, returned to the Hearth for a research project, interviewing 22 women who participated in the Hearth for varying lengths of time. She found that coming facilitated a sense of agency and capability. The women could better accomplish goals they had in their daily lives. Most important, the women enabled how powerful it would be to be treated like a regular person when they were there.

“To them, we aren’t homeless people, we are just people,” one woman explained. “We are accepted for who we are.”

Another said, “I can come here and feel like I am a part of some kind of light, some kind of sanctuary, some kind of collaboration, some kind of future.”

At the fundraiser there were also women and staff from the Hearth who gave their first-hand testimony about what the Hearth meant to them and how it empowered them to live out the ideal that “the fullness of each person is realized in relation to others.”

Michelle Schlienger, an alumna from the Hearth shared a poem that expressed how she benefited from the Hearth and its programs at a time when she was suffering from mental illness.

“I felt very grateful that I was there. They always made time for you and accepted you as you were,” she said.

Susan said there are volunteer and employment opportunities for those wanting to work in this program.

For information, email info@hearth4women.org or view the video on the 30 years of Hearth history at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kW_Hi3vyh0&t=87s. Another video is at https://youtu.be/kVYiJemGVE.

Space heaters can actually increase your winter bill if used improperly. Only use them to heat a single, occupied room, and be sure to lower the temperature setting on your furnace while the space heater’s in use.

For more ways to save this winter, visit myavista.com/winterbill.