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The
Fig
Tree

December 2025
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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest
online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

Land gift opens path to healing

By Mary Stamp

Chris Parkin and LaRae Wiley, who started the Spokane Salish School (SSOS) in 2010 as a language immersion preschool, envision the Salish language and culture being part of the fabric of civic life in Spokane. Not only do they want people to learn the sounds, words and concepts, but they also hope people will know what camas taste like and how to live cultural values of respect, sharing and caring. LaRae’s vision of having a Salish village along the banks of the Spokane River is coming about through Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington (CCEW) giving SSOS two acres for a new school and community center. The land was once part of the Sisters of the Holy Names Convent grounds. Adjacent are 30 acres protected by the Conservation Futures Program, where students can learn about wildlife and native plants.

The Salish School of Spokane (SSOS) now has about \$3 million to raise beyond \$7.7 million already committed toward the \$10.7 million estimated cost for the new school. They expect to break ground in 2026 and open the new school in 2028. How did it come about?



Chris Parkin and LaRae Wiley see their vision of a Salish village on the Spokane River as possible.

In 2021, Rob McCann of Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington (CCEW) invited Salish School of Spokane to help integrate indigenous language and culture in Gonzaga Haven, a CCEW affordable housing complex where 60 percent of units would be for Native Americans.

While hesitant because of Catholic complicity in assimilation, SSOS leaders realized Rob was genuinely reaching out to bring healing. Rob said CCEW wanted to help the Salish School of Spokane create a Salish village on the Spokane River related to River Haven, a planned 72-

unit permanent supportive housing development. In addition to the gift of land, CCEW has pledged that after the 15-year Low-Income Housing Tax Credit investor period, they will transfer the \$23 million River Haven housing to the Salish
Continued on page 4

Episcopal priests’ sabbatical gives insights on history, interfaith ties

Heather VanDeventer, dean of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John in Spokane, and David Gortner, priest at St. Luke’s Episcopal in Coeur d’Alene, spent a three-month sabbatical over the summer traveling through Mediterranean countries in Africa and Europe. Since returning, they have been reflecting with their congregations on the impact of religious history and current interfaith and ecumenical life. David and Heather recently shared some of what they learned.

- They experienced Jewish faith communities reemerging

- after the annihilation of Jews by Nazis in Europe.
- They saw the slow, cautious increase of Christian faith communities in Muslim lands, and of Muslim faith communities in Christian lands.
- They encountered and studied about the roots of the spiritual traditions of Kabbalah and Sufism in Jewish and Muslim faiths in the Middle Ages.
- They visited shared holy sites and places of spiritual importance to people in the three Abrahamic faiths.
- They met people in different countries seeking to recover times of positive interfaith co-

operation and respectful coexistence. They are now sharing their observations in newsletters and sermons. In addition, they will offer reflections by writing columns in The Fig Tree. David is a member of The Fig Tree board. Beginning in June, they reconnected with some areas they visited on their honeymoon 26 years ago. They also visited new places in Spain and Morocco, including historic Jewish neighborhoods in Muslim-era sites in Girona, Toledo, Cordoba and Sevilla that span 1,500 years of Abrahamic religions’ history. “We learned stories of cooperation and conflict, respect and prejudice, trust and suspicion, and how rulers set the stage for positive and negative relationships,” David said. Under Moorish Muslim rule from 711 to 1348, along with mostly peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Muslims, Christians and Jews, there was classism with Christians and Jews consigned to lower classes, he said. “As Catholic Spanish rulers retook control of Spain, Jewish oppression and anti-Jewish
Continued on page 6

Behind the scenes are 130 volunteers

By Kaye Hult

When people in the Inland Northwest think about The Fig Tree, Mary Stamp may be the person who comes to mind. She co-founded the newspaper more than 41 years ago and has overseen how its media have expanded over that time. Beyond Mary, four other staff and about 130 volunteers each year make its media and programs possible. Malcolm Haworth edits the yearly Fig Tree print and online Resource Directory and is in constant pursuit of new organizations to add to it, as well as making sure information in it is up to date from year to year. As ecumenical liaison he helps coordinate the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference. Marijke Fakasiieiki, as development and editorial associate, contacts people to learn their stories, to network with them or to solicit advertisements or donations to support the venture. Kaye Hult, administrative and volunteer coordinator, recruits and keeps in contact with volunteers for the various tasks. Lorna Kropp, webmaster, keeps the website current. Beyond them is a cadre of volunteers who do a variety of tasks needed for The Fig Tree’s success. The Fig Tree is recognizing many of them with a brunch during the Dec. 3 mailing. “Sometimes we look at five to 10 volunteers helping at one time with mailings, deliveries, displays, editing or writing. Other volunteers host tables or speak at benefits, share in videos, help plan events or serve on the board. Adding up, I realized more than 130 volunteers make the newspaper and directory possible,” said Mary. “They help staff multiply their reach by doing a wide range of tasks.” For the newspaper, volunteer writers help write stories, and editors make sure they read well and fit in the space on the pages. Mary relies on some volunteer writers, interns and staff to write stories about people who are making the world a better place as they live out their faith and values.
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Religion News Briefs

Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111
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62 faith groups will divest from fossil fuel

On Nov. 18, 62 faith institutions, including the World Council of Churches (WCC), announced their divestment from fossil fuel companies, signaling to negotiators at the United Nations climate summit in Belém, Brazil, the urgent need for a fossil fuel phase-out, given the harmful climate, biodiversity and human rights impacts of extracting, transporting and burning fossil fuels. WCC general secretary Jerry Pillay said, “in this kairos moment we face today, people of faith have to pay attention not to be unconsciously or inadvertently complicit with the root causes fueling the climate emergency. Verifying with our financial service providers that church assets are not used to finance fossil fuel expansion is a moral imperative. “Fossil fuels are responsible for 90 percent of today’s CO2 emissions—fossil fuels. Let’s accelerate the transition to renewable energies through responsible financial choices,” he said.

Religious institutions manage a combined \$3 trillion of investments globally. Faith communities also call governments and banks to phase out support for fossil fuels and to scale up investment in clean energy. Faith communities pressed three key demands: ambitious national climate action plans with real accountability, climate finance as justice through grants instead of loans and debt cancellation, and a just transition toward genuine socio-ecological transformation that centers Indigenous wisdom and rejects false solutions. Protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples, children and other vulnerable groups is integral to this transformation.

Christian leaders commemorate Council of Nicaea

Commemorating the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, faith leaders gathered on Nov. 28 in Nicaea—modern-day Iznik, Türkiye . World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Jerry Pillay joined Pope Leo XIV and His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew on Constantinople, head of the Eastern Orthodox Church, for an ecumenical prayer service.

Pope Leo XIV said, “We live in a time marked by tragic signs, yet we are linked by a profound bond. We are invited to overcome the scandal of the divisions that unfortunately still exist, to nurture the desire for unity for which Jesus prayed and gave his life,” he said. “Today, the whole of humanity afflicted by violence and conflict is crying out for reconciliation.” **Bartholomew said** the commemoration expresses hope in world with upheavals, difficulties and divisions: “We bear living witness to the same faith expressed at Nicaea,” he said. “We return to this wellspring of the Christian faith to move forward. The power of this place does not reside in what passes away but in what endures forever.”

Pillay read from John 17, Jesus’ prayer: “That they all shall be one, just as you, my Father, are in me, and I am in you.” **Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Leo XIV signed** a Joint Declaration giving thanks for the meeting 1700 years ago and today: “This anniversary can inspire new, courageous steps towards unity. The goal of Christian unity contributes to peace among all peoples,” the declaration says, encouraging the whole of humanity to knit together. “While we are deeply alarmed by the current international situation, we do not lose hope. God will not abandon humanity.”

China Christian Council welcomes WCC

The China Christian Council, Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and Amity Foundation welcomed WCC leaders Nov. 17 to 18, for a pilgrimage and encounter with people and churches in China, as many gathered before the Nov. 20 to 25 Executive Committee meeting in Hangzhou. WCC leaders learned churches are growing rapidly and have drawn tens of millions of people with 350,000 baptized each year, and pastors trained at 22 theological colleges. They learned of theological renewal rooted in Chinese culture that explains Christian faith in modern Chinese contexts.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Fig Tree seeks to reach goal of \$16,000

As of press time, The Fig Tree had raised \$9,700 toward its Fall Fund Drive and year-end giving goal of \$16,000, with hopes of surpassing that goal to fill in for gaps in other income sources. Of that amount, \$4,325 was in matching funds donated by the board of directors. “From donors who gave in 2024 but have not yet given in 2025, we have a potential of raising \$15,000 more,” said Mary Stamp, editor. “That would cover what we need and start us strong for 2026.” The Fig Tree has mailed let-

ters, sent emails, made calls, sent texts and posted on Facebook to encourage readers to donate again. “We use the public broadcasting model of being available free and inviting support, but we do not have the platform of radio or TV to reach a captive audience with our messages,” she said. Whitworth intern Frances Fakasiieiki has been publishing bits of stories on Facebook and Instagram to invite people to read the full articles in each issue. She has also been posting clips from the benefit video and

quotes from speakers to invite giving, which has received 500 views. “We shared several posts on articles reminding people that articles are not just interesting information to read but jump off the pages, for example, to invite donations that are creating libraries in Ethiopia, to invite participation in advocacy and rallies to support democracy, to engage people in fair trade, and to put food on the tables of neighbors,” said Mary. For information, visit thefig-tree.org/donate.html.

Mission Outreach gathers gifts for kids

Mission Community Outreach Center needs donations and volunteers for its Children’s Christmas Joy event. “Each year, we come together as a community to make sure local kids experience the joy, warmth and excitement of Christmas,” said Ali Norris, executive director of the center. Mission Community Outreach Center will provide clothing,

books and holiday gifts to more than 1,000 children. They request new children’s clothing—sizes toddler 3T to Kids 16—such as jeans, leggings, joggers, long-sleeved shirts, underwear and winter hats. They also seek books for boys and girls. Donors may either shop for items or make monetary donations.

Parents come from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 6, to Stevens Elementary School, 1717 E Sinto Ave. to shop for their infants through sixth graders. Volunteers are needed on Friday, Dec. 5 to set up and on Saturday to help shoppers and clean up. For information, call 536-1084 or email mcoc.spokane@gmail.com.

PJALS trains in nonviolent direct action

The Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane is planning “Nonviolent Direct Action Training: What Activists & Organizers Need to Know Now” from 9 a.m.to 1 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 6. The location will be shared at registration. This hands-on training prepares leaders and individuals to engage in mass mobilization and direct action in the community. Participants will learn tactics and best practices for building the movements for immigrant rights, multi-racial democracy, and racial and economic justice. They will learn about mass

mobilization, and strategies and tactics for nonviolent direct action, de-escalation and non-compliance. They will gain a sense of choices and consequences of these tactics and how to implement them in a way that meets the goals of the movement. Liz Moore, executive director of PJALS, said that after the training participants will understand the many roles, risks, legal aspects and best practices for civil resistance and nonviolent direct action, be able to differentiate between terms such as civil disobedience, civil resistance,

non-violent direct action and non-cooperation, and learn to apply techniques for staying focused on the objectives of the action and not to be easily provoked. They will also learn about the questions and reflections to use to decide what role to take in an action. The training is co-presented by Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR) and PJALS. There is no cost to attend. Optional donation will go towards workshop costs; any remaining proceeds will be split between SCAR and PJALS. For information, email pjals@action.pjals.org or visit pjals.org.

Women’s Hearth sets two volunteer days

Transitions is offering two days of volunteer service from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 6 and 13, at the Women’s Hearth, 920 W. 2nd Ave., helping with cleaning, organizing, repairs and preparing hygiene and makeup kits.

Women’s Hearth is the successor to the Women’s Drop-In Center of the 1990s, founded by Holy Names Sister Cathy Beckley, who died on Nov. 21 at Mary’s Woods, Maryhurst, Oregon. She had a passion for justice

and was delighted to see how Women’s Hearth had developed in service to women in the downtown Spokane area. For information, call 455-4249, email afitzgerald@help-4women.org.

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Breakfast-Time - March 18

Persist Together:
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ALTCEW connects volunteers with seniors

Adopt a Neighbor is a community initiative of Aging and Long Term Care of Eastern Washington (ALTCEW) to recruit groups and businesses to assist older adults and individuals with disabilities with raking leaves and shoveling snow.

It fosters a sense of community among neighbors with nearby seniors and people with disabilities.

ALTCEW invites clubs, organizations, businesses, churches, community centers and schools to adopt one or more seniors or individuals with disabilities.

Each group decides how many to adopt. ALTCEW matches them with individuals and shares their contact information so they make arrangements from there.

For information, call 960-7281 or email action@altcew.org.

Tree of Sharing will serve 6,000 people in 2025

Since 1982, the Tree of Sharing has served the Spokane area to ensure that 6,000 people who might otherwise be forgotten will receive a holiday gift.

The Tree of Sharing opened Friday, Nov. 28, and is open through Sunday, Dec. 14 at Riverpark Square, Northtown and Spokane Valley malls.

The Tree of Sharing is collaborating with 44 local social service and nonprofit agencies who submit gift requests that are picked up by shoppers at the Tree of Sharing tables at the malls. The shoppers bring the items back to the tables.

Those items are taken to a warehouse where they are sorted for delivery to the agencies.

For information, visit treeofsharing.org.

Habitat Spokane dedicates new home

Habitat for Humanity Spokane is planning Home for the Holidays, a home dedication for a family who will move into an affordable home they have helped build.

The dedication will be from noon to 1 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 10, at Airway Heights. The address will be provided for those who sign up. On an ongoing basis, Habitat for Humanity Spokane seeks people to volunteer in the store, warehouse and construction. For information, call 534-2552 or email rsvp@habitat-spokane.org.

Liberty Park Library hosts Black Liturgies

Liberty Park Library is hosting Black Liturgies for Staying Human at 5:30 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 18, at 402 S. Pittsburg.

The December theme is “A Community Practice: Joy and Wonder,” which invites nonviolent, intersectional and interfaith meditation and reflection practice.

For information, email social@spokanelibrary.org or visit spokanelibrary.org.

Homeless Connect recruits sponsors and vendors

The 14th Annual Spokane Homeless Connect registration for sponsors and vendors is now open. The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 28, at Spokane Convention Center, 202 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

With the community experiencing food disparity, rent hikes, inflation and barriers to basic needs, this event brings direct service providers together in one space for one day, so those needing assistance have the ability to access what they need without barriers.

Last year’s event saw nearly 2,000 people. Organizers anticipate more this year, said Kari Stevens, organizer.

For information, call 458-2509 x 338, email kari.stevens@dshs.wa.gov or register at spokaneconnect.org.

Conference theme is ‘We Shall Overcome’

The 2026 Eastern Washington Legislative Conference will focus on the theme, “We Shall Overcome: Building the Beloved Community Today,” when participants gather from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 31, at Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond.

The opening will include reflections on the impact of music and songs that have influenced movements for justice.

The keynote plenary panel on “Spiritual Ramifications of Persistence” will include Episcopal Bishop Gretchen Rehberg, Lutheran Synod director of evangelical mission, Liv Larson Andrews, Max Oliva SJ of Gonzaga University, Karen Stromgren of Muslims for Community Action and Service and Gary Jewell a leader in the Mennonite Church and Fig Tree Board moderator.

Briefings on 2026 legislation

will be presented by Kristin Ang of the Faith Action Network and Jean Welch Hill of the Washington State Catholic Conference. Luc Jasmin III, the governor’s representative in Eastern Washington will also share.

Afternoon sessions include workshops on people power and creative resistance by Liz Moore of the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane; faithful education with Emily Clark of Gonzaga University, Steve Somers of the community college and Paul Schneider of Spokane Valley High School; art expressing advocacy with Shantell Jackson of PJALS; media literacy with Mary Stamp of The Fig Tree; faithful advocacy with Gen Heywood of Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, and community organizing with Laurel Fish of the SpokaneAlliance.

Next are workshops on is-

suess—racial justice, food security, affordable housing, environmental policy, refugees and immigration, and Indigenous issues.

There will also be resource tables with partner organizations sharing about their nonprofits and their work on issues.

Among the event sponsors are Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, the Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium, Dorothy Day Labor Forum, Washington State Budget and Policy Center, The Fig Tree, Faith Action Network and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Planning is still underway with invitations for workshop speakers, display tables, sponsors and other presentations.

For information, call 535-4112, email event@thefigtree.org or visit secure.givelively.org/donate/the-fig-tree/2026-legislative-conference.

‘Take Action Against Hate’ awards given

The Gonzaga Center for the Study of Hate announced the 2025 Eva Lassman “Take Action Against Hate” award recipients at the Human Rights Spokane Banquet on Nov. 6.

They are Florida State University’s Hate Crime Research and Policy Institute and Pardeep Kaleka, a Milwaukee-based anti-hate activist.

The awards are for an organization and an individual that challenge hate and make positive strides in the footsteps of Eva Lassman, a Holocaust survivor and anti-hate advocate.

“The committee is attentive to efforts that demonstrate impact,” said Gonzaga’s Aaron Danowski, who chaired the awards committee.

The Hate Crime Research and Policy Institute, founded in 2019 by Brendan Lantz, examines how hate, bigotry and extremism victimize people based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability and other characteristics.

The institute compiled the Tracking Transgender Homicide in America database and manages the Longitudinal Hate Crime

Victimization Survey, the largest ongoing panel study of exposure to bias and health outcomes in the country. It also collaborates with Florida hate-crimes task forces to bolster education and awareness of the inadequate reporting of hate crimes by law enforcement across the country.

Pardeep, a leader in the anti-hate movement, is committed to communal healing and combatting hate from the 2012 murder of his father and six Sikh parishioners by a white supremacist at the Oak Creek, Wis., Sikh Temple.

He co-founded Serve2Unite to help young people of different religious and cultural backgrounds build inclusive, non-violent communities. He is the co-author of

The Gifts of Our Wounds, a memoir and call to action co-written with Arno Michaelis, a former white supremacist Pardeep met after his father’s murder. Together, they have travelled across the U.S. sharing their story of reconciliation and healing.

Pardeep is a strategic advisor to Not in Our Town (NIOT), a national movement using storytelling and film to confront hate and promote local solutions. It produced a documentary on the Oak Creek tragedy and healing.

He is also an interventionist with Parents4Peace, helping people disengage from extremist ideologies.

For information, call 313-5368 or email nailen@gonzaga.edu.

2 FREE

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Spokane Valley United Methodist Church
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Gift of land for new school, community center is chance to heal

Continued from page 1
School “at no cost for eternity.”
“It’s a tremendous act of restorative justice and is a national model for partnering with BIPOC groups,” said LaRae. “We look at what it means to accept, forgive and heal. We need to open our hearts and minds and to readjust our thinking to bring healing.”

The present campus has no room to grow. The new school will have eight classrooms and a community center for cultural events, recreation and art with a capacity for 125 kids, so SSOS can again include high schoolers.

LaRae, the co-founder and former executive director, and Chris, the principal, and are doing presentations on the project. LaRae, who continues as a board member and the elder linguist, is recovering from a brain injury from falls in 2018 and 2023.

Brea Desautel of the Colville Confederated Tribe and Kim Richards, an Eastern Washington University instructor, are now co-executive directors.

Chris and LaRae tell groups about revitalizing the Salish language and culture, which were repressed by systems that grew out of colonization. For example, only in 1983 did it become legal to teach Native American languages in schools.

Chris said there are 29 distinct Salish languages across Washington, Idaho, Montana, the Oregon Coast and Southern and Central British Columbia.

“All are critically endangered because of colonization, genocide, assimilation, tribal termination and white nationalism,” he said, noting that half of the world’s 7,000 languages are headed for extinction. “Language is the foundation of human cultural identity.”

The last first speakers of Coeur d’Alene and Wenatchi languages have died. There are six surviving first speakers of the Kalispel language and three of Spokane.

For the Colville Okanogan language taught at the Salish School of Spokane, there are two surviving speakers among the Colville Confederated Tribes and about 25 in the Okanogan Valley of B.C.

“With the SSOS, there are now 50 new speakers. I am one,” said Chris. “Our family has three gen-

erations of Salish speakers—us, our children and grandchildren.”
Before COVID, the school also taught Spokane, Kalispel and Coeur d’Alene Salish languages but has focused on Colville-Okanogan Salish since then.

At the Salish School, one- and two-year-olds in day care, three- and four-year-olds in an ECEAP preschool, K-2, grades three to five and a sixth- to eighth-grade class are immersed in nsəlxc̓iṇ (Colville Salish), creating new Salish first language speakers.

English-speaking parents are required to spend 60 hours to learn Salish.

The 27 adults teaching Salish language and culture learn while being mentored and supervised on the job.

The Salish School, a nonprofit K-8 private immersion school, teaches all subjects in nsəlxc̓iṇ—chemistry, math, music and history—plus art, piano, powwow drumming and dancing, cross country, soccer and equestrianism.

“We invest in the kids and their families. The kids also read at grade level in English,” Chris said. “We want to open doors for them to follow their dreams—be it to go to Harvard or to live on the land,” said Chris.

LaRae and Chris are also adapting the Salish Language Revitalization program they developed to teach Salish into an Indigenous Language Fluency Transfer System to teach other Indigenous languages. They are now working with more than 30 Indigenous communities in Alaska, California, New Mexico and Australia.

Chris, who grew up in Deer Park, met LaRae, who grew up near Cheney, at Western Washington University. They married in 1984 and completed studies by 1989 at Eastern Washington University—Chris in Spanish and LaRae in history, music and social studies.

Before starting SSOS, Chris taught high school and college Spanish at Bridgeport, Wenatchee, Spokane (Gonzaga Prep) and Wellpinit. LaRae taught social studies, history and music at middle and high schools in Bridgeport, Wenatchee and later in Chewelah.

In 1999, LaRae began per-

forming music, publishing a CD as a singer-songwriter of contemporary Native American music—first in English and then in Salish.

She started volunteering to teach in the Spokane Tribe’s language program. In 2003, she started an apprenticeship in Colville Salish. She and Chris began team teaching Salish in Wellpinit, creating Salish books and recordings with fluent Spokane elder Ann McCrea.

They then created lesson books at the Omak Language Office with Sarah Peterson, an elder fluent in Colville Salish. With their children in college, they moved to live with Sarah at her home in the Similkameen Valley in British Columbia north of Oroville. From 2005 to 2007, they learned Salish from her and began making Salish textbooks. They continued to work with her from 2007 to 2021 once they returned to Spokane to care for their granddaughter, Mireya, while their daughter, Dania, studied to be a nurse practitioner.

They spoke Salish to Mireya in their grandma-grandpa daycare, while Chris also helped the Kalispel Tribe develop a Salish curriculum.

“Kalispel and Colville Salish are related, but distinct languages, like Spanish and Italian,” he said.

In October 2009, they started

the nonprofit Salish School of Spokane, with Mireya, LaRae’s sister’s child and two other children. LaRae taught four girls from six months to four years old.

With fiscal sponsorship from the Potlatch Fund, they rented a house on Cedar St. and opened it as a childcare center in September 2010 with six children.

In 2012, with a three-year grant from the Administration for Native Americans for \$250,000, they hired four full-time language trainees to teach 12 children and rented their current campus at 4125 N. Maple St. Chris became program coordinator.

They doubled enrollment to 24 in 2013, 50 in 2015 and 70 by the time COVID hit, when the school served children from age one to grade 12 and 49 employees. During COVID, they cut to 32 children from three years old to sixth grade, in part

by graduating eighth graders to high schools. Older students came to language classes. Now there are 50 children in grades one to eight, 34 full- and part-time staff and 26 adults in the intensive Salish program.

Mireya graduated in 2025 from North Central High School.

While 60 percent of students are Southern Interior Salish, other families represent Native tribes from around the West who want to be part of the movement to revitalize indigenous languages.

SSOS has an extensive curriculum as LaRae and Chris continue to translate and publish books for reading, science, math and algebra in Salish. There are more than 700 Salish Word of the Day videos on YouTube and Facebook.

For information, call 325-2018 or email info@salishschoolspokane.org.

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Pastor reimagines a multi-college, community-wide campus ministry

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

Emily Kuenker was installed as the pastor of Grace Commons Spokane in November 2023.

Emily’s position is a reimagining of campus ministry, which builds on the legacy of Lutheran Campus Ministry at Eastern Washington University but also incorporates a wider focus on serving students and young adults throughout the greater Spokane area.

During her installation, ELCA Bishop Meggan Manlove cited the passage from Ezekiel where God asked, “Mortal, can these bones live?” and Ezekiel replies, “O God, you know.”

“It is a wonderful passage for a ministry embarking on something new, full of hope and possibilities, recognizing that what we become will be similar but not identical to what we have been,” commented Meggan.

Tasked with creating a new faith community for students and young adults, Emily has been at work for the last two years building relationships.

Even today, Emily has no office.

“My work is meeting people where they are, whether that is classrooms, coffee shops, protests or community organizations. The goal is to build a relational faith community that is galvanized by a common desire to act for the good of our neighbor,” she said.

Prior to coming to Spokane, Emily was pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Logan, Utah, her first call. She was installed in that parish in early 2020 and her first experience with pastoral ministry was learning how to pastor in the pandemic.

“It was about learning how to be nimble, how to make one plan but be willing to pivot quickly as needs and circumstances change,” she said.

This experience was good preparation for her work in Spokane, where Emily is called to innovate, to be creative and to experiment with new expressions of young adult ministry.

Emily was born in Aurora, Colo., and grew up in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, but as she began to develop an interest in social justice as a teenager, she began to question church teaching.

“I started to hear how the congregation spoke about people who were different from us, especially those who didn’t share our faith,” she said. “By the time I left for college I had a lot of questions about whether my faith fit in my church of origin.”

Emily attended Gustavus Adolphus College, an ELCA institution in Minnesota, and majored in classics.

“I loved my major, I was a big word nerd, and I loved studying Latin and Greek,” she said.



Emily Kuenker meets young adults where they are.

“Seminary wasn’t even on my mind yet at all, but I think some of my professors and friends recognized the direction I was heading in long before I did.”

Seminary would come years later. After graduating from Gustavus in 2010, Emily returned to Colorado. During a year in the Urban Servant Corps, a service program in Denver, she was introduced to House for All Sinners and Saints Lutheran Church.

There she was moved by the preaching and the central teaching about God’s grace.

“It wasn’t until then that I had the realization that God’s unconditional love was for me. I heard the gospel for the first time when I was 22, and of course, that was a transformative moment, a life-changing moment,” Emily explained.

She attended Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., where, as part of her training, she spent one summer of intensive clinical pastoral education at the University of Minnesota Medical Center. She served as a chaplain in pediatrics with a focus in the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) and learned by experience that, as the director of her Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program told his students: “You have 90 percent of what you need already.”

An article about her in the seminary’s newsletter reported that Emily was skeptical but during that summer she learned that “the more I was myself and the more I trusted being Emily was good enough for the people I was working with, the more

I trusted just by being a good listener, just by doing things that came naturally, offering a reassuring touch, praying what was on my heart, all of that was good enough. It took me three months to figure that out.”

By the end of that summer, she had also come to another realization about herself and her call, which serves her well in this “something new” she has taken on as pastor of campus and young adult ministry:

“When God called me, God called me with all my gifts and talents and also with all my imperfections and deficiencies,” Emily said. “It is in remembering that and being who I am that my talent at being a pastor lies.”

When she finished her master of divinity, she received a post graduate fellowship, allowing her to travel to study Christian communities in conflict zones.

Over the next year and a half, Emily spent time in the occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank, Northern Ireland, Colombia and the Southern states of the U.S.

This experience changed her life.

What she learned impacted her profoundly both in her preaching and in her commitment as a follower of Jesus.

“I learned how essential it is to tell the truth. Truth is necessary for peace to exist on any level. We can’t heal what we can’t name,” Emily said.

She goes further.

“These Christian communities that exist outside the culture of

the white American church invited me to ask questions about what it means to lead a Christian life. What unites them is this idea that life is lived for others. We belong to one another, and the well-being of my neighbor is absolutely my business,” she commented.

“This idea became central in my pastoral identity. For me as a person and as a pastor, living a Christian life means that when there are children in my city who will go hungry, it’s my business to care about that and do something about that. When my immigrant and refugee neighbors are being taken from their homes and jobs, it is my business. When the people in power enact policies of cruelty in the name of a malformed Christianity, it is my business. Apathy is a privilege we can no longer afford,” she said.

Armed with these learnings, Emily is shaping an emerging young adult faith community.

“The work of Grace Commons Spokane is forming faith that is embodied in public life,” she explained.

Combining the elements of traditional campus ministry and community organizing, Grace Commons Spokane aims to equip young adults to bring the convictions of their faith to bear in civic life.

“If we look at these big social movements like Civil Rights, we see the church present and active as a vehicle for positive social change that moves us toward a more just and more equitable world. Faith communities have

a role to play in shaping a better society where all people can thrive, and we want to make sure that we are showing up for that,” Emily said about her hopes for the future of this new ministry.

In addition to her work with students and young adults, Emily works as a faith leader with the Spokane Alliance and is currently convening the Clergy Immigration Table, an ecumenical group of clergy and lay leaders from local churches working together on a faithful response to shifts in federal immigration policy.

“It’s incredibly important,” she said, “that as Christians we stand in opposition to policies that tear families apart, use violence and intimidation to make people afraid and try to exert control over people.”

She hopes that as Grace Commons Spokane grows, young adults will be drawn into this work as well.

“The hope is as we engage with more young adults, we can bring them alongside the work we’re already involved in, but more than that, I want to hand them the tools they need to be able to take action together on those issues that are most important to them,” she said.

“Our young adults are powerful, passionate people, who care about integrity and about the church living up to its values, and if we let them, they can show us how to be a church that does good in and for the world,” Emily affirmed.

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Priests believe people grow in faith as they hear others' faith stories

Continued from page 1
violence increased. In 1492 and 1493, Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain," he explained. "Spain is still finding its way in affirming the presence of other faiths—including non-Catholic Christians—after a Catholic form of Christian nationalism took hold in prior centuries and the dictator Franco magnified and manipulated its use."

"Leaders and members in the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church told us of the challenges of being different types of Christians in Spain before and during Franco," Heather added.

David and Heather began their visit to Morocco during the Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira, an Atlantic coastal city that was a favorite of Jews when many lived in Morocco especially after deportation from Spain after the reconquest.

They visited sacred sites and faith communities in Marrakesh and villages where the High Atlas Foundation guides Muslim and Jewish people together in sustainable agriculture, economic development and women's empowerment.

"In and around Fez, we toured old synagogues and mosques, visited tombs and caves that are pilgrimage sites for the three faiths, and met people leading the reconstruction of a Catholic monastery that sparked interfaith cooperation from the 1950s to 1970s," said David.

In his younger years, Hassan II, the Moroccan king, who reigned from 1961 to 1999, was inspired to make Morocco a nation that welcomed and affirmed diverse religious communities. The current king, Muhammed VI, continues this support.

"We met a Christian interfaith campus minister at an American-like national liberal arts university, saw Islamic universities and schools founded by women over 1,100 years ago, and met a leader of the American Language Center," said Heather. "In Rabat, the capital, we met leaders of an ecumenical and interfaith theological school who are helping Christian leaders understand Islam and Muslim leaders understand Christianity."

Jews were in Morocco in the first century when the Roman Empire annexed it in 40 CE, and Christians were present and active for the centuries before the rise of Islam across North Africa.

"In the last century, Morocco was one of the few Muslim nations with laws of tolerance and respect for other religions," David said. "When the Nazis attempted to force the king to turn over Jews, he refused, saying,



Heather VanDeventer and David Gortner in Girona, Spain.

"We are all Moroccans here." In recent years, there have been places people of the three faiths come together for shared Iftar meals during the Ramadan fast."

Heather and David spent July in Tunisia, Italy, Albania, northern Greece and North Macedonia.

"Albania demonstrates the strongest interfaith respect, co-existence and collaboration. This small country, with a complicated history and repressive era of Communist rule, has been reborn as a nation with pride," David pointed out. "It was long a place where Abrahamic faiths coexisted peacefully."

In the Communist era, all religions' houses of worship were destroyed or claimed for nonreligious purposes. Cemeteries were destroyed to further annihilate faith-related memory.

"Since Albania peacefully overthrew Communist rule, religion has reemerged strong," he said. "We saw new Orthodox and Catholic churches, Muslim mosques and shrines, and pilgrimage sites. We met religious leaders working in interfaith partnership for the public good."

Orthodox and Catholic faiths have deep roots, as does the Sufi and Bektashi Muslim tradition.

"Albania intentionally draws together strands from different Abrahamic religions," David said.

In Greece, they found the history of interfaith co-existence and collaboration more complicated with the interplay of the rise of Christianity and decline of Greek polytheism.

In addition, they learned of the relatively peaceful co-existence of Orthodox Christianity and Islam in Greece and Turkey under the Ottoman Empire.

"When war erupted between these nations and brought the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Lausanne enforced a mutual deportation," Heather said. "Turkish Orthodox Christians were moved to Greece, and Greek Muslims were moved to Turkey. Fear and tensions between groups and anti-semitism rose after this."

On the island of Corfu and in the city of Thessaloniki, they learned that Jewish presence once was strong. Thessaloniki initially drew Jews expelled

from Spain, and centuries later Jews escaping from antisemitic cruelty in Eastern Europe and Russia. It became known among Jews as "the Jerusalem of the Balkans," but Nazi incursions with Greek cooperation led to the destruction of Jewish neighborhoods, seizure of property and deportation of 54,000 Jews to concentration camps.

In North Macedonia, David and Heather also found a spirit of peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims, who shared sacred places. Houses of worship have been both Muslim and Orthodox Christian. Houses of worship and sacred water springs are pilgrimage sites. There are shrines to Saints Cyril, Methodius and others who brought Christian faith and an early alphabetic system to the region.

In addition, David and Heather found that Mother Teresa, who came from North Macedonia, is regarded with reverence. There is a shrine in the heart of Skopje that memorializes her, her childhood home and tells her life story.

In August, they were in Austria, Germany and the Nether-

lands, visiting sites of Christian Reformation history and cities where they have family roots.

"People were good to us when we identified ourselves as clergy on a journey to discover the coexistence and cooperation of Abrahamic faiths," said David.

They connected with Episcopalians, worldwide Anglicans and other Protestants in Europe.

"We formed interfaith and ecumenical relationships we hope to strengthen in order to build more meaningful connections for the Episcopal Church, American universities and other faith communities," Heather said. "We hope to help foster stronger interfaith connection and collaboration here in this country and particularly in our region to share the love of Christ by loving and respecting our neighbors."

David and Heather affirm that "we grow in our own faith as we listen to and learn from others about their faith."

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Be the Change 509 group rallies to thank ordinary angels for their work

Petra Hoy has gathered a group that likes to thank angels and saints in the region—people she considers superheroes for “getting in good trouble,” in the words of her “patron saint,” the late Rep. John Lewis of Georgia.

“There are always people who are just doing stuff and don’t talk about it,” she said.

“What we do with Be the Change 509: Eastside Gladiators is a drop in the bucket,” Petra added. “We just want people to know they are not alone, and someone will root for them.”

“After the 2016 election, I looked at what I could do next,” she said. “I realized elected officials were ordinary people.”

So, she looked at what ordinary people are doing every day.

In 2017, in the spirit of Obama’s words, “you need to be the change,” she started the group and called it Be the Change 509: Eastside Gladiators.

“We are not an official group. We just do stuff,” said Petra.

For a while, it was primarily political, like knocking on 37,000 doors with the Washington State Democrat’s coordinated campaign. They also did postcard writing to help in political races in other areas, such as two Georgia Senate races.

In 2025, the group began looking for other ways to help and started Freedom Fridays. About 10 gladiators organized regular rallies with other gladiators and friends participating.

In February, they gathered bras and undies as part of the annual Mardi Bras collection party for Volunteers of America.

“People like to do rallies. With so many organizations doing good work all the time, we reach out to thank them,” Petra said. “For example, we brought treats to people working at the Social Security office and held a rally nearby.”

One Friday, they honored KSPS-PBS, and the Spokesman-Review did a story on the rally, which drew about 75 supporters.

“We brought cookies and were given a tour of the TV station,” she said. “We learned that KSPS is the biggest preschool in the U.S., with one in four children learning from the shows.”

For another Friday rally, they



Cam Zorrozuva, Shelly Smith, Petra Hoy and Brett Kelley rally as superheroes for election workers. Photo by Gen Heywood

titled “Reproductive Freedom Rally,” the Eastside Gladiators, who wear a vest with an image of a gladiator, took thank you cards and treats to Spokane and Spokane Valley Planned Parenthood. Employees appreciated it. They also sent thank you cards to all Planned Parenthood and pro-choice sites in Washington and North Idaho.

When the group went to the new Crosswalk building with treats and thanks, they were given a tour to learn about the program and become ambassadors for it.

One Freedom Friday, they thanked the press—The Spokesman-Review and Range media—for the important work they do.

Another week, they did a combined rally and food drive for Spectrum Center. They also had a food drive for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center.

“To make the food drive on the corner of Sprague and Pines fun, we celebrated Taylor Swift’s new album and dressed as ‘Swifties for Freedom Friday’ and drew attention on social media. We handed out friendship bracelets with Swiftie themes,” Petra said.

In August, the group rallied for “Freedom Friday, We Love Teachers” to collect school supplies for the Student and Family Engagement (SAFE) Center.

“In October, we took balloons, thank you cards and treats to election workers,” Petra said. “Later that week, we had a rally and wore superhero costumes to express support for their role in assuring free, fair elections.”

“We dressed as superheroes, because we like to have fun and it feels powerful to dress up

as Wonder Woman or Captain America. The new ‘Superman’ movie has a message of hope in a time when it’s easy to give up. We hold onto hope and believe in good. Superheroes are about seeing good in people,” Petra said.

They have said thanks to the Liberty Lake Police Department and gone twice to the Spokane Veterans Medical Center.

They plan to thank the TSA and air traffic controllers at the airport for working hard without pay during the shutdown.

The Eastside Gladiators have visited the Spokane Public Library and sent thank you cards to the 12 Spokane County Library locations. They will visit the North Idaho Library Alliance on Jan. 23, to do “Hands Off Libraries: Library Love Rallies,” because “librarians can feel beaten up with book bans. We need to show them love.”

“We are on a roll and will continue,” Petra said. “People do not want it to fizzle. It feels different from other rallies. We show gratitude and support. People do not have enough cheering for what they do. They need gratitude.”

“Hands Off Medicare/Medicaid” will be a peaceful sidewalk rally at N. Ash and W. Wellesley on Feb. 6, followed by a Mardi Bras party Feb. 20 at Puebla Mexican Restaurant.

“For our rallies, we follow the nonviolence guidelines of the Peace and Justice Action League

of Spokane,” Petra said.

Expressing gratitude comes naturally for her, growing up with parents who were children in Germany and Yugoslavia during World War II and saw the devastation of war but did not talk about the trauma of losing relatives.

Her parents met in Canada when visiting Winnipeg. They fell in love and married. Petra was their first child. They moved to Portland, Ore., when Petra was four and became U.S. citizens when she was 17.

“My dad lived the American dream. Grateful for a U.S. soldier who gave him candy during post-war hardship, he wanted to come to the U.S.,” she said.

Petra grew up in Sandy near Mt. Hood and went to Mt. Hood Community College for two years. Then she earned a bachelor’s degree in environmental studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and a master’s in business in 1998 at George Fox University, where she met her husband.

They lived in Vancouver, Wash., Portland, the Bay Area, Mequon, Wis., and Redmond, Wash., when their two children were young. In 2009, Petra’s husband found work in Spokane.

While their children were in school, she became “a professional volunteer,” according to her kids—from coaching a jump rope club and organizing a running club for Sunrise Elementary to helping with math, language arts and cross country.

Entering political volunteering appealed after Petra learned of the struggles of her daughter’s Muslim Kuwaiti friend, especially after the 2016 election.

“My roots for gratitude come from growing up Catholic. I also draw on that from a family who are grateful to be Americans,” she said. “I want to pass that gratitude forward.”

Petra quoted inspiration from Mother Teresa: “Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

“I’m a fan of Pope Leo and Pope Francis,” she said, adding that she and her daughter, Dharma, did an El Camino walk in Portugal in July 2024.

“El Camino is a reminder that people have done hard things and endured hard times before us, and we can do hard things,” said Petra. “It’s easy to fall into despair, but we look for good things, like Mr. Rogers.”

This fall, the Eastside Gladiators took a break from thank-you rallies to work on the election, writing postcards for campaigns in Virginia, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, plus local canvassing, cards and calls.

Soon they will thank CHAS and the Spokane Regional Health District because “public health has taken a hit.”

“The goal was to get a message across while keeping things a bit fun,” she said. “There is so much doom and gloom. We need some fun.”

“We don’t agonize. We organize,” Petra said. “Anyone can write 20 postcards. It matters. Faith and goodwill will win. It’s hard to stay strong, but I’m obnoxiously optimistic. Some people are angels and saints. Their everyday is super inspiring.”

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Vets in family motivate housing developer to persevere on housing project

Having a father, a son, uncles, nephews, nieces, grandnieces and cousins who serve or have served in the Air Force, Army, Navy and National Guard motivated Dave Roberts to persevere in locating funding sources and through various housing organizations to bring the Vets on Lacey housing project to life.

Dave is now a housing developer at Widmyer Corporation, working in partnership with Volunteers of America (VOA) to complete the project.

VOA of Eastern Washington is planning a grand opening on Monday, Jan. 5, and homeless veterans will move into 12 units in two triplexes, a duplex and one four-plex. The project is adjacent to Jayne Auld Manor (JAM), a 48-unit complex built by Spokane Housing Ventures (SHV), a nonprofit affordable housing developer. It is named for a former executive director of SHV.

In 2016, Dave, then senior developer with SHV, asked owners of two homes on N. Lacey if they would sell so SHV could develop affordable housing. They were open to that.

“As part of a group with the Veterans Leadership Committee of the Spokane Continuum of Care, I worked with the late Sandy Williams, Black Lens editor, on a mapping process to end veteran homelessness here,” Dave said. “I learned the need was persistent and being addressed slowly.”

He considered how SHV might develop housing for vets and thought of the N. Lacey site.

An affordable housing developer since 2005, Dave began seeking public funding partners and found the two homeowners still interested in selling.

SHV secured a purchase agreement and Land Acquisition Program (LAP) funding from Washington State Housing Finance Commission and a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank to build five affordable housing townhouse duplexes.

In 2019, they bought the houses, moved in two veteran families and made funding appeals.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) helped identify and support tenants. He got a grant from Spokane Rotary 21.

SHV certified in 2020 as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) to receive city and county Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME funds. It then applied to Washington’s Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which with other sources meant Vets on N. Lacey was funded.

In late 2021, SHV merged



Dave Roberts

with Catholic Housing Services of Eastern Washington to form Catholic Housing Ventures (CHV), and the project no longer qualified for CHDO funds.

When Dave, who spent 2022 with CHV, found Vets on Lacey did not fit their portfolio, he sought another sponsor.

“Volunteers of America stepped up,” he said.

Meanwhile, new city zoning and density regulations meant the five parcels and duplexes grew to 12 apartments in four

buildings on one parcel.

The Spokane Housing Authority approved his request for project-based HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) rental assistance and supportive services.

In 2023, Dave moved from CHV to Kiemle Hagood, an affordable housing developer that recently sold its residential management and development to Widmyer Corp. in Coeur d’Alene.

“It took more than two years to find replacement funding. The city re-awarded HOME funds and, again, the big one was gap funding from HTF,” Dave said. “VOA closed acquisition of the site from SHV, we closed the financing package, demolished the houses and broke ground on construction in April 2025.”

Construction of Vets on N. Lacey will be finished before the end of 2025 and occupancy will begin in January 2026.

Health Care for Homeless Vets will screen vets for HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing project-based or tenant-based assistance. Vets on N. Lacey will have eight project-based packag-

es with supportive services and four units that are tenant-based. VOA will provide supportive services for those.

Those services include behavioral health counseling, substance-use disorder treatment, employment-readiness and job-placement assistance, medical advocacy, education access, transportation services, financial support, family reconnection and life skills training.

“Vets on N. Lacey took on a life and a path of its own. I just tried to stay aboard. There are so many participants in one aspect or another that have been supportive to see the development survive and persevere to suc-

cess,” he said, telling of finding inspiration from Jayne at SHV and from veterans in his family.

“My worst day can’t compare to facing armed combat. I couldn’t give up on this project,” he said. “I routinely kept in mind the future residents who served to protect us, were wounded or traumatized and now are homeless—on the streets, in shelters, couch surfing or doubling up with family or other vets.

“They deserve a safe, decent, dignified home where they can be comfortably housed and thrive,” Dave commented.

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New Story’s Guns to Gardens events will help turn guns to garden tools

Tom Robinson and Roger Hudson of New Story and Covenant United Methodist Church (UMC) recently invited folks to forge donated guns into garden tools at a “Guns to Gardens” event, and then they used the tools to plant garlic seeds in the church’s community garden.

They are also forging their vision through the nonprofit they formed in 2022 called New Story, which sponsored the event.

“It’s a way to express commitment to care for the planet and people,” said Tom. “We live between the violence-of-now and the not-yet of swords forged into plowshares, driven by the promise that one day every man, woman and child will sit under their own vine and fig tree in peace and unafraid.”

During the Guns to Gardens event held Nov. 22 at Covenant UMC, participants prayed in the Peace Cranes Chapel that honors those in the U.S. who died by gun violence in a mass shooting.

Brian Hewitt from Raw Tools in Seattle—raw is war backwards—brought his forge to cut guns into small pieces of metal and form tools.

Tom, who retired after 37 years of practicing law and 13 years of adjunct teaching two classes in American politics at Gonzaga University, said the experience of cutting up guns can be cathartic, especially for those who have lost someone to gun violence or suicide.

Tom also has found expression for political action by helping organize the Spokane Alliance in 1998 and serving on research action, teaching and lobbying teams. He grew up Catholic in Spokane and married a Baptist. He and his wife attend Covenant UMC near their home.

Roger came to the U.S. from South Africa after high school. After completing studies at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, he was ordained. In 1989, he and wife returned to South Africa, where he started an eco-village on the Gqunube River. Fourteen years later, he returned and served churches in the Pacific Northwest—five years in Leavenworth, two at Manito UMC in Spokane, three at the Uniting Church in Wilbur and six at Covenant UMC, retiring in 2022. Since then, he has spent time in study and gardening.

Roger helped Covenant establish a memorial of 1,000 white peace cranes the congregation folded with the help of Patti Reiko Osebold, a Japanese American member. The cranes are suspended from the ceiling over a corner chapel. In the midst of the white peace cranes are 145 red cranes, each signifying



Jonas Cox will use his equipment to forge more guns to tools.



Heated metal from rifle is remolded into a tool.

a mass shooting in the U.S.

“When we put it up 10 years ago, we had just 30 red cranes. Every time a mass shooting has happened since then, we added a red crane,” said Roger. “My successor, Megan Madsen, has continued the tradition. On each crane, someone writes the number who were killed and wounded, not counting the shooter, the place the shooting took place and the date.”

Megan acknowledges the loss of each of the victims by name, inviting worshipers to say their names aloud to symbolize their value.

The Guns to Gardens event also belatedly celebrated the Martinmas feast to mark the end of the harvest and the start of winter. The feast remembers Martin of Tours’ life as a soldier turned peacemaker, who chose Christ and left the Roman army to wage peace

“Connecting Guns to Gardens with honoring St. Martin of Tours reminds us that Christians are called not to the domination and violence of an empire but to the kingdom characterized by the power of love and nonviolence to redeem the world,” said Roger.

“Many are prisoners to the conventional wisdom that violence redeems, but we say nonviolence and love redeem violence,” he added. “We live in a society characterized by violence. Gun violence is a symptom. The faith community needs to lift up the alternative vision,” Roger said.

The vision to turn guns into

garden tools comes from Isaiah 2:4: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

“It’s not just guns into garden tools but guns into gardens. The completion of the vision from that text comes with every man, woman and child sitting under their own vine and fig tree in peace and unafraid. It is about active compassion and helping people provide food for themselves by using garden tools to grow food in their yards,” said Roger.

Guns to Gardens is hoping to partner with Johnny Edmondson of Growing Neighbors, which promotes people gardening in their community, turning their front, side and back yards into gardens.

Guns to Gardens, a national project initiated locally by New Story, is the first event. In the spring, participants may plant vegetables in other gardens to experience the peace and security of growing their own food.

The name “New Story” comes from the children’s and adult’s book, *Cory and the Seventh Story* by Brian McLaren and Gareth Higgins. Cory the raccoon and his sidekick, Owl, encounter the six old stories that don’t work: domination, revolution, isolation, purification, accumulation and victimization.

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Above are two examples of garden tools made from guns.



Tom Robinson and Roger Hudson plant garlic with new tool.

ure, Owl keeps asking, “Who’s gonna save us?” until Swifthouse invites the animals to a banquet to say the six stories don’t work.

“The seventh story is one of peace and love, where people move to the security of sitting under their own vine and fig tree.

“By turning a gun into a garden tool and creating a garden, we’re inviting people to choose to be a part of the solution by telling a new story,” said Tom.

The domination story leads to those dominated rising up in revolution that leads to chaos, out of which some animals establish their own village in isolation. The purification story arises from people living in isolation, blaming others for their problems. That leads to them wanting to oust immigrants. Next is the accumulation story that bases a person’s value on how many things we have. The sixth story is victimization, or not taking agency, he summarized.

The seventh story invites people to choose to build the nonviolent society they want.

“Our differences aren’t a reason for shame, punishment or exclusion but are marks of what make us lovable, so we form a new community,” Roger explained. “The solution is to tell a new story, the story of nonviolence and care for the common good and the planet.”

“From my 71 years of experiencing the six stories, I am convinced they do not work for everybody. They create mil-

lions of people without hope or equity,” said Tom.

He pointed out that the new story is already happening through many nonprofits that take care of the world by putting aside land for wildlife habitat as the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy, taking care of the river as Spokane Riverkeeper and protecting birds as the Audubon Society.

“Our slogan is: Choosing to prosper together by caring for planet and people,” said Roger. “That’s an approximation of God’s kingdom—a sustainable society creating equitable, sustainable economic, social and natural capital.”

Roger and Tom are on the New Story board with Debbie Stempf, a retired physical therapist, and Jonas Cox, an associate professor of teacher education at Gonzaga and a member of the Spokane Friends Church, who has a forge, anvil and tools and plans to offer more Guns to Gardens events.

For information, email roger@newstoryspokane.org.

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World Communion of Reformed Churches Council held in Thailand

In Chiang Mai, Thailand, the World Communion of Reformed Churches 27th General Council opened with worship that featured Thai drumming and dancing, and closed with a message “Hope Beyond the Tears,” sharing the respectful, prayerful tone of the deliberation.

It was hosted by the Church of Christ in Thailand.

Outgoing WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi said, “The last 10 days have been a celebration of our being in communion together. I thank God for how we gelled as a communion, even around areas where we still have differences—but that is God’s family.”

“The welcome enabled us

from different cultures around the world to be able to function and to feel free to deliberate together on difficult issues,” he said.

“The cultural diversity of Chiang Mai has given us many lessons,” said outgoing WCRC President Najla Kassab. “We were inspired by the role the church has in the society, a church that wants to share the love on the streets,” said Najla, who, coming from Lebanon in the Middle East, appreciated the inter-religious diversity and respect she experienced.

Incoming WCRC General Secretary Philip Vinod Peacock said, “Every delegate who came to this meeting will take a little bit of

Thailand away with them as they go back to their home countries.”

Duangsuda Sribuaai, academic dean of the McGilvary College of Divinity and representative of the Church of Christ in Thailand, was grateful to see the unity and cooperation among churches around the world.

“We learned a new awareness of the issues you have been talking about,” she said. “Talking with you gave us a picture of the issues not only in Chiang Mai and Thailand but around the world.”

The press noted the women in leadership, both within the WCRC and its 230 churches in 109 countries across the globe.

Najla was the first woman

elected as a WCRC president. Her successor is another woman, Karen Georgia Thompson, general minister and president (CEO) of the United Church of Christ in the U.S.

Philip acknowledged there is still work to do to empower women in leadership among Reformed churches. “On the one hand, 83 percent of our churches ordain women,” he said, “but in all our churches, only 23 percent of our leadership are women.”

WCRC leaders held a service commemorating 150 years of WCRC history.

“The service meaningfully captured 150 years of our life together and brought that into our present tense, joined by the

ecumenical community,” Setri said. “It was symbolized for me in the 150-member choir, more than half of whom were from Buddhist communities. We can sing together and make a difference together.”

For information, visit wcrc.eu.

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GU establishes Woodley Institute

At Gonzaga University the Woodley Institute for Civil Engagement and Humanistic Dialogue was established through a gift from 1969 alum Tom Woodley and his wife, Nancy.

Rooted in the Jesuit, Catholic and humanistic tradition, the institute will prepare students to lead with wisdom, humility and integrity in a divided time. It will elevate civil discourse, interdisciplinary dialogue and literacies of conflict and digital engagement.

In addition, a Woodley Scholars political science program will guide students to be principled public servants.

As a political science graduate who went on to Georgetown Law, federal service and 45 years representing firefighters and public-safety workers, Tom knows how rhetoric can harm or heal.

“Our country has many deep divisions and hostile rhetoric that’s not constructive,” he said, hoping the institute addresses that.

“Tom and Nancy’s investment allows us to form leaders who build trust across difference,” said Gonzaga President Katia Passerini. “Through Woodley Institute and Woodley Scholars, students will connect scholarship with civic practice and develop the habits of learning, reasoning and service that democracy urgently needs.”

The institute will offer lectures, workshops and partnerships to help students, faculty and neighbors practice evidence-based reasoning, navigate the media landscape and engage across worldviews.

“We need qualified people to serve the public interest and the common good,” Tom said, urging graduates to consider government service and hoping to nurture leaders whose words, actions and decisions bring light—not division—to public life.

For information, call 313-5368 or email nailen@gonzaga.edu.

Giving Machine set up at Valley Mall

The 2025 Light the World Giving Machine Initiative of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will have one of its 126 locations in 21 countries in Spokane Valley.

An opening ceremony will be held at 11 a.m., Friday, Dec. 12, in the Spokane Valley Mall food court. It will be open through Jan. 1.

Giving Machines—like vending machines—offer donors options to select nutritious meals, warm clothing, hygiene kits or livestock for people in need.

Globally, about 500 nonprofits are offering more than 4,000 opportunities for people to donate.

In Spokane, donations go to Vanessa Behan for emergency childcare, Teen and Kid Closet for clothes for low-income youth, Second Harvest Inland Northwest for food, Spokane Neighborhood Action Network (SNAP) for housing, energy and financial assistance, Project

Beauty Share for hygiene and beauty products, CARE for livestock and refugee meals, and Water for Good for clean water and hygiene training. The full donation goes to the charities.

“Spokane for the first time joins this global effort to share light and kindness in the Christmas season,” said Dave and Noreen Skogen, Spokane Valley Giving Machine city leaders. “We invite people to visit the machines and experience the joy of giving.”

“Giving Machines are a re-

minder that small acts of kindness can make a big difference. We invite people of all faiths and backgrounds to see how their donations can directly bless lives here in Spokane and around the world,” said Elder Hal Hunsaker of the local Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Giving Machines were introduced in 2017 and since then more than \$44 million has been contributed to charities.

For information, call 993-5544, email daskogen@centurylink.com or visit LightTheWorld.org.

INUUC finds new home at Friends Church

Since early 2024, the Inland Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church (INUUC) Relocation Team has explored locations where the church might put down roots.

They have visited sites, held listening sessions and gathered feedback from the members.

In September, the Relocation Team unanimously recommended that INUUC establish a long-term space-sharing partnership with the Spokane Friends Meeting at 1612 W. Dalke.

More than 90 percent of the INUUC support this move based on shared values, the aesthetics of the space, the sense of welcoming across spiritual and secular perspectives, the visibil-

ity of the location with sandwich boards on nearby corners and the flexibility for growth.

The INUUC will hold Soul Weaving services at 11:30 a.m. on second and fourth Sundays and then first and third Sundays on Zoom.

The INUUC Governing Circle unanimously approved the relocation. The Spokane Friends Meeting discussed the proposal and approved it in September.

“Our move is an opportunity to deepen community, live into our values of flexibility and cooperation, and position INUUC for sustainable growth,” said Erin Popelka, secretary of INUUC governing circle.

“I hope the arrangement will strengthen ties between our two traditions, which are rooted in peace, justice and openness to diverse perspectives,” she said.

For information visit inuuc.org.

Goodwill opens new location

Goodwill opened a new store and Workforce and Family Services office on Nov. 21 at 557 S. Main, in Colville. This is the third location in Colville since 1954. Goodwill sought a new location to expand its services there to meet the needs of staff, shoppers and donors.

“We are excited about the opportunities this larger facility provides our community, team members and programs,” said Clark Brekke, president & CEO of Goodwill Industries of the Inland Northwest

The location has 18,000 square feet of space for the store, donation center and social services such as support for veterans, payee services, community supports and career certificates.

For information, call 684-6162 x 3 or visit discovergoodwill.org.

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Public Notice of Funding Availability 2026 HOME Investment Partnership Program

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, through the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME) provides annual grants on a formula basis to cities and urban counties to develop viable communities by strengthening public-private partnerships and expanding the supply of decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing. Primary attention is focused on rental housing, for very low-income and low-income families. The regulations implementing the HOME Program are found at 24 CFR Part 92.

The City of Spokane, through the Community, Housing, and Human Services Department (CHHS), is seeking proposals for housing projects that increase and/or preserve the supply of affordable housing units serving extremely-low (30% of Area Median Income) and very-low-income households (below 50% of Area Median Income) in the City of Spokane.

An estimated \$1,124,000 in federal funds will be available for affordable housing development through the HOME Program Request for Proposals (RFP). \$374,000 is allocated to Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO). \$750,000 is allocated for award to any HOME eligible applicant.

Applications for new construction of affordable multi-unit rental housing, acquisition of multi-unit rental housing, and rehabilitation of multi-unit rental housing will be prioritized for funding.

The full HOME Program request for proposals, application, additional resources and application requirements will be available on the CHHS website at: <https://my.spokanecity.org/chhs/funding-opportunities/chhs/>, starting Friday, November 14, 2025. **Completed applications are due on Thursday, January 15, 2025, by 5 p.m.**

Technical assistance is required. For assistance in scheduling technical assistance, or accessing the application and related forms, contact the CHHS Department at spokanechhs@spokanecity.org.



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Public Notice of Funding Availability

2026 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides the City of Spokane with annual grants on a formula basis for the development of a viable urban community. CDBG funds may be used to provide essential public services, create decent housing, expand economic opportunities, and improve living environments for low- and moderate-income persons. The program is authorized under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Public Law 93-383, as amended; 42 U.S.C. 5301 et seq, and implemented through regulations at 24 CFR Part 570.

The City of Spokane, through the Community, Housing, and Human Services (CHHS) Department is seeking proposals for Public Facilities and Improvements, Neighborhood Improvements, and Multi-Unit Rental Housing Acquisition/Rehabilitation for Program Year 2026. These activities are collectively referred to as “capital” projects.

An estimated \$1,600,000 in federal funds will be available through this Request for Proposals (RFP). Of this amount, \$400,000 is allocated to Neighborhood Improvements projects proposed by non-profits on behalf of Neighborhood Councils. The remaining \$1,200,000 is available to fund any eligible Public Facilities and Improvements, Neighborhood Improvements, and Multi-Unit Rental Housing Acquisition/Rehabilitation proposals submitted by an eligible non-profit for consideration.

Applications for projects that improve childcare facilities, improve multi-family affordable housing rental units through rehabilitation and projects that increase affordable housing units through acquisition will be prioritized for funding.

The full CDBG RFP, application, additional resources and application requirements will be available on the CHHS website beginning Friday, November 14, 2025, at: <https://my.spokanecity.org/chhs/funding-opportunities/chhs/> **Completed applications are due on Thursday, January 15, 2025, by 5 p.m.**

Technical assistance is required prior to application submission. To schedule a technical assistance appointment or for help accessing application materials, please contact the CHHS Department at spokanechhs@spokanecity.org.

Pastor has found ministry in small, rural communities fulfilling

Knowing people as individuals beyond their racial or gender identity, not having long waits for medical appointments, conversing with neighbors at the grocery store and having skies dark enough to see the stars are some of the advantages Jeannette Solimine finds in rural life.

Since seminary, Jeannette, a United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor in Colfax, has been doing small church and rural ministry.

After serving Plymouth Congregational UCC Church there three years, she made a covenant with the Pacific Northwest Conference (PNC) of the UCC to do pulpit supply and community ministry in Eastern Washington.

With her background living in large cities and studying and working abroad, that might not have seemed a likely choice.

As a young child, she lived on a military base in Augsburg, Germany for several years. Then her family settled in Davis, Calif.

At 16, she studied a year in the Himalayas at Woodstock Christian International School in Mussoorie, India, with children of missionaries, businessmen, politicians and diplomats of many faiths—Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and atheists. She learned about it from her grandmother’s cousins, who had been missionaries in India.

After high school, she studied international relations in Scripps Women’s College at Claremont and spent her junior year at the University of Heidelberg. Her travels in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union included visiting concentration camps.

In 1986, she earned a bachelor’s degree and began graduate studies in international policy at Monterey Institute of International Studies, focusing on communism in East Germany. After she graduated in 1988, Jeannette went to China with 20 others to teach English. She was the only one in the group in Jiaxing, west of Shanghai, when the Tiananmen massacre happened. She returned two months early.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the USSR between 1989 and 1991, the focus of her studies became irrelevant, so she changed career directions.

Back in San Francisco, she worked in lawyers’ offices and began attending St. John’s UCC, where she was inspired to become a minister. She entered at Pacific School of Religion in 1997.

During seminary, she married John Solimine, and Sophie was born. Chrissie was born after she graduated. Both daughters’ disabilities now shape her perspectives and her life.

After graduating in 1999, and being drawn to serve small, rural churches, Jeannette came to begin a three-year Renewal



Jeannette Solimine served 20 years in ministry in Colfax.

Ministry in Colfax in 2001.

“When I told my parents, I learned my great-great-grandfather had started a Presbyterian home ministry there in the 1880s,” she said.

As a Renewal pastor, Jeannette was to report information about the church that did not make sense for a small rural church.

By then, Sophie’s autism and Chrissie’s genetic Davet Syndrome and mitochondrial disease were evident, so Jeannette offered to work half-time for six months to complete her contract.

Jeannette and John had bought a house. Because John has a business, they stayed in Colfax while she searched for a new church.

“Being up front about the challenges of caring for my daughters, I realized I would not find a full-time job in ministry,” she said.

Health care and costs also kept them in Colfax, where the girls qualified for Washington’s Apple Health Care and the local clinic had a sliding scale.

“It was hard financially and we were on food stamps,” said Jeannette, “but we owned our car and house debt-free, and my parents helped.”

Jeannette became engaged in the community, serving on the Colfax City Council, as a volunteer and as a substitute aide at the school.

Believing she belonged in ministry, she pursued being a specialized minister and staying in Colfax, where she developed ministries to the community and built relationships with area churches to do pulpit supply.

She eventually established a formal covenant with the PNC and Plymouth UCC for community ministry and pulpit supply in 2018.

Jeannette preaches in nearby Lutheran, Disciples of Christ, UCC and other churches in Colfax, Cheney, Dayton, Endicott, Pullman, Lewiston, St. John’s and Spokane. She served the Disciples Church in Cheney for a year.

From 2004 to retiring in 2024, her community ministry has

included teaching Bible studies, visiting residents and leading worship at senior care facilities, serving as volunteer hospital chaplain, leading services at a rehab center, doing funerals and weddings, and informally counseling and referring teens she met as an aide at school.

Those involvements have given her insights into the dynamics of small-town rural and small-church ministry for ministers, denominations, churches and communities.

After retiring from the specialized ministry covenant, she joined Community Congregational UCC in Pullman, but she continues preaching and doing community ministries.

Jeannette has observed that few seminary students are drawn to serve small churches in rural communities as had happened in the past. Several dynamics are behind that trend.

Most have debts and cannot afford to serve a small congregation that is unable to pay salaries denominations require for full-time clergy.

Palouse dry-land farmers live season to season. They rely on machinery, not farm hands, so the towns are smaller and there is little potential for church growth.

There are also few ways a pastor and spouse can earn supplemental income.

Jeannette described some responses to these concerns.

- Some churches have withdrawn from wider church ties and become community churches.

- Some denominations created ways to support lay ministries and provide training for local people to be ordained or licensed.

- Some small churches call retired pastors who have retirement income to supplement what the church can pay.

One detraction is that Eastern Washington has a negative reputation among some churches in other areas from media news on white supremacy.

“Despite assumptions that small, rural churches are racist,

sexist, homophobic, fundamentalist and white supremacist,” Jeannette noted, “those dynamics exist in large, urban churches, too.”

“Hispanic, Asian, Indigenous and African American people live in rural communities, as do gays, lesbians and trans people,” said Jeannette, “but people know them, because in a small town, everyone knows everyone.”

From preaching in many Palouse churches, she finds that bias against rural communities runs across denominations.

“Here, we can see the stars at night. Many small communities are safer than urban areas. There is less crime and less hate crime. Our biggest problems are domestic violence, drugs and limited services,” Jeannette said.

Some people who might otherwise be homeless live with family and friends.

“People know each other and take care of each other. We talk with each other at the grocery store,” she said. “We have opportunities to be neighbors.

“I don’t see homeless people on the streets of Colfax,” she said, adding that those passing through who are unsheltered might go to shelters in Pullman or Spokane where there are other services.

The Colfax Ministerial Association established a common travelers fund so people passing through seeking aid don’t have to go from church to church but can still get some help.

To respond to needs of poor people in rural communities, some churches and ministerial

associations offer food banks.

Colfax has a Council on Aging, serving seniors and people with disabilities, a food pantry and a Department of Social and Health Services office. It has “a good small hospital with the Whitman Hospital and Medical Clinics where there is little wait for appointments. In addition, the hospital foundation helps those without insurance.”

Jeannette finds that resources for people who are disabled are limited, but everyone in town knows and interacts with Sophie and Chrissie as best as they can. Both of the girls go to weekly therapy sessions.

“Chrissie and Sophie have taught me unconditional love,” Jeannette said. “They ground me and make me appreciate life.

“They have taught me to get along with people with whom I may disagree without losing my integrity,” she added. “I work with people in fundamentalist and conservative churches to raise money for the food bank and other community services.

“It’s important not to disrespect anyone’s lived experience or judge a whole community or region,” she said.

Similarly, Jeannette believes people in small towns benefit from pastors bringing new perspectives to them. Pastors also benefit from insights on life that rural towns and small churches can offer them.

For information, call 509-288-0799 or email revjeannette@msn.com.



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Volunteers make a difference in the vitality of The Fig Tree media

Continued from page 1
The stories offer hope, using solutions-oriented journalism that invites a culture of peace and justice. Three days a month, editors and proofreaders help to shape the stories, editing online. “There is value in having many eyes looking at the stories to ensure accuracy and readability,” said Mary.

The writers and editors do a two-hour training with Mary about The Fig Tree editorial approach, so they understand the vision for the paper.

To keep The Fig Tree enterprise in shape, a volunteer board of directors meets monthly to review finances and suggest ways to raise funds. They recently approved establishing The Fig Tree’s Sustainability Fund.

They also suggest story ideas and join other volunteers to carry out tasks, such as planning events, inviting donations and reaching out to others at displays.

Some volunteers gather on first Wednesdays to prepare thank-you letters and invitations to donate for mailing. Others pick up bulk quantities of each issue to deliver to worship centers and organizations in Spokane and other places in Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

In late summer and early fall, they help distribute the Resource Directory. Second Harvest also provides a truck and two volun-



Bonnie White, Betty Krafft and Carol Gauper volunteer with Marijke Fakasiieiki, back row, at Unity in the Community display.

teers to deliver large orders of directories to agencies.

Throughout the year, Marijke finds events for The Fig Tree to have display tables that showcase both newspaper and resource directory. Volunteers oversee the table, engaging with those who come to introduce them to The Fig Tree, give them a Resource Directory and invite them to join the volunteer team.

The Fig Tree holds three events each year. In the fall is the Fall Fund Drive. At the end of January is the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference. In mid-March, The Fig Tree gathers more than 300 people at its Spring Benefits.

Volunteer teams help envision and carry out these events. They suggest presenters, sponsors and resource displays from faith and nonprofit organizations.

“As volunteer coordinator

for The Fig Tree working with many dedicated individuals, it is important to give them a shout-out and recognize their special contributions,” said Kaye.

Many volunteers come back year after year, with some assisting since the paper began.

Some volunteer or join as interns through Volunteer Spokane, Handshake or Just Serve—places that list volunteer opportunities. Some sign up to help at display tables.

While many have gray hair, The Fig Tree volunteers include college interns and others who are working but seek a meaningful way to volunteer their time.

Erin Endres has been a volunteer editor for several years.

“I started volunteering during COVID when I was laid off. I continue to volunteer because I want to give back to a small organization. Reviewing news stories

is as easy as it gets,” she said. “I volunteer because The Fig Tree’s social justice lens is an honest, refreshing media approach.”

Living into The Fig Tree mission to break through divisions among people to build understanding, and promote unity and action for the common good, The Fig Tree welcomes the participation of people from all walks of life, and without regard to gender, age, ethnicity, religion or lack thereof, as long as they seek the common good and unity.

“Our volunteers matter. Our first interest is to build relationships with them, so they know they are working with an

agency that cares about them. It is important to let volunteers know they are appreciated as major givers with their time and talents,” Marijke said. “We greatly appreciate their gifts of their hearts and commitment to the work of The Fig Tree.”

“We are grateful for all those who share with us in this joy-filled mission of bringing hope, just by informing, inspiring, involving and gathering people,” said Mary. “Their donation of their time, energy and skills become a major people effort. Many thanks to all.”

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

2025 volunteers who were event speakers, benefit hosts, event planners and student interns, and did writing, editing, displays, mailings and deliveries.

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Editor expresses gratitude for many gifts and supportive words

As we go to press for this issue, we are grateful for all those who share their stories, insights and comments in this issue and through the year.

All who participate in story sharing, advertising, donating, writing, editing, mailing, deliveries, displays, research, planning, gathering, speaking, hosting and more are part of the fabric for our media venture that invites people to live

and pray for and with one another.

May we have a curiosity to listen to and learn from one another, to break through the bind of ideologies and theologies to the heart of people in the community, region, nation and world.

As we have been doing the Fall Fund Drive—\$6,300 left to raise—I have been grateful for the comments of those who spoke at our Benefit Lunch and for the

benefit video. Here are a few of those comments to inspire year-end giving.

- “The Fig Tree is a bridge between people, a force of love, connection and community.” --Pingala Dhital
- “Words have power to turn our senses, minds and hearts towards what is truly important.” --David Gortner
- “The Fig Tree makes our world a better place.” --Kristine Hoover

- “The Fig Tree exemplifies the power of sharing personal stories...and connects communities across continents.” --Kasahun Kebede
- “The Fig Tree weaves us together into a community striving towards a collective vision of the world.” --Cameron Conner

May your gratitude be expressed in your support as we end 2025.

Mary Stamp - editor

FLLC challenges comments, invites learning about faiths in the community

Several local leaders rallied Nov. 25 at Spokane Valley City Hall in support of their Muslim neighbors. Petra Hoy of Eastside Gladiators organized a rally in support of Muslim neighbors. Gen Heywood, convener of Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience (FLLC) and pastor Veradale United church of Christ; Brianna Dilts of Faith Action Network, Maisa Abudayha, co-executive director with Feast World Kitchen and Karen Stromgren of Muslims for Community Action and Support (MCAS) rallied along with many others.

After the rally, the Spokane Valley City Council held its regular session, where the Muslim community and other Spokane community members came to support of their Muslim neighbors.

Muslim community members commented on how they felt related to their safety after the comments made by Councilwoman Jessica Yeager were posted on her social media, saying she was a proud Islamophobe and that Islam has no home in the Spokane Valley. She went on to say that what she said on her personal social media post was free speech, and

she stands by it.

Muslim community members who attend the Spokane Valley Islamic Center said they don’t feel safe. Naghmana Sherazi, CEO of MCAS and member of FLLC read a statement from FLLC that was signed by 32 Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, individuals from Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, Ecumenical Catholic, Episcopal, Interfaith, Jewish, Lutheran, Muslim, Sufi, United Church of Christ traditions and community members.

“It has come to our attention that the councilwoman and the Spokane Valley City Council would benefit from education about Islam and possibly other faiths that are different from those held by council members” she read. “The language used by Councilwoman Yaeger is offensive and must be addressed. It shows a great lack in understanding of the Muslim faith and is dangerous for our Muslim neighbors.”

The FLLC statement said they ask the council to take this display of bigotry from a public leader and make it an opportunity for the entire city to learn that there are many faiths in the region.

“We call you to work with local faith leaders and faith communities to create opportunities to learn about Spokane Valley’s Baha’i, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Sufi, Wiccan, as well as Christian, Jewish, and Muslim neighbors,” Naghmana read. “Make this the start of drawing our community together in respect and building understanding.”

Many others who spoke shared similar words in their statements.

“She put an unwarranted target on an already marginalized community’s back,” said one Muslim community member. “She should not be in public office if she doesn’t want to serve the community as a whole.”

Other members of the Spokane community spoke.

One person who commented that, for someone to say that Muslims have no home here, is wrong because Muslims work and live in Spokane Valley, and their children attend school in Spokane Valley.

Other individuals called for her to resign, saying she should not be on the council if she is going to put a target on an already marginalized community.

Kawkab Shishani, a professor at the

Washington State University School of Nursing and a Muslim, told the councilwoman that her comments place people in danger. They invite hostility and fuel bigotry.

She went on to say, “We do not feel safe when a public official claims that our faith and presence have no place in this city we call home.”

Kawkab invited her to coffee, to sit down with her and have a conversation.

Towards the end of the meeting, Hilary Hart, a member of Temple Beth Shalom Jewish community, said that in 2014 she received the same invitation from Kawkab, and it changed her life in a positive way.

She said she went from being altogether unfamiliar with Islam to being and advocate, volunteer and a welcome guest at many potlucks where she developed a deep and non-judgmental understanding of Islam.

Hilary recommended without reservation that Councilwoman Yeager consider his offer for coffee.

Karen Stromgren
Guest editorial - MCAS

Letters to the Editor

Sounding Board

Commentaries

Family Promise, Refugee Coalition express their visions to serve

Do you know what we want most at Family Promise of Spokane?

To no longer exist.

We know the completion of our mission—equipping families and communities to end the cycle of homelessness—means there will be no need for us once that is done. We welcome that future.

To some, a future without homelessness may seem out of reach, even naive. We say otherwise. In our broader community, people subconsciously believe that homelessness must be because it has been for so long. It’s just the way it is.

Homelessness isn’t some unfortunate fact of life. It’s a complex issue, to be sure, and the pathways into homelessness are as numerous and varied as the folks who fall into them. Once we broke it down, examined the data and talked to families, we realized our community’s approach to homelessness fails in a significant way.

Many solutions to homelessness begin and end with shelters. The idea is that once someone gets into a shelter, they can focus on rebuilding their life. Although shelters serve an important function in mitigating homelessness, they cannot solve it on their own. Shelters are not homes. That difference matters.

All roads lead to home—or in some cases, the lack of one. Safe and stable housing provides the literal and figurative groundwork for anyone to thrive. Children need the consistency housing provides. Parents need its security. Kids need a place to study. Parents need a place to cook. The whole family needs a safe place to sleep.

Housing is inherent to our social lives

as well: Where do you live? Where are you from? Home is where the heart is. There’s no place like home. These common questions and sayings reveal that many people derive a true sense of self from home, which helps define who we are to ourselves and others every day.

Homes foster a sense of belonging and community. They situate us within a neighborhood, alongside other families and people with whom we share food, smiles and memories. They bring people together and anchor them in a world that seems to spin a bit faster.

While shelters provide some degree of safety and community, a shelter alone cannot stabilize a homeless person, let alone an entire family. Homelessness is inherently traumatizing, and while shelters provide a necessary stopgap, they do not provide the same level of autonomy and stability that a home does. Shelters do not stop the cycle of homelessness.

If we connect the dots, a child in homelessness grows up to become an adult in homelessness to become a parent in homelessness, and so the cycle continues—and it isn’t for a lack of trying. Someone who grew up homeless often lacks resources, family support and knowledge that many take for granted. So, what if we address these deficiencies a lack of stable housing creates?

The cycle breaks when our efforts against it go beyond shelters and jails. Our approach shifts and expands. Prevention is the best medicine. Band-aids don’t heal wounds by themselves—the body does. Prevention, as an approach, cares for the body of problems that make up

homelessness, rather than its most visible expressions.

Family Promise places families into homes, teaches them vital life skills and orients them towards their goals. We help them believe again. In the prevention approach, housing is step one. Whether it be work, schooling or even starting a business. Everything else follows.

Every day at Family Promise of Spokane, we work alongside families whose stories inspire us. Their experiences offer brief glimpses into the future we’re working for—one where every child has a home to return to at night.

For information, visit familypromisefspokane.org and sign up for a Come & See visit.

Samuel McLaughlin
Digital Marketing Associate

The Eastern Washington Refugee Coalition (EWRC) is concerned that the administration has set the 2026 refugee admissions ceiling at 7,500, the lowest in the history of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Most of these limited slots are reportedly reserved for a single group, leaving thousands of vulnerable individuals stranded. Many refugees have already been waiting for years—some even decades—for the chance to rebuild their lives in safety, and some who were finally scheduled to travel to the U.S. this year have seen their journeys abruptly canceled.

For 45 years, USRAP has stood as a beacon of hope and a testament to American leadership and humanitarian values.

It has provided safety and opportunity to millions fleeing violence and persecution, while strengthening communities across the country. In Eastern Washington, refugees have revitalized neighborhoods, filled critical workforce gaps, and launched businesses that create jobs and spur local economic growth. They are teachers, healthcare workers and entrepreneurs who enrich our cultural and civic life.

Today, with more than 42 million refugees worldwide, the need for U.S. leadership is greater than ever. Restricting admissions and narrowing eligibility abandons persecuted religious minorities, allies of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, and families fleeing war in Ukraine.

These decisions also carry economic consequences: studies show that reducing lawful pathways like USRAP could cost the U.S. economy nearly \$900 billion between 2025 and 2028.

Under the Refugee Act of 1980, the president must consult with congressional leaders before setting the annual ceiling. These consultations have reportedly not yet occurred.

The EWRC urges Congress to insist on a lawful, humane process and to advocate for a ceiling that reflects America’s values—at least 50,000 admissions, consistent with prior commitments.

The coalition urges people to contact their representatives in Congress to express opposition to slashing refugee admissions and demand a resettlement program that prioritizes those most at risk.

Karen Garras
EWRC communications
coordinator

Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed
Send events to development@thefigtree.org by 3rd Fridays

- Ongoing • **Second Harvest Food Sorting**, 1234 E. Front, M-Sat, call to set time, 252-6267, 534-6678, ekanally@2-harvest.org
- To Dec 4 • **Hope for the Holidays**, deadline to deliver gifts to YWCA Spokane, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., 993-9315, carolinem@ywcaspokane.org
- To Dec 14 • **Tree of Sharing**, pick up tags and purchase gifts for people in need, Riverpark Square, Northtown, Spokane Valley Mall, treeofsharing.org
- Dec 4 • **The Fig Tree Development and Board Meetings**, Benefit 12 p.m., Board 1 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org
- **Tree Lighting Ceremony**, "Remembering Those We Have Lost," Hospice of North Idaho, 2290 W. Prairie, Coeur d'Alene, 4:30 & 6 p.m., RSVP, (208) 772-7994
- **Sandpoint Festival of Trees**, Charity and Cheer Window Walk, 1st Ave and Cedar St., Sandpoint, 5 to 7 p.m., (208) 920-1841, katie@CRECidaho.com
- Dec 4, 11, 18 • **Taizé Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartletts@gonzaga.edu
- Dec 4-7 • **Holiday Artists Shop**, CREATE, 900 W. 4th, Newport, createarts.org
- **The Nutcracker Ballet**, The Fox Theatre, 1001 W. Sprague, 6:30 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org
- Dec 4-20 • **Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer**, Spokane Civic Theatre, 1020 N. Howard, Th-Sat 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., Sun 2 to 4 p.m., 325-2507, spokanecivictheatre.com
- Dec 5 • **Ringin in the Holidays**, Lilac City Voices Barbershop Chorus, St. Stephen's Episcopal, 5720 S. Perry, 7 to 9 p.m., 345-1021, lilaccityvoices.org
- Dec 5-6 • **Corbin Holiday Arts and Crafts Fair**, Corbin Senior Center, 827 W. Cleveland, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., memoriesbymema@gmail.com
- Dec 5-7 • **Kostelec Studio Annual Holiday Open Studio Weekend**, 1123 S. Cherry, 5 to 9 p.m., 868-8910, kostelecstudios.com
- **Journey to Bethlehem**, South Hill Seventh Day Adventist, 5607 S. Freya, Fri 6 to 8 p.m., Sat/Sun 4 to 7 p.m., bethlehem.journeyspokane.com
- **Weekend Retreat for Men and Women**, "Love Is Lord of Heaven and Earth," Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S. Ben Burr, 7 p.m. to 1 p.m., ihrc.net
- Dec 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13 • **One Magic Night at the Manger**, Northwoods Performing Arts Center, 3645 SR 211, Newport, dinner 6:30 p.m., show 7:30 p.m., (208) 448-1294, northwoodperformingarts.com
- Dec 5-21 • **All Is Calm**, Spokane Civic Theatre, 1020 N. Howard, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., 325-2507, spokanecivictheatre.com
- **Scrooge: The Musical**, Spokane Children's Theatre, 2727 N. Madelia, Fri 7 to 9 p.m., Sat/Sun 2 to 4 p.m., 328-4886, spokanechildrenstheatre.org
- Dec 5-Jan 9 • **Saranac Members Presents**, Saranac Art Projects, 25 W. Main, F/Sat 12-8 p.m., sapgalleries.com
- Dec 6 • **Christmas Bazaar**, 3rd Ave. Marketplace Senior Programs, 1215 E. 3rd, Post Falls, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., (208) 773-9582, 3rdaveseniors.org
- **"Non-Violent Direct Action Training"**, PJALS and SCAR, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., RSVP for location, pjals.org
- **Discover Your Inner Fire**, Wim Hoff Method, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, harmonywoods.org
- **Annual MAC Holiday Artists Studio Tour**, 2316 W. 1st, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., northwestmuseum.org
- **Antoine Peak Summit Hike**, Inland Northwest Land Conservancy, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., inlandnwland.org
- **Children's Christmas Joy**, Mission Community Outreach Center, Stevens Elementary, 1717 E. Sinto, 536-1084, 4mission.org
- **Lefse Making & Tasting**, Peace Lutheran Church, 309 N. Lake, Colfax, Quilt Raffle, 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., 397-2121, peacelutherancolfax.org
- **Live Native Art Auction and Market**, Elk Soup, The Philanthropy Center, opens 10 a.m., auction 12 to 6 p.m., 218-1929, ElkSoupED@gmail.com
- **Clothing Swap**, Spectrum Center, 1514 N. Monroe, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., info@spectrumcenterspokane.org
- Dec 6, 13 • **Black Santa Storytime**, Wishing Tree Books, 1410 E. 11th, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., 217-1866, wishingtreebookstore.com
- **Youth Makers Market**, Wishing Tree Books, 1410 W. 11th., 1 to 4 p.m., 315-9875, books@wishingtreebookstore.com
- Dec 6, 7 • **Gonzaga Candlelight Christmas Concert** Matinee, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 2 to 3:30 p.m., 313-2787, music@gonzaga.edu
- **Whitworth Christmas Festival Concerts**, St. John's Cathedral, 127 E. 12th, Sat 6:30 p.m., Sun 3 p.m., 838-4277, whitworth.edu
- Dec 6, 13 • **Volunteer Service Day at Women's Hearth**, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 455-4249, help4women.org
- Dec 8 • **Inland Harmony Chorus Christmas Concert**, 1912 Center, 412 E. Third, Moscow, 6 p.m., 1912center.org
- Dec 9 • **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference** Planning Team, Zoom, 1 p.m., 535-4112, kaye@thefigtree.org

- thefigtree.org
- **Common Ground**, Inland Northwest Land Conservancy Annual Meeting, CenterPlace, 2426 N. Discovery Place, 6 p.m., inlandnwland.org
- Dec 10 • **Seeds of the Future**: Garden Reflection & Planning Party, The Scale House Market, 4422 E. 8th, 6 to 8 p.m., thescalehousemarket.com
- Dec 11 • **"Pilgrims of Hope"**: Advent Day of Prayer in the Jubilee Spirit," Fr. Maria Lazar, IHRC, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net
- **Holiday Mingle & Cookie Party**, Spokane Riverkeeper, Community Building/Saranac, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., spokaneriverkeeper.org
- **Free Immigration Clinic**, Latinos en Spokane, 1502 N. Monroe, 5 to 7 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
- **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733
- Dec 11-18 • **Christmas Bureau**, Spokesman-Review, Catholic Charities, Volunteers of America ask families needing assistance to pre-register, Spokane County Fair & Expo Center, 404 N. Havana, volunteers needed, donate at christmasbureauspokane.org/donate
- Dec 12 • **Second Friday Artwalk**, Sherman Ave., Coeur d'Alene, 5 to 8 p.m., (208) 415-0116, artsandculturecda.org
- Dec 12-Jan 1 • **Giving Machine** by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, Spokane Valley Mall
- Dec 12-Jan 5 • **One-month Winter Retreat** on White Tara and the four Immeasurables, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Ln, Newport, sravastiabbey.org
- Dec 13 • **BrrZAAR**, Terrain at River Park Square, Local Winter Art Market, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., terrainspokane.com
- **Christmas Dinner**, German-American Society, 25 W. 3rd, 5:30 to 10 p.m., germanamericansociety-spokane.org
- **BellaCristo Christmas Handbell Concert**, Spokane Valley United Methodist Church, 115 N. Raymond Rd., 7 to 8 p.m., 924-7262, cathycfink@comcast.net
- Dec 13, 14 • **Spokane Symphony Pops 3**: Home for the Holidays, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat 7:30 p.m., Sun 3 p.m., spokanesymphony.org
- Dec 13, 14, 20, 21 • **A Night in Bethlehem**, Mode Campus, 2110 N. Molter, Liberty Lake, 4 to 7:30 p.m., 255-3734, findyourmode.com/events/a-night-in-bethlehem-weekend-1
- Dec 14 • **German American Society Christmas Service**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, cookies at German Club, 25 W. 3rd, germanamericansociety-spokane.org
- **BellaCristo Christmas Handbell Concert**, Holy Cross Lutheran, 7 to 8 p.m., cathycfink@comcast.net
- Dec 15 • **Christmas Carol Sing Along**, with the Palouse Choral Society, 1912 Center, 412 E. Third, Moscow, 7 to 9 p.m., (208) 669-2249, 1912center.org
- Dec 16 • **Inland Northwest Land Conservancy Volunteer Orientation**, 35 W. Main, 4 p.m., inlandnwland.org
- Dec 17-28 • **Global Holiday Fair and Bake Sale**, Nonprofit Cultural Organizations, River Park Square Mall, 928-9664, charity@spokaneunitedwestand
- Dec 18 • **Black Liturgies for Staying Human**: Joy & Wonder, Liberty Park Library, 402 S. Pittsburg, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., spokanelibrary.org
- Dec 19 • **Sensory Friendly Santa Visits**, Focused Behavior Solutions LLC, 1719 N. Atlantic, 12 to 5 p.m., 800-781-5536, focusedbehaviorsolutions.com
- **WinterFest**, West Central Community Center, 1603 N. Belt, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.,
- Dec 19-21 • **A Big Band Christmas**: Around the World, with Spokane Valley Summer Theatre, University High School, 12320 E. 32nd, Fr/Sat 7 p.m., Sat/Sun 2 p.m., 368-7897, collin@svsummertheatre.com, svsummertheatre.com
- Dec 20 • **Personal to Political**: Celebrating the African American Artists of Paulson Fontaine Press, Jundt Art Museum, 200 E. Desmet, M-Sat, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., 313-6843, Gonzaga.edu/jundt
- **Handel's Messiah Sing-along**, First Presbyterian, 308 S. Cedar, 3 to 5:15 p.m., spokanefpc.org/messiah, youtube.com/@FirstPresbyterianChurchSpokane
- **Community Mutual Aid**, 820 W. Spokane Falls Blvd, 7 to 8:30 p.m., ianfiorino97@gmail.com
- **Campana Sobre Campana**, Christmas in Mexico! Mariachi Garibaldi De Jaime Cuellar and Ballet Folklorico Del Rio Grande, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 211 E. Desmet, 7:30 p.m., gonzaga.edu/events
- Dec 23 • **Family Law Clinic and Services**, Inland Empire Legal Aid and Vanessa Behan, 1 to 4 p.m., inlandempirelegallaid.org
- Dec 28 • **Taizé Sunday Evening Hour of Prayer**, IHRC, 6910 S. Ben Burr, 5 p.m., 995-0987, ihrc.net
- Dec 29 • **Free Community Dinner**, Connect Church of the Nazarene, 4520 N. Crestline, Connect Dinners, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 919-1897, connectdinners.org
- Jan 8 • **The Fig Tree Development and Board Meetings**, Benefit 12 p.m., Board 1 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org

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Christmas Lessons & Carols
Sunday, Jan 4
Epiphany Lessons & Carols
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Church intentionally seeks to be multicultural and multiethnic

Restoration Church is intentionally building itself as a multicultural and multiethnic church that reflects Rev. 7:9, which describes “a great multitude of all people, nations and tongues.”

“The kingdom of God is not segregated,” said Andre Dove, the presiding preacher and apostle. “We have African American, biracial, white, Hispanics, a family from Thailand and a man from the Central African Republic.

“**God’s intent is that** his church should not be homogeneous or monocultural, but to be multicultural in Spokane requires that we are intentional in our efforts,” he said.

That intention is reflected in who is in leadership roles or power positions in a congregation.

“Monocultural churches often struggle to engage people from different cultural backgrounds as leaders,” Andre explained.

“We are made in God’s image, so when there are multiple voices at the table, those voices and needs should be heard,” he said.

For Andre, part of being intentional was his research of the cultural breakdown of people within an 11-mile radius of the Restoration Church at 2815 W. Sunset Blvd.

The demographic background is 78.9 percent white, 7.7 percent Hispanic, 2.8 percent Black, 1.9 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.5 percent Asian, .9 percent Pacific Islander, 2.5 percent other races and 10 percent people of two or more races.

“Knowing these demographics is part of gathering different people,” he said.

Andre said that Restoration has about 50 members.

“**Building a multicultural, multiethnic church** also takes endurance in continually compelling all people to come,” he said.

“There would be no need for Black churches if racism was not an issue,” he said. “We do not identify as a Black church just because I am Black. We identify as a kingdom church that desires the nations to come.”

Andre’s own blended family—with children ranging in age from five to 33 years old—reflects his vision for the church. His wife of six years, Laurie, is white. Her two oldest children are white, and she has a biracial daughter. Andre’s oldest child is biracial, the next three are Black and their own five-year-old child is biracial. Their oldest daughter is marrying a man from the Mariana Islands.

“God will send people to Restoration Church who have a heart to be in a multicultural, multiracial church,” Andre said.



Andre Dove is an apostle and preacher at Restoration Church. Photo courtesy of Andre Dove

“It takes time to engage other cultures. We do not know what God will do to tear down the walls of racism and sexism.

“God calls our church to be different. People are transformed by relating across race and finding a place where their voice is heard,” he said.

He pointed out that those who ask, “Why do we have to always talk about race?” is not ready for multicultural ministry.

Andre shared his journey into ministry at Restoration Church.

He was born and raised in Joliet, Ill., 30 miles east of Chicago, growing up in Christ Temple Apostolic Faith Church, a Pentecostal denomination.

He came to Spokane from Joliet in 1988 when his mother moved with the family seeking a better life. Because there were few Black people here, Andre, then 10, returned to Joliet to stay with his grandmother, but came back to attend University High School as a sophomore.

At 19, he felt God’s call on his life to preach the Gospel. It was recognized by his Sunday school teacher when he was five telling his mother to have him sit in the front row because, “The Lord is calling him into ministry.”

From 1994 to 2001, he served the U.S. Air Force in San Antonio, Tex., Biloxi, Miss., and Tacoma, Wash.

In 2005, he earned a bachelor’s

degree in religion at Faith International University in Tacoma, followed by two other degrees in theology with an emphasis on urban ministry—a master’s at Grand Canyon University in 2018, and a doctorate of ministry degree in 2026 from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

While he has also been part of Baptist, non-denominational and Church of God in Christ churches, his foundational understanding of ministry began in the Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith.

“**I believe in the five-fold** ministry described in Eph. 4:11 and I Cor. 12:28, which says that God gave gifts to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These gifts are meant to equip believers for service, leading to the growth, maturity and unity of the Christian body,” Andre said.

His older brother is apostolic overseer of Restoration Churches and other churches across the nation.

Serving at McChord AFB in Tacoma, Andre joined Altheimer Memorial Church of God in Christ and yielded to God’s call to be a preacher.

After being discharged, Andre settled in Tacoma for a few years. From 2009 to 2012, he was dean of students at Vatterott College in Kansas City before returning to Spokane, where his

mother still lives.

“**I thought I would settle** on the West Side to avoid the racism I experienced in Spokane, but there were no jobs open,” Andre said. “The Lord did not want me there and closed those doors.”

He found a job at Spokane Falls Community College as a workforce coordinator helping adult learners finish studies to improve their lives. After a year, he was recruited to be dean of students at the STEM-oriented Pride Prep middle school.

“It was a wonderful school for kids who did not fit in traditional education. BIPOC students went to Pride Prep for grades six to eight and thrived,” he said.

For seven years, he was dean of students and then vice principal as Pride Prep grew and added Innovation High School for ninth to 12th grades. Innovation High continues, but Pride Prep has closed.

Andre left the school to go into full-time ministry.

“Restoration was a fledgling ministry trying to grow,” he described, adding, “I have done lawn care, electrical work, plumbing and put in new doors.”

In 2013 he started at the church, which was formerly St. Matthews Institutional Baptist Church. That church had moved from 5th and Arthur into the former Sunset Hill Baptist Church on Sunset Blvd. There was a two-year transition from the ministry of the late Eugene Singleton, former pastor of St. Matthews Institutional Baptist Church, to Andre.

“To have a fresh start, the church moved from affiliation with the Southern Baptist denomination. It changed its name to Restoration Church and is a non-denominational organization.

“**God called me to be an** Apostle. I am not the only one preaching. We also have prophets, evangelists, teachers and preachers. I believe in the work of ministry, edifying the body until we come into unity of faith and Jesus returns,” explained Andre, whose ministry includes a street ministry in the West Hills neighborhood with people who are experiencing homelessness or drug addiction.

“I pray with them and connect them with resources, such as at Union Gospel Mission,” he said.

One of Restoration Church’s preachers leads worship at UGM on second Wednesdays.

Andre has partnered with Kyrion Environmental for two years to train people for jobs in asbestos remediation, as building inspectors and other jobs. The company teaches classes to prospective employees at the church.

Andre also helps people search for and sign up for jobs.

Another partner is Cedric Bradley with the Hope Club. He connects with people on the streets, involves them in treatment programs and helps them find jobs and housing. He has outgrown the space at the church and now has an office in the Community Building downtown.

Andre sees that his mission is to receive people into the church and equip them to be biblically literate, so they are not only followers of Jesus but also leaders who go out to compel more people to come.

“I equip them to share the good news of God’s word,” he said.

Andre is the primary preacher and trains ministers, who share responsibility for preaching with him and who minister to him.

“I believe women can be ministers, so women preach, too,” he added.

In addition to his ministry with the church, Andre has a consulting group, Dove Consulting, which focuses on education, leadership, mentoring, church revitalization and diversity training.

For information, call 535-6926, email andre@restorationchurchspokane.com or visit restorationchurchspokane.com.

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