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FEATURES 70 EVENTS



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

Center aids resilience, advocacy, transformation

By Mary Stamp

In the five years since the Gonzaga Institute of Climate, Water and the Environment was launched in April 2021, it has facilitated efforts by the campus, schools, city, county, state and community to transform technologies, policies and ethics to turn around climate change.

Its founder and director, Brian Henning, is a professor of philosophy, ethics and environment, committed to integrating Gonzaga's Jesuit Catholic roots and Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical Laudato Si', "On Care for Our Common Home."

Brian, who grew up in Boise, came to Gonzaga in 2008 after earning a doctoral and two master's degrees at Fordham University in New York City and a bachelor's degree at Seattle University.

"We help the Inland Northwest understand and respond to the climate crisis. As a Jesuit, Catholic, humanistic university, we have the opportunity and obligation to help our region understand what's changing, why it's changing, what they might do about it and how the work has matured," he said.

Brian is one of five full-time



Brian Henning is committed to transform world views.

and two part-time staff, two senior fellows and 12 to 20 student interns who work with the institute.

The institute focuses on three components of climate change as society transitions to a low carbon future: creating resilience to the changes, advocating to change policies and addressing the moral and spiritual dimensions.

The first part of the Climate Institute's work is the Climate Resilience Project, which was inspired by the Northwest Heat Dome in June and July 2021.

Brian said it was the deadliest weather event in the state's history. The Climate Institute and Spokane Regional Health District responded by mapping heat across the city and finding islands where there was less green space.

"Heat was highest in areas with fewer trees, and those areas correlated with the income and race of residents," he said.

"We found a statistical likelihood that those with less money and those who were not white lived in areas with fewer trees and green spaces. In a fair world that wouldn't be the case," said Brian.

The Climate Institute, working with colleagues at University of

Continued on page 4

When systems of people who care work together they save and improve lives

By Mary Stamp

Systems can and do work. When they do, they save lives, making people ready to lend support to those needing assistance in major disasters, like the recent wildfires across Washington.

Firefighters, other first responders and volunteers with expertise rushed to the scenes as flames spread. Many had gone to the Colville Confederated Reservation when major fires erupted there. As they fought flames, tribal leaders began to

help people evacuate and provide food.

River Warrior Society, a nonprofit that usually focuses on building canoes and organizing river journeys with area tribes, began organizing drives and connecting people on their Facebook page to receive food and supplies for families impacted by the Modrite Fire near Inchelium sparked by lightning on July 17. They continued as other fires broke out. They knew the territory and could deliver donations

to strategic locations.

The River Warrior Society and Halmxilp Indigenous Birth Justice coordinators Twa-le Abrahamson Swan, Faith Zacherle Tonasket and Crystal Lee Conant provided direct assistance, deliveries and support to elders and vulnerable community members—short-term lodging, gas assistance, donated furniture and clothes, referral to services for the Colville Confederated and Spokane tribes.

That's what nonprofit and faith communities do.

As flames spread in Spokane urban areas, calls went out through the first responders' channels to Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and Australia and across the U.S. California was designated to organize the response in Spokane because other areas of Washington were burning.

Quickly firefighters, air crews, emergency medical teams and law enforcement arrived.

Evacuations were traumatic and may have seemed chaotic,

Continued on page 6

Resource Directory data compiled for fire response

The Fig Tree 2026-27 Resource Directory enters its 53rd year as the go-to guide, a much-used comprehensive compilation of congregations, ecumenical and interfaith ministries, human services, children-and-family, health care, senior, justice, multicultural, environmental, arts and culture, and civic resources.

Selected information is included in a short-term PDF guide after the Spokane Complex fires—at thefigtree.org/directory.html.

The Fig Tree published 20,000 copies—fewer than in 2025 because of rising costs—with support from faith communities, agencies, more than 125 advertisers and 23 community partners.

About 3,500 copies were mailed and the rest distributed in bulk to faith groups and agencies by 25 volunteers. Directory editor, Malcolm Haworth, distributed 100s of copies of the full directory to emergency shelters and resource centers after the fires.

The Resource Directory helps service providers direct people in need to resources that can change their lives. Agencies appreciate this service, so staff do not need to do the research to make their own directory. Staff and volunteers also give directories to clients as a self-help tool, connecting them in times of need to services and in times of stability to volunteer or work opportunities.

"When people lack access to the internet, the power is out or people lose their technology in a fire or when evacuating, a print copy can be a lifeline for them," said Malcolm.

"We seek to raise up to \$10,000 beyond our budgeted \$67,000 so we can print up to 5,000 more copies, because we gave out so many to fire survivors," said Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate. "Innovia has given \$2,000 and the Spokane Parks Foundation, \$500, toward the \$10,000 needed."

For information, call email info@thefigtree.org or visit thefigtree.org/directory.html.

Religion News Briefs Around the World

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

World Council of Churches is 78 years old

“Seventy-eight years later, we give thanks to God for the faithfulness that has sustained the World Council of Churches (WCC) through generations,” comments WCC general secretary Jerry Pillay. “We remember with gratitude all those who have prayed, served, sacrificed and worked tirelessly for the unity of the church and for God’s mission in the world.”

This anniversary is, above all, a celebration of God’s faithfulness, he reflected.

“The WCC has travelled through remarkable, turbulent times: the Cold War, struggles against racism and apartheid, the pursuit of justice and peace, the challenges of poverty and inequality, conflicts and humanitarian crises, the climate emergency and profound changes in the life of churches and societies,” he wrote “In every generation, the churches have sought together to discern what it means to follow Christ faithfully in the world.”

He gave thanks for the many voices that have shaped the ecumenical movement: “We are called not simply to speak about unity, but to embody it; not simply to pray for peace, but to become peacemakers; not simply to proclaim God’s justice, but to stand with those who are marginalized, forgotten and oppressed.”

Jerry reflected that God has sustained the churches in moments of difficulty, opened doors when the way seemed uncertain, raised prophetic voices when courage was needed and continues to call people forward.

GEM School evaluates government systems

What a government owes to foreign lenders from what it collects in tax and what it receives to cope with climate change has impact on how much is left for public services. From Aug. 17 to 28, the World Council of Churches (WCC) brought 22 church leaders to Panama City to study those systems and learn how to argue for changing them. It is called the GEM School, the Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life.

“Churches have been speaking about economic justice for decades. What is needed now are people who can mobilize congregations around the vision of an Economy of Life as well as sit down with finance officials to argue the case,” said Athena Peralta, director of the WCC Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development.

Five partners ran the school: the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council, Council for World Mission and United Society Partners in the Gospel.

The school rests on the 2012 São Paulo Statement, the WCC’s call for an economy that serves life ahead of growth.

It opens into an ecumenical consultation on economies of peace—economies reshaped to sustain peace and dignity rather than fuel conflict.

“Panama sits at the crossroads of global trade and finance, where the world’s money flows. It is a fitting place to ask: Who does all that wealth and money ultimately serve?” said Marie-Aimee Tourres, a development economist who lectures on global finance at the GEM School.

WCC says land restoration needs faith partners

The World Council of Churches delegation tells Conference of the Parties (COP17) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, that land restoration needs faith partners. As Mongolia hosts the UN Convention to Combat Desertification for the first time, nearly 77 percent of its land is degraded. The theme is “Restoring Land, Restoring Hope.” “We have still too much land degradation all over the world, from Africa to North America, Turtle Island, even in the United States. We find new science, but also newer and deeper theological perspectives to help us move toward solving these challenges,” said Angelique Walker-Smith, WCC president from North America, who was part of the delegation in Mongolia.

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Fig Tree receives Holy Names Sisters’ grant

Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary of the U.S. Ontario Province have awarded The Fig Tree a ministry grant of \$5,000 for 2026.

This year, 32 programs receive a total of \$146,825 in Ministry Grants, and eight programs receive a total of \$128,170 in Immigrant and Refugee Fund Grants.

“We are truly encouraged by the connection to the SNJM values and charism reflected in your request,” said Sr. Linda Patrick, SNJM, of the Province Leadership Team. “The work you are doing matters, and we are grateful for the opportunity to support The Fig Tree in serving the people and communities who count on you.

“Thank you for the mean-

ingful work you do in serving others. Your care, commitment and steadfast presence make a lasting difference in the lives of those you serve,” she added, noting that the Sisters of the Holy Names have ministered to the most vulnerable in society since 1843.

Ruth Safranek, a Holy Names associate and a regular Fig Tree volunteer with distribution and mailing, submitted the grant. In addition, Sr. Catherine Ferguson also continues the SNJM presence as an editor, writer, board member and development committee member.

The Sisters of the Holy Names have been involved in The Fig Tree since Holy Names Sister Bernadine Casey, who died in 2007, co-founded The Fig Tree

in 1984 with Mary Stamp, who continues as editor and publisher.

“We value our ongoing partnership with the Sisters of the Holy Names that helps support training in The Fig Tree’s peace and solutions journalism, internships with college students and support as a Resource Directory community partner,” said Mary.

“We connect with the SNJM mission of educating people as we share stories of people who live their faith and values and build understanding to inspire people to advocate for justice, promote peace and care for creation,” she added. “We cover stories that break through divisions other media and politicians foster to maintain power.”

For information, call 509-535-1813 or visit thefigtree.org.

PJALS plans party and annual benefit

The Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) will host its Community Spirit Appreciation Party from 6 to 8 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 9, at Finch Arboretum Woodland Center to show its appreciation for its members and to gather them to strengthen relationships.

“Members are why the PJALS community has been a steadfast part of the movement for peace and justice,” said Shar Lichty, development director.

PJALS will hold its 11th An-

nual Benefit beginning at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 14, in Spokane Valley (location will be sent to those who register), an evening event to increase accessibility.

The theme “People Power: Shaping Our Future Together” will focus on a shared vision for PJALS’ future.

As it seeks at this event to increase its capacity and funds to sustain its work, Shar said that “PJALS believes everyday people can accomplish extraordinary things together. For 50

years, we have organized for racial equity, economic justice, peace and human rights to build a multi-racial, intergenerational, all-gender, rural-urban, bottom-up movement centered on the leadership of impacted people.”

Guests will learn how PJALS strengthens people to join in strategic action that exposes and transforms systems of hate, violence, exclusion and oppression to build a just future.

For information, email slichty@pjals.org or visit pjals.org.

Habitat-Spokane launches recovery fund

Habitat for Humanity–Spokane is launching the ReBUILD Spokane Wildfire Recovery Fund, a community investment in long-term housing recovery that will follow the recent wildfire emergency.

The fund will support planning, partnerships and resources for long-term housing recovery as community needs become clearer.

During the emergency response, Habitat-Spokane focused on preparing for the

housing recovery that follows, coordinating with community, municipal, county, state, regional and Habitat for Humanity International partners to understand emerging needs and determine where Habitat housing expertise can have the greatest impact.

Long-term housing recovery requires preparation, coordination and resources before rebuilding opportunities emerge.

The ReBUILD Spokane Wildfire Recovery Fund strengthens

Habitat’s housing mission by preparing the organization to respond to long-term community recovery needs.

Habitat-Spokane is preparing so the region has additional housing capacity as recovery moves from emergency needs toward repair, rebuilding and permanent housing solutions.

For information, visit habitat-spokane.org/rebuild-spokane and follow @HabitatSpokane on Facebook.

Helpers Network reaches out to fire victims

The Spokane Helpers Network, a nonprofit that that has

teams of volunteers to do free deliveries of food and necessities on an ongoing basis, is offering its delivery services to those impacted by the fires.

Its volunteers are taking its services to homes, apartments, RV campgrounds, trailer parks and hotels.

They have streamlined their

application on their website for those who select “help for fire victims.”

Spokane Helpers Network offers nonperishable food bags, nonperishable meal kits, hygiene kits, kids snack bags and bus fare.

For information, visit spokanehelpersnetwork.org.

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Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane

pjals.org/2026benefit

Veterans For Peace marks Hiroshima Day

Remembering Hiroshima: Empathy and Nuclear War event hosted by Spokane Veterans For Peace was held at 7 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 6, in the Community-Building Lobby, 35 W. Main Ave.

The keynote was given by Sean Chabot, Eastern Washington University professor of sociology.

Spokane Raging Grannies shared music.

For information, call 209-2385.

Bishop, environmentalist discuss solar

“Solar for the Good of the World” is an EcoFaith Conversation, featuring Northwest Intermountain Synod ELCA Bishop Meggan Manlove and environmentalist and author Bill McKibben, at 3 p.m. (Pacific time), Thursday, Sept. 3, on Zoom.

They will talk about the biggest thing shaping the future of humanity: the sun. They will discuss how solar has a place in homes, churches and communities through the lens of faith and seeing all energy as a sacred gift.

For information and to register, email EcoFaithNWIM@gmail.com.

Spokane River faces climate crisis

The Spokane River is facing another climate-driven crisis along with the wildfires as portions of it are once again running dry, increasing the harm to fish, wildlife and critical river habitat, said Katelyn Scott, water protector. Portions of the river were dry for nearly a month until the Post Falls Dam increases releases after Labor Day.

“The Spokane River, the region’s lifeblood, is running dry. It is another devastating reminder of what a hotter, drier climate looks like,” said Katelyn. “We must take immediate action.”

Spokane Riverkeeper monitors flows downstream from Barker Rd. with the Spokane Community College Water Resources program to document impacts. Along this reach, the Spokane River water seeps through the riverbed into the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer.

“We need to change how we manage and conserve water, not treat it as normal,” she said.

A rally for Spokane River Flows will be held from 4 to 6 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 3, at the Centennial Trail Barker Rd. Trailhead, North Barker Rd. in Spokane Valley. It’s an opportunity to see low flows firsthand and learn why protecting the river’s future depends on protecting its flow. Participants will gather near Barker Road, march along the Centennial Trail into the dry reach of the Spokane River. There will be speakers along the way.

Spokane Riverkeeper will share what needs to happen to protect the river and how community members can take action.

For information, email katy@spokaneriverkeeper.org or visit spokaneriverkeeper.org/river-conservation.

Ecumenical potluck held in Genesee, Idaho

Palouse and Tseminicum Clusters will gather for an Ecumenical Potluck from 2 to 5 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 20, at St. John Lutheran Church, 648 W. Ash in Genesee, Idaho.

This is a chance to meet folks from other area Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America churches and those in communion partnership with Lutherans—the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America and The Moravian Church.

The potluck will also include neighboring Catholic and Community churches in Genesee with whom the churches serve the community.

The program will share how the Inspire Craft Group promotes love, connection and support.

For information, call 208-285-1719.

Parish hosts service for St. Francis’ 800th

St. Francis of Assisi Parish will host a Transitus Prayer Service to celebrate the 800th Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi at 7 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 3, at 1104 W. Heroy.

The anniversary celebration has been proclaimed by Pope Leo XIV, said Sr. Sharon Bongiorno of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

For information, email sbongiorno@fspa.org.

Shalom Ministries seeks new venue for meals

Shalom Ministries is reimagining how to serve Spokane after receiving notice that it will no longer be able to serve food and provide services to the unhoused and hungry at its current location starting Sept. 30.

Shalom Ministries has provided daily meals, clothing and essential services based at its location in the basement of the church at 518 W 3rd Ave. for 32 years. The building, originally owned by Central United Methodist, then bought by the New Community Church, was recently purchased by Zeal Church.

In 2025, the ministry served more than 80,000 meals and continued to serve the same numbers in 2026.

In addition to meals, Shalom and its partners have facilitated the distribution of clothing, medical care through CHAS, health services through the Spokane County Health District and the

WSU medical school and nursing programs and partnered with several other organizations helping the unhoused and hungry.

For the last two years Shalom volunteers sponsored the Connections Poetry Workshop for its diners and local poets, and the workshop is in the process of publishing a collection of poems written by participants in this workshop.

The Shalom Ministries Board

is seeking options to relocate its services. Because of the costs and time needed to relocate, the ministry shut down temporarily and served its last meal August 20.

They will keep their diners, volunteers and supporters updated as they continue their search for a new location.

For information, email shalommeals@gmail.com, visit facebook.com/shalomdining-withdignity or shalommeal.org.

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Climate Institute invites participation of faith community leaders

Continued from page 1
Washington hosted a symposium with community leaders to analyze and publicize a survey on who had air conditioners, who could afford to run them and what barriers there were to having and running air conditioners.

Aware that another summer hazard related to climate change was wildfire smoke, the institute conducted another survey and hosted symposiums over five years, leading to a Spokane report on wildfires.

By understanding problems, they help the community do climate resistance.

Identifying heat islands on a map of Spokane, they urged the City of Spokane to plant trees through its urban forestry program, Spocanopy, with The Lands Council. The Parks Department can use the maps to decide where parks are needed in its 20-year Comprehensive Plan with the county,

The city, county, Avista, academic entities and community organizations formed the Spokane Community Resilience Collaborative that meets monthly to make the city more resilient to extreme heat and wildfire smoke.

“In Spokane, we have access to nearby natural spaces. Riverside State Park is minutes from downtown. Residences are across the river,” said Brian. “Generally, we can minimize the spread of fire from forests

to urban areas but this summer an arsonist and winds made the fires hard to prevent,” he said. “Fire lines can create defensible spaces, but 45-mile-an-hour winds sent embers to rooftops a mile away.”

Instead of thinking of trees as a liability, Brian said the group is focusing on building houses that are less likely to burn. We can rebuild with fire-resistant homes, as they are doing in California, and not build in the wildland-urban interface.

“We have a long-term need to address what’s driving climate change that brings shorter winters with less snow and longer summers with less rain. The combination makes forests dry,” he said, pointing to the need to reduce burning oil, coal and natural gas.

“Focusing on the impact of changing climate on vulnerable community members is a central commitment for our Jesuit university,” Brian said.

The second part of the Climate Institute’s work is advocacy to change laws and systems.

Brian said communities cannot adapt their way out of the climate crisis. They need to change political and economic systems by adopting local and state laws that create change.

For example, in 2024, the institute helped the Spokane City Council draft and pass a law recognizing renters’ right to install air conditioning.

“Because we grew up in a

world that considered heating a necessity and cooling a luxury, landlords could not rent a unit or home without heating,” he commented. “We learned in the 2021 Heat Dome that cooling can make the difference between life and death.”

Spokane was the first city in the state to say landlords can’t prohibit tenants from installing air conditioning. Its law was the model when the state legislature passed SB 6200 in 2026 to recognize that renters have the right to install cooling. Brian cited that as an example of advocating for systemic change.

“Building on that, we have worked six months with the Spokane City Council on a second law that moves beyond landlords allowing cooling to requiring landlords to provide it as they do heating. We are the first city to recognize renters’ right to cooling,” Brian said, noting plans to advance a state bill to meet the urgency of climate change impacts by working politically to pass policies that change systems.

Last fall, Gonzaga’s Climate Institute began collaborating with the Environmental and Climate Law Clinic at the GU Law School to advance systems-level policy changes. Law students can now also focus on environmental law—along with elder and tax law—to advance laws that change systems.

“As law students do that, the institute can focus on implement-

ing renters’ rights,” Brian said. “We don’t want to move too fast with creating new laws and skip implementation.”

The third part of the Climate Institute’s work is what Brian considers the most important and most difficult—worldview transformation.

“In Laudato Si, Pope Francis tells us that the climate challenge is not just a technical problem but also a moral and spiritual problem. It’s about more than what type of cars we drive or how we create energy,” Brian said.

“We need to understand ourselves in relationship to our planet and the natural world. We are not lords over nature, but part of the community of life. We need to have a sense of care and connection to the wider community of life,” he affirmed. “We need to transform our worldview.

“That’s where my work as a philosopher and ethicist comes in,” said Brian. “Worldview transformation is critical to the future we want—not only decarbonizing energy and transportation but also restoring our connection with the rest of the community of life. We are kin, connected in a web of interdependent life.”

The Worldview Transformation Project is a multigenerational endeavor with two parts.

One part is through the Climate Institute hosting 10 to 12 lecture series every year to create conversations on the complexity of the climate crisis.

The second part is the Climate Literacy Project, which does worldview transformation through K-20 education, by GU students hired and trained as climate literacy fellows to engage youth eager to understand how and why the world is changing and what they can do.

“We train educators to change technology and change people,” he said.

Brian reaffirmed that “we need a cultural, societal ethical shift along with a shift to technical sustainability so we can be resilient to changes and can change ourselves. We need to change ourselves and our lightbulbs.”

In weighing strategies to decarbonize electricity, transportation and heating, he noted that the options are not simplistic good-bad choices but are complex better-worse choices. This relates to personal choices for vehicles and heating to choices about public land use, transportation, greenspace and growth management plans of cities and counties.

Because it is about both technological transformation and human spiritual/moral transformation, Brian hopes that more faith leaders will participate in the institute’s programs.

“Faith communities have robust resources and structures to advance concrete plans in this journey,” he said.

For information and detailed reports, visit gonzaga.edu/climate-institute.

KYRS station manager plans to retire

KYRS Thin Air Community Radio announces the retirement of Michael Moon Bear, station manager. KYRS, Spokane’s volunteer-run, non-commercial, nonprofit community station, offers programs for unserved and underserved populations in Eastern Washington and the Idaho Panhandle on 88.1 & 92.3 FM and streaming 24/7 at KYRS.org.

It provides news, views, culture and music other media overlook as it seeks to empower people, especially ethnic minorities, low-income and other marginalized groups, to strive for a more just, sustainable world.

Michael has been station manager in a time of growth in local programs and community partnerships. The station increased

local music and public affairs.

He also helped relocate the studio to the Central Library in downtown Spokane, launched the Get LOUD in the Library concert series, expanded multicultural programming, saw growth in community fundraising and hosted the 2025 Grassroots Radio Conference, welcoming community broadcasters from across the U.S.

Michael also was underwriting coordinator, program director and host of the radio show “Around the World with Michael Moon Bear” since 2004.

“KYRS belongs to the volunteers, programmers, listeners, donors and community partners who have built it. I look forward to watching the next generation continue this work,” he said.

The KYRS Board of Directors appointed Dana Matthews as interim station manager while it does a search.

For information, call 747-3012, or email office@kyrs.org.

WCFR cancels fundraiser to feed neighbors impacted by fires

Women and Children’s Free Restaurant (WCFR) canceled its fall fundraiser, Dinner on the Plaza, to turn their attention to neighbors affected by the Spokane Complex fires.

They are grateful to those who gave them \$25,000 to match donations and double their support.

“It’s a heartening how our business community shows up for our neighbors in difficult times,” said Lisa Diffley, executive director. “In late August, we

were preparing dinners for up to 500 additional families each week, ready for easy pickup by drive-up or walk-up. Soon, we’ll restock our grocery offerings, so families can fill their kitchens again. We plan to increase our services for as long as our neighbors need us,” she said, grateful for the donations that make that possible.

For information, visit wcfr-spokane.org.



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Women-led Mahima empowers women with refugee experiences

In August 2025, Mahima International became an independent women-led organization, operating under the Smith-Barbieri Progressive Fund while it established itself as an official nonprofit. It obtained its 501 (c) (3) status in May 2026.

In 2021, Pingala Dhital, who resettled in Spokane in 2008, received funding from Innovia to start a program for women with refugee experience. She moved the project from World Relief, where she worked for 14 years, to Refugee and Immigrant Connections of Spokane in 2022 and then to Thrive International, where she started working in 2023.

“We were founded by and for women with refugee experience,” said Pingala, who coordinates the program with a board of seven, four with refugee experience.

“**We honor the wisdom** women carry, shaped by displacement and endurance. We also recognize the power of being the authors of our own stories as a way to remember our past while building a joyful future in our new homeland,” she said.

“We create spaces where women’s voices are centered, their knowledge is valued and their identities as contributors, leaders and wisdom-keepers are recognized,” continued Pingala, who was born and lived in Bhutan before becoming a refugee.

From her work with resettlement agencies, she realizes many women come from patriarchal societies, and patriarchy prevails in different ways worldwide.

“For most of their lives, many women have been dependent on or been seen as the property of men, so they obey them to be safe,” she said. “Because many have been punished for speaking, they learned to be silent.”

When they resettled in communities like Spokane, their husbands readily found jobs, often leaving the women dependent.

“**Without opportunities** to learn English, develop new skills or connect with others in their community, many women experienced extreme social isolation. The physical, social and cultural isolation of women who have experienced domestic violence made it nearly impossible to seek resources available here,” Pingala explained.

“In addition, as we come into humanitarian systems, we have been labelled as vulnerable and victims, as if we are helpless or worthless,” Pingala continued. “It’s easy to push women into isolation. Mothers may reinforce patriarchy for their daughters to



Pingala Dhital establishes independent nonprofit.

protect them from harm.”

Pingala told of a young, vibrant woman who joined Mahima. When she started dating a young man, her father followed her and grounded her. She stopped working and was unable to claim the freedom she had found in working. She was afraid it would shame her family and cause pain for her mother and sister.

“As the power of patriarchy continues here, we seek to restore their wholeness and humanity,” said Pingala.

Mahima began with listening to two things at once, listening to what a woman has endured and what she hopes for herself.

“In the last few years, we have walked alongside 17 women whose lives have been touched by domestic violence or crisis,” she said. “Not every story ended as we hoped.

“**We started hosting tea and coffee** gatherings called The Third Cup, where we drink tea and listen to each other. We also do beadwork, sewing and candle making with those women.”

The baklava made by a woman connected with Mahima is available at Feast World Kitchen, Huckleberry’s and Indaba Coffee.

The sewn products, candles and henna arts are available at The Third Cup monthly gatherings.

“The goal is for women to sell products they make to earn some independent income,” said Pingala.

More than 400 women have participated in beading, sewing, candle-making and listening projects, and 35 women have graduated from the sewing program and received a new sewing machine and accessory kit. Pingala keeps connected with most of them.

Those efforts foster social connections that uplift women’s dignity, provide a sanctuary for them to share their stories and

create opportunities to develop relationships with the community grounded in mutual respect, cross-cultural understanding, reciprocity and solidarity.

“We use food, art and stories to develop meaningful, lasting connections between women of many backgrounds,” said Pingala, who finds the term, “refugee women,” limiting.

“**We speak of women** with refugee experience, refugee backgrounds or who have lived as refugees. We do not define them by problems they have faced. We separate women from the problems. They are human beings no matter what they have been through,” she explained.

“I have been through a lot. I am still a woman. To identify me as a refugee again and again reminds me of and traps me in the trauma,” she said, likening it to speaking of people as low-income. “I want to stir empathy and remind people that trauma is something we survived.

“We believe that words and actions can contribute to transforming post-traumatic stress disorder into post-traumatic growth,” she explained.

Pingala said the name, Mahima International, and its logo reflect the complex experiences of displacement and resettlement.

“We chose the name Mahima, a Sanskrit word, because it speaks to radical grace through pursuing inner peace and wisdom in the midst of the complex experiences of displacement and resettlement,” she said.

The logo incorporates the lotus flower. It symbolizes that beauty and growth can emerge from a muddy pond or from suffering. That invites women to reclaim lives rooted in joy, peace and cross-cultural connection. In those contexts, they are defined not by their displacement but by their wisdom, leadership and

healing powers.

“We believe those closest to a problem are also the ones closest to its solution,” she added.

“**Resettlement offers safety** and hope to families who have spent generations in refugee camps. It opens a path for them to connect and contribute to their new communities,” she said. “Resettlement is experienced as a profound act of kindness. Those who receive it carry deep gratitude for the chance to start again.”

Pingala said resettlement also brings pressure to learn a new language and navigate high-tech environments and complex systems all at once as they adjust. The pressure to assimilate often pushes refugees’ identities and stories to the margins. Women are absorbed into systems that fail to see or draw on the strength and resilience they already have.

“**At Mahima, we witness** each other’s grief, but we don’t have a savior attitude. We do not minimize the problems or categorize them under an umbrella. We let women own their stories. If I share my story, it is not to say I know someone else’s story, because that also silences a woman,” she added.

Mahima’s work gives women the time they need to open up by creating a space alongside them, so they feel they are equal.

“We believe in the solidarity of learning from each other. Empowerment and transformation cannot be imposed but come from within—like seeds growing in the right conditions,” Pingala said

Women rewrite their narratives about themselves in their own terms. Their narratives are not used to evoke pity or raise funds for an organization, but for each woman to share her own truth. The foundation of this work is human connection—human kindness.

Mahima also facilitates connections among women with refugee experience and women in the local community. Since March, it has hosted The Third Cup from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. on last Fridays at the Woman’s Club.

“The first cup, we are strangers. The second cup we are friends. The third cup we are family,” said Pingala, referring to a Balti proverb. “Drinking tea or coffee is a ritual in many cultures. By drinking tea, we find joy in connecting people, sitting in spontaneous interaction.”

In 2025, more than 100 women who were sewing and beading graduated. Mahima partners with Spokane Zero Waste for employment and Ganesh Himal to sell products.

In June, Mahima shared beading projects women can do in their homes or at the Woman’s Club, because some women are cautious about going out in the anti-immigrant climate.

Five or six Story Circles based on language groups started in June when young women were out of school and could help their mothers attend.

“**Our goal is** not to ‘help’ women but to follow their lead, to walk with them in an intentional cross-cultural space that creates one-to-one, long-term relationships,” said Pingala, who like others at Mahima works part-time on contract—even though it’s more than a full-time effort.

“It’s especially exciting to give young women a chance to dream and express themselves,” she said. “We have been in the margins, not decision-makers. Mahima opens us to our potential to build a whole, joyous life grounded in community.”

For information, call 798-5947, email info@mahimainternational.org or visit mahimainternational.org.

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Faith and nonprofit organizations are ready to help in disasters

Continued from page 1
but most people left when asked to evacuate or when their neighborhood’s electricity was cut.
Of the 67,000 who evacuated, only 600 went to Red Cross emergency shelters, Mark Finney, executive director of Thrive International, learned from involvement in a network of calls because Thrive offered space to dozens of families. Two displaced households responded as of Aug. 26.
“Most were welcomed in the homes of family, friends and faith communities—or went to hotels,” he said, heartened that Spokane has such a network of folks ready to welcome people in their homes.
There were no deaths reported.
Close behind the first responders are those who know how to help local communities respond to immediate needs. Along with systems of trained national, state, county, city, community response, there are nonprofit and faith groups who respond to individual and community needs every day.
They were ready to offer food, safe water and temporary shelter—opening their buildings.
Along with them were crews managing evacuation routes and turning off power to prevent spread of the fire.
The American Red Cross, which helps in house fires, has people trained to respond in disasters. The Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, Second Harvest of the Inland Northwest, SNAP, Goodwill—to name a few—are also ready for quick response on a large scale.
Early on, the Spokane County Emergency Management (SCEM) helped communities open a disaster recovery center where survivors come to find aid, file claims and coordinate efforts.
A resource gathering Aug. 4 at the Shadle Park High School drew more than 1,500 agency representatives. About 75 representatives of government agencies, nonprofits, faiths and businesses sat at tables from Aug. 6 to 12, also at Shadle Park, the designated Disaster Assistance Center.
They offered a combination of short-and long-term response efforts by the Spokane County



Riverside Real Life was destroyed in Spokane fires.
Photo by Frances Fakasiieiki - Intern

Emergency Management, Spokane Region Long Term Recovery Group, Spokane Public Schools, the Washington Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, Innovia and other community partners.
In subsequent weeks, enrollment began with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the state Department of Health and Social Services and programs of fire assistance through fire stations.
The Adventists Community Services and SCEM collaborated to open a central warehouse for donated supplies for fire relief on the second floor at the eastern entry of the the Northtown Mall.
Faith and nonprofit communities have lists of members and, for most, their first action was to reach out with calls and texts to check on their members.
Cody Natland, pastor of Ellensburg United Methodist Church (UMC) and on the Inland District United Methodist superintendent team, contacted pastors and Spokane area churches during the fires and initial response asking clergy who in their churches evacuated or lost homes.
As evacuations began, Chabad of Spokane reached out to members to identify immediate needs, learn who evacuated or lost homes and establish a fund to help them.
Other churches and faith communities offered their spaces for overnite shelters, day dropin centers to escape the smoke and recharge technology.
Meggan Manlove, bishop of the Northwest Intermountain

(NWIM) Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), said that homes of seven members of ELCA congregations were destroyed by fires along with homes of friends, co-workers and relatives. All ELCA churches were still standing.
The Holy Temple Church of God in Christ has surrounded a member with care, accompanying her now and committed to accompany her family for the long term.
Members of the nondenominational Riverside Real Life Church on North Nine Mile Rd. learned on their church’s Facebook page that their church had been burned down on Aug. 1. The next Sunday, Valley Real Life offered their space for the Riverside church, which is one of their church plants, to come and worship.
In addition, on the Colville Confederated Reservation, the Indian Shaker Church in Nespalem was destroyed in July in the Kaiser Canyon Fire.
Systems are in place to channel aid where it is most needed. Local faith groups set up disaster relief funds or directed people to give through their regional and national channels, which are in

place to aid those most in need and have a broad picture of the needs as they respond to fires and floods in other disaster areas.
There are local and regional people in many faith groups responsible for disaster assistance. Many are already involved with the Washington Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WA VOAD), which is in place for long-term recovery.
An article on page 8, shares more details on WA VOAD and the United in Crisis-Greater Spokane, two agencies that coordinate local faith communities and volunteers to help individuals and families recover from community crises.
Mindy Smith, director of church engagement at Whitworth University, gathered 10 Spokane clergy and faith leaders to learn about Pasadena’s Clergy Coalition after the Eaton Fire in Los Angeles County from two pastors who shared about their faith-community disaster response through building a coordinated, relational sustainable system of care.
Pasadena’s Clergy Coalition organized around 4Cs: 1) cash as flexible financial resources, 2) care including of community leaders, 3) clear, centralized communication, and 4) collaboration of congregations and nonprofits.
They shared how disaster response begins with much energy but moves to fatigue, grief and conflict without coordination.
Years of sermons and scripture studies prepare people in faith communities to help their neighbors, repair the earth, donate funds and open the door when someone in need knocks needing food, shelter, clothing, hygiene kits, emergency supplies, referrals and compassionate caring.
It’s what their systems are in place to do.

While many said how amazed they were at the readiness to respond and the coordination of efforts, that’s what the faith and nonprofit systems are set up to do, collaborating with federal, state, county and city disaster response systems that provide immediate and long-term response.
The Long Term Response Team, which was set up during the Oregon Road fire in Elk and the Grey Fire in Medical Lake and Silver Lake in 2023, is still in place to help. Its term has been extended another seven years.
Coordination is the key. Everyone wants to help. Those who have done it before help people know what others are doing and how to volunteer in effective ways. There may be duplicate efforts, but in such a massive disaster, multiple efforts are needed.
They just need to communicate. That’s what VOAD and other united efforts do.
See the stories with more information on those efforts.
See the story about some specific responses on page 7.
See Sounding Board with comments of local faith and nonprofit leaders on page 14.



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Different faith communities report on some actions to assist after fires

The Fig Tree gathered reports on some on the immediate ways the faith and nonprofit communities responded from faith leaders The Fig Tree was able to reach.

Cody Natland of the Inland District United Methodist super-intendent team, which represents the national United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), received and gave out gift cards, and hygiene and cleanup kits to local churches through the Disaster Assistance Center (DAC).

UMC Early Response Teams (ERT) from three conferences brought their expertise in cleaning up fire retardant.

He was concerned about wildfires across the Inland and Seven Rivers districts from White Swan to Tonasket, in the wilderness west of Lake Chelan to the Colville Reservation, and in North Spokane.

Many UMC churches opened doors to offer shelter, meals and relief, and asked how they could help he said.

Kathy Bryson, the Pacific Northwest UMC Conference disaster response co-coordinator, offered suggested actions: 1) Pray for survivors, first responders and everyone impacted. 2) Respond when supplies are requested for hygiene kits and soot sponge kits. 3) Donate to disaster response funds. 4) Attend trainings, such as Connecting Neighbors training Saturday, Sept. 19, at Beaverton First UMC in Oregon and training to be an Early Response Team (ERT) member on Saturday, Sept. 26, at the Des Moines, Wash., UMC.

As of Aug. 21, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington (CCEW) had received more than 1,439 requests for assistance from the DAC at Shadle Park High School. Its call center is following up by reaching out to each one.

CCEW bought and handed out more than \$142,000 of \$100 gift cards for gas and groceries. It managed 56 Airbnb referrals for displaced families and offered short-term housing or hotel assistance.

It received more than 2,158 donations of money and items—clothing, household items, hygiene and school supplies. CCEW staff at the DAC handed out gift cards, solar lights and chargers, blankets and connected people to its resource database for housing options. It also referred people for emergency assistance, mental health counseling and case management.

Representatives from Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Charities Hawaii, who responded to the Lahaina fires in Maui, came to Spokane to provide guidance to ensure donations go to people most impacted.

The Presbytery of the Inland Northwest (PIN), shared links to local resources such as spokanecommunityresources.org, thefigtree.org/directory.html and to the national Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, invited donations to the Inland Northwest Presbytery for Spokane Fire Relief and referred people to a story about how people came together around the fires at pcusa.org/news-storytelling/news/2026/8/7/spokane-fires.

Paul Allen, executive minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Northern Lights



Rob McCann of CCEW, Fr. Tim Hays, pastor of Assumption Parish and Art Smalley of Assumption's Knights of Columbus visit a damaged location in the Indian Trail area.

Photo courtesy of Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington

District, said the Week of Compassion focuses on emergency aid. It works with ecumenical partners to provide long-term assistance and helps congregations and others prevent disasters. With ecumenical partners in mainline churches, they are also providing assistance in Yakima.

Chris Snow, pastor at North Hill Christian, worked with community partners to provide water and a charging station for phones. He will keep the Disciples region informed of needs.

During the first two weeks, the national Churches of Christ came to the Colbert Church of Christ to provide water, food, diapers, shovels, goggles, gloves and PPE.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provided humanitarian assistance from its Welfare Square in Salt Lake City and five bishops' storehouses to meet needs.

On Aug. 11, two truckloads with 38,000 pounds of shelf-stable food arrived, one at Second Harvest Inland Northwest in Spokane and one at Partners Inland Northwest in Spokane Valley.

JustServe, a website of the church, connects people with volunteer opportunities, donation needs and support organizations.

Local congregations partner with community nonprofits, emergency management officials and civic leaders to provide shelter, meals, volunteer service and other assistance to assure resources are distributed quickly to those with the greatest need, he said.

Items from a temporary resource center run by local congregations were transferred to a resource center on the second floor of the former Sears building at the Northtown Mall. It is open from 1 to 8 p.m. daily.

On Aug. 18, the church took a truck of food and emergency supplies for the Spokane Tribe in Wellpinit and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation at Coulee Dam. The supplies included 40 generators, gas cans and extension cords to help displaced households temporarily living in campers, RVs or other locations.

Richland and Kennewick stakes hosted 600 people at a pancake breakfast and clothing drive and sent clothing, shoes, socks and essentials Aug. 19 to the Teen & Kid Closet, which provides clothing and essentials for youth in foster care and experiencing poverty. The donations are especially for children impacted by the Spokane fires.

Since the fires began, two meetinghouses opened to evacu-

ees and the church also provided drinking water to Second Harvest.

The Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ (PNC-UCC) reported that more than 100 wildfires were burning in its region across Alaska, Washington and North Idaho with impact on thousands of people.

Website manager Ben Crosby created a page with resources for those who are dealing with the fires, welcoming people to send suggestions to office@pncucc.org.

As the Spokane Complex Fires became the focus of news and fire-fighting efforts, the PNC-UCC expressed its commitment also to respond to the needs from the Colville Confederated and the Spokane Indian Reservation, as well as needs in areas near Chelan, Tonasket and Yakima.

Benjamin Watson, pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, said that the Spokane Ministers Fellowship will work in collaboration with other ecumenical efforts.

At the Spokane Buddhist Temple, Namo Amida Butsu and JW Webb said that for the Sunday service after the fires they focused on compassion and gratitude.

"We made space for members and guests to share, reflect and participate in a short, guided meditation on the teaching of Buddhist master T'an-luan about never abandoning any sentient being in suffering, but constantly aspiring in the heart to fulfill the mind of great compassion."

Episcopal Bishop Gretchen Rehberg invited those needing assistance or resources to reach out to the Episcopal Diocese. She invited others to donate to the Episcopal Disaster Relief Fund to help the diocese care for those affected.

Gifts will provide assistance to individuals, families and congregations as needs arise for emergency aid and helping communities on the long journey of recovery and responding to unforeseen needs.

"Every gift, no matter the size, is a tangible expression of hope,



Red Cross representatives help at Disability Assistance Center.

healing, and God's love," said Gretchen.

Jewish Family Services, Congregation Emanu-El and Temple Beth Shalom received several grants from the Seattle Jewish community and individual donations to support families who lost homes and to make the synagogue building more fire and smoke resistant, said Rabbi Tamar Malino.

They have an ongoing collection drive for goods and non-perishable food for Partners Inland Northwest and provided N95 masks.

"We galvanized teams of volunteers to work with Feast World Kitchen and World Central Kitchen to provide meals during the evacuation and beyond," Tamar added. "We recognize that our city's recovery will take time, and we will continue to coordinate volunteer efforts as needed."

In response to the wildfires' impact on families in the region, Chabad of Spokane launched a community fire-relief effort to provide assistance to families who lost their homes and support firefighters on the front lines.

Chabad of Spokane has also been supporting firefighters and emergency personnel, providing practical items requested by crews, including hygiene products, wipes, energy drinks and other supplies that can make a difference in long shifts fighting fires.

The rabbi and members also visited fire-response areas to learn what firefighters and displaced residents need. Chabad is accepting contributions to its fire-relief fund and connecting families with resources.

The Spokane Hindu Temple and Cultural Center received a major donation from Seattle Hindu Organizations and the priest, Devraj Tiwari, started distributing funds in August.

Families from India who are in Spokane helped each other out,

receiving evacuees.

At the Southside Center, families also made vegetarian food for those in need and boxed about 50 dinners to give out at Shadle Park High School.

In addition, Indian families from Seattle and Portland sent items to the Hindu temple in the valley for volunteers to distribute.

Muslims for Community Action and Support also gathered donations for distribution.

Unity Spiritual Center at 2900 S. Bernard opened their building the first night and three families who evacuated with pets stayed overnight.

In mid-August, they did a shower bag/toiletry drive for fire victims, firefighters, Red Cross volunteers and anyone displaced by fires. They received more than 200 toiletry bags, 750 toothbrushes, more than needed for fires. So, they donated the extras to YMCA, YWCA, Union Gospel Mission, Family Promise, Transitions and Women's Hearth.

For information, the following is a list of contacts with some of those featured in this story:

- Catholic Charities, cceasternwa.org
- Northern Lights Disciples, office@northernlightsdisciples.org.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 509-270-4950 or justserve.org.
- The Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, theepiscopaldioce-seofspokane.churchcenter.com/giving/to/disaster-relief.
- Chabad of Spokane, jewish-spokane.com.
- Hindu Temple and Cultural Center, shtcc.org.

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Feast World Kitchen teams up with World Central Kitchen to serve meals

Tom Okura, chef program training manager at Feast World Kitchen, reported that Feast partnered with World Central Kitchen at their 3rd Ave Spokane restaurant across from First Presbyterian Church to provide meals for people who evacuated from the wildfires in Spokane, beginning Aug. 3, when World Central Kitchen (WCK) arrived in Spokane.

Feast set up a walk-up tent where those displaced by the fires could receive a free meal. WCK, an international agency that works in war zones, disaster areas and refugee camps, was quick to respond, identifying places that need support in a tragedy like Spokane's wildfires, which displaced more than 60,000 people and destroyed nearly 900 structures.

"They did research on who needed help, what help they needed and how they could help. They reached out to us to find a partnership with places that serve food, serve the community and could support their efforts," said Tom.

WCK sponsored free meals. Feast gave out 200 to 250 meals a day.

"Many people needed basic things like food and connection to community. Some people just needed a place to get hot food, see a smiling face and talk to others," said Tom.

"People came from all over. They were staying with family and friends, in hotels or shelters like at the Convention Center," said Tom.

For those working with Feast, it was good to help by doing something they do all the time.

"For Feast, food has always been a way to bring people together and to build community," he said. "It plays into our vision to support the community."

A number of Feast chefs, who are former refugees, asked how they could help when Feast announced they were teaming up with WCK. Every day, some prepared the meals, while others volunteered to serve the plates. A number of the refugee chefs



Feast set up a tent for serving food to people impacted by fires.

had survived difficult situations and understood what it meant to be displaced.

"None of the chefs lost their homes but some were evacuated," said Tom.

"We shared information based on the guidance from health district officials, offering support, resources and information on safety for people in affected areas," he said.

"Usually when disasters and tragedy happen, the community steps up. It's great to see everyone trying to help, and we wanted to make sure everyone knows it's ok to accept help. It strengthens us to have people from around the world come to make sure we all get through this," said Tom.

As of Aug. 24, they continued to serve people but expected that Feast would shift their model in late August to move back to normal operations, but integrate fire response meals into their regular service, anticipating the need for longer term support.

Instead of serving from a tent in front of the restaurant, they

are asking people displaced by fires to call or email to sign up. They are asking for a description of the situation for those displaced—lost home, damaged home, hosting those displaced.

They will use remaining funding to offer e-gift cards to order food online or dine in.

"Recovery will take long for many, and food is a practical need and comfort," he said.

Feast has received funds from local donors, World Central Kitchen, Rebuild US and Starbucks Foundation.

For information, call 608-1313, email admin@feastworldkitchen.org or visit feastworldkitchen.org.



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Communication, coordination improve relief and recovery in disasters

As the Federal Emergency Management, city and county Disaster Assistance Center, and other immediate coordinated emergency response efforts by congregations, faith and nonprofit groups begin to shift to long-term recovery efforts, faith-based and nonprofit organizations have organizations set to carry on the long-term recovery mode.

Those include Washington State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WA VOAD), United in Crisis-Greater Spokane.

Faith and nonprofit organizations also connect with the Washington Volunteers Organizations Active in Disasters (WA VOAD) to help groups work collaboratively in the long term, after media headlines cease to keep concerns in front of people and when the tedious work of rebuilding and recovery continue.

It is one tool for the long-term response to a disaster like the recent wildfires, some still burning in the Cascades, west of Tonasket, near Yakima, on the Colville Confederated and Spokane Reservations, and in the Spokane Complex.

Ray Sherjven, WA VOAD representative for Lutheran Disaster Response, invited ELCA Bishop Meggan Manlove to a statewide Zoom meeting of the WA VOAD. The present WA VOAD President Christie Merrill of the American Red Cross asked members, including county and tribal participants, to name their needs. A request for hay for livestock was met by one group.

Each agency shared what resources and expertise they bring—help with childcare, food and hazardous material gear (PPEs) for people in burned areas.

VOAD members were referred to a website on urban fires, washington.postfire.org set up by organizations to share learnings from wildfires in Los Angeles two years ago.

WA VOAD's 39 organizations operate under four C's: cooperation, collaboration, communication and coordination, said Marty Grisham, past president of WA VOAD.

Marty was emergency manager for the City of Tukwila Fire Department before becoming involved with the WA VOAD. He also works with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Charities.

Christie, who also serves on the American Red Cross Board of Northwest Washington, came to the Spokane Disaster Assistance Center on Aug. 6 to share about emotional and spiritual resources.



WA VOAD is about faith and nonprofit organizations collaborating in disasters such as Partners INW and JustServe.
Courtesy of Brook Weidaeur

She told Marty she's been receiving phone calls and offers from around the Pacific Northwest.

Organizations in WA VOAD include the national, state and local Catholic, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, Latter-day Saints, Lutheran, Mennonite, United Church of Christ, United Methodist churches and disaster agencies, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, Muslim and other interfaith groups, plus Catholic Charities, Adventist Community Services, The Salvation Army, the American Red Cross, Second Harvest of the Inland Northwest, United Ways of the Pacific Northwest and more.

"We have conference calls in which everyone participates. If a specific need arises, organizations say they will take care of that," said Marty. "It's easier because everybody's at the same table at the same time, enhancing and not cross purposing or duplicating efforts."

There may be 50 to 80 at those meetings, said Marty.

Government and other partners see WA VOAD as a resource for unmet needs. For example, Second Harvest had almost run out of their supply of water. The Latter-day Saints Charities had a warehouse with water and sent a truck with 20 pallets.

"We coordinate and work together for the better of the whole," Marty said. "We connected people to provide hay for livestock, personal protective equipment and air purifiers, and to receive donations for people who lost everything."

While media focus was on Spokane, WA VOAD also was responding to fires in Okanogan, Stevens, Yakima and other counties, diverting resources from the abundance going to Spokane.

"We ask people to not empty their old clothes from closets because it can be a problem for emergency management teams, such as the Red Cross or Salvation Army to manage too many donations of used clothes," Marty said.

ty said. "We tell people to contact their local religious community and participate through them."

"It's humbling and restores my faith in humanity to see all the different people helping," said Marty

For information visit wavad.org or facebook.com/wavadwa.

United in Crisis-Greater Spokane is an alliance of local churches and volunteers helping individuals and families prepare for, respond to and recover from community crises. It is supported by United in Crisis, a global nonprofit training organization that unites and equips churches to form local crisis-response networks to address the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of those affected by crises.

It opened a disaster assistance center to serve individuals and families affected by the Spokane fires the third week in August at **Family of Faith Community Church**, 1504 W. Grace Ave.

Trained volunteers from churches provide emotional and spiritual care, emergency financial assistance and other disaster-relief services.

"Recovery continues long after the immediate crisis," said Daniel Geraci, CEO of United in Crisis. "By bringing churches

and volunteers together, we help survivors address immediate challenges and know they will not have to navigate the recovery process alone."

United in Crisis-Greater Spokane is preparing to support survivors through its Crisis Relief Shepherd Program that pairs volunteers with individuals and families for support through recovery.

Volunteers help survivors address emotional, spiritual, physical and practical needs and connect them with resources,

providing long-term relationships families need as they rebuild.

United in Crisis-Greater Spokane churches are receiving donations for gift cards for essential needs, emergency housing, emergency transportation, building materials and other recovery assistance.

It has 17 years of experience developing, mobilizing and training church networks to meet needs.

For information, call 512-825-8211, or email daniel@unitedincrisis.org.

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SCC starts nursing program in Colville

Spokane Community College (SCC) is starting the first cohort of students in its practical nursing certificate program at its Colville campus, expanding access to nursing education for students in Stevens County and surrounding communities.

Louis Kaplan, SCC associate dean of nursing, said the practical nursing program is the fastest way to becoming a practicing nurse. Applications for winter quar-

ter cohort starting Jan. 5 are open through Sept. 15. The program also offers a summer quarter start, with applications opening Jan. 15 and closing March 1.

The Colville site will provide four students per cohort an opportunity to do the certificate close to home to prepare for careers as licensed practical nurses (LPNs).

Spokane Community College President Jenni Martin said healthcare employers throughout

the region are looking for skilled nurses. Expanding opportunities for students means more people can pursue careers without leaving their communities.

“Many rural communities face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals,” said Colville-based Katie Kleinhesselink, dean of rural education at SCC.

For information, visit scc.spokane.edu.

Gonzaga offers AI Transformation Program

Gonzaga launches a first-of-its-kind AI Transformation Program for Inland Northwest organizations to build durable, self-managed AI capability to adopt AI responsibly.

The Executive AI Think Tank at a Glance from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 10, and 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Friday, Sept. 11, at Gonzaga University is an entry to GU’s 18-month Organizational AI Transformation Program research cohort for executives and leaders of 20 organizations.

The program is led by GU’s Institute for Informatics and Applied Technology and its Center for Lifelong Learning with AI transformation experts

Gena Hoxha and Alex Stanton of Think Purple.

They combine applied technology, ethical AI, cybersecurity, leadership and human-centered education with real-world organizational experience.

The cohort helps leaders move beyond AI experimentation to build leadership, governance, workforce trust and operating capacity for AI transformation.

“AI transformation is about more than technology,” said Shanchieh Jay Yang, Reisenauer family director of Gonzaga’s Institute for Informatics and Applied Technology.

“Organizations must align process with mission and equip

people with a sustainable support structure to continue learning, adapting and governing these technologies as they evolve to move from curiosity to capability, and experimentation to responsible, sustained transformation,

“Gonzaga regularly hears from corporate leaders seeking guidance to help their organizations build capacity to use AI strategically and responsibly,” said Rachelle Strawther, founding director of Gonzaga’s Center for Lifelong Learning.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/center-for-lifelong-learning/professional-development/business/executive-ai-think-tank.

Report reveals how essential nonprofits are

The 2026 State of the Sector Report of Idaho Community Foundation (ICF) shows nonprofits are essential to strengthen communities, support families and drive the state’s economy yet, they struggle to meet growing demand as funding is uncertain.

The report says Idaho nonprofits employ more than 81,000 people, contribute \$8.1 billion to the gross state product and are the state’s fifth-largest private sector employer, but many organizations are stretched beyond capacity.

According to the report, 51 percent of Idaho nonprofits served more people in 2025 than the year before; 63 percent anticipated demand for services will continue to increase; 51 percent were un-

able to fully meet demand for their services in 2025; 43 percent drew on cash reserves to cover operating costs and an estimated \$200 million capacity gap exists between the services Idaho nonprofits provide and the needs of communities across the state.

“Nonprofits are woven into nearly every aspect of life in Idaho,” said Kevin Bailey, ICF’s vice president at the Impact and Nonprofit Center. “They help families access healthcare, housing, food, education, recreation, arts, culture and countless other services. The report shows the tremendous value they bring and the challenges they face.”

It also examines the “philanthropic gap”—government fund-

ing supports nearly \$400 million a year in nonprofit-delivered services in Idaho. As public funding is less predictable, philanthropy is a critical source of support, but current giving alone is unlikely to replace funding losses.

The ICF helps Idahoans invest in people, places and causes they care about. The report is at idahocf.org/state-of-the-sector.

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

Huntington’s Walk set

The Huntington’s Disease Society of America (HDSA) Team Hope Walk opens at 9 a.m., Saturday, Sept. 26, at Orchard Park, 20290 E. Indiana in Liberty Lake.

The Washington chapter is hosting the walk to raise funds to improve lives of people affected by Huntington’s disease (HD) with education, advocacy and research. HD, a genetic disorder, causes the progressive breakdown of nerve cells in the brain damaging their physical and mental abilities in their prime years.

For information, email nicole-meyerjones@gmail.com or visit hdsa.org.



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Small, small-town church says outreach, peace are its path to growth

The Ellisforde Church of the Brethren's community ministry's focus on the denomination's historic commitment to peace, its active support of vulnerable immigrants and its openness to start new things—like an interfaith evening of music—are behind its growth today.

Daniel Klayton, its pastor, sees new life in the church in an unincorporated community seven miles north of Tonasket in North Central Washington.

He is building on the church's inclusion of different walks of life and its focus on peacemaking, nonviolence and advocacy against war and oppression. Those dynamics drew him to the church soon after he moved to Oroville and started playing music in a rock band at the church.

"I started attending and connected with both the spirit of the open and affirming church and the Church of the Brethren being a historic peace church," he said.

Daniel, who grew up Jewish in Virginia, explored Buddhism and Christianity as a young adult while studying English literature and philosophy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where he graduated in 2011.

Debbie Roberts, his predecessor who retired in 2021, mentored him along his journey into ministry. In 2017, he began preaching on occasion and, loving to write, found that part of ministry resonated with him.

Daniel started an online graduate certificate program with Bethany Seminary in Richmond, Ind. He earned the certificate in theopoetic and theological imagination—theology expressed in creative writing and poetic sharing of theology and spirituality.

His interest in and call to ministry grew in the two-year program, while he supported himself as a ghost writer and by working at the library.

In 2018, he began dating his wife, Savanna, a Canadian. The two married in 2020 and Daniel moved to Canada soon after.

When Daniel decided to enter pastoral ministry, the Whitestone Community Church of the Brethren, 15 minutes from Ellisforde, invited him to serve as its part-time, licensed pastor in mid 2019. He began ministry training with the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

In March 2020, Daniel and Savanna, who works remotely editing books and journal articles, moved to a new home in Osoyoos, B.C., near the international border. The COVID 19 pandemic soon had an impact on his ability to cross the border. So Daniel had to resign as manager at the library, but he could do ministry remotely.

He also started an administrative job with the Pacific Northwest Church of the Brethren



Daniel Klayton finds his ministry in Ellisforde.
Photo courtesy of Daniel Klayton

District—handling communication, supporting congregations and building ties between the denomination, regional district and local churches. District work was already being done remotely because the area is geographically spread across Washington and Oregon.

After Debbie retired, the Ellisforde church invited Daniel to be their pastor. After working three jobs for several years, Daniel has stepped away from pastoring the Whitestone church and continues to pastor the Ellisforde church and work for the district.

In May, he was ordained. "In my time at Ellisforde since 2021, the church has faced challenges and declining membership, but in the last two years the trend changed directions," Daniel said. "We have become a small but growing congregation with an average attendance on Sunday of 25 to 30, up from 10 to 12."

He discussed reasons for the growth.

"Our church has leaned into engaging our community with peace, compassion and solidarity with the oppressed," he said. "When ICE started its campaign of persecution and dubiously legal deportation of community members, we started a rapid response group for immigrant neighbors and others persecuted because of their ethnicity."

That group offers ongoing support to keep families safe and together and to bring home family members who have been detained.

"In a world increasingly racked with war, the peacemaking, anti-war focus of the Church of the Brethren and Ellisforde Church has also been a source of growth," he added. "We offer workshops on nonviolence in the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr., our connections with families in Gaza struggling to survive the ongoing genocide."

Step by step the border opened. Daniel, who became a permanent resident of Canada, returned to in person ministry in 2023.

Living in Osoyoos and crossing the border several times each week, he is a familiar face for border agents on both sides, but he is aware that with current U.S.-Canada tension, there is the possibility of issues arising.

Daniel travels to the U.S. for pastoral visits, community events and church programs. He does sermon writing and administrative work from home.

"Even when circumstances have been difficult, the church's resilient hope, openness to new possibilities and active involvement in the community have driven us forward," he said. "The church's passion and commitment to community service continues to inspire and transform us, both congregationally and individually."

"Outreach through service to and events in the broader community express our spirit, values and welcome. We have experienced a turning point through our community engagement. For example, we helped organize a large rally to support immigrant neighbors and express faithful opposition to ways they are treated nationally and locally," Daniel pointed out.

That drew new folks.

In addition, this spring, the Ellisforde church was led by member Ton Rietvekd to organize a community interfaith "Celebration of Spirit," an evening of music and communal singing with participants sharing their "different spiritual paths and the love common to all of those paths," he said.

A Jewish woman led singing, reminding Daniel of Jewish songs he had not sung for a long time.

Other participants included a Baha'i group, Native Americans from local tribes and members of the Pamtingpa Buddhist Center in the Tonasket Hills.

Those who attended from Tonasket and nearby communities expressed interest in having more such events.

"We do ecumenical and interfaith events open to the whole community when we can, because building bridges and learning from different traditions are important values to us," Daniel said.

"We draw from a wider area than most churches. Okanogan County is a rural area and geographically one of the largest counties in the U.S. Most of those who attend come in person. A few come on Zoom to join in worship and events."

"We also build bonds among members at a potluck after worship," said Daniel. "Loving our neighbor as ourselves is desperately

needed in our world and in our individual lives."

"Many spiritual traditions hold the value of compassion," he said, aware of this from the values of his parents and a sister who are Jewish, a mother interested in Buddhism, a brother whose family is Muslim and a wife who is not involved in a faith community.

"As a family we know that love is what we need, and there are many pathways to experience it and express faith," he said. "I feel called to live that out in my life and to foster that in the community."

"Our communities need love, and faith can be a powerful, lifelong path to share that," Daniel said.

The diversity in his family has led him to be curious about differences and have an eye to find common ground on "what we share across differences."

The Ellisforde church is an open and affirming congregation, reflecting full inclusion and support of LGBTQ+ folk.

"We live in a world that has become more violent to and discriminatory of people who are queer, transgender or gender nonconforming," he observed, "but at Ellisforde we cultivate an inclusive love that does not discriminate out of prejudice or bigotry."

For information, call 703-618-4948 or email daniel.klayton@

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St. Vincent de Paul celebrates 80 years of serving in North Idaho

By Kaye Hult
Eighty years ago, parishioners from St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church opened a small clothing closet that anyone in hardship could access with dignity and compassion. Thus, St. Vincent de Paul North Idaho (SVDP) was born in 1946.

“St. Vincent de Paul has been privileged to be the caretaker of those in need in Kootenai County,” said executive director Scott Ferguson.

“These efforts reflect the strength in which this organization started. This same strength over the years has attracted servant-minded community members and leaders who felt called to serve the poor, start a thrift store and ensure the basic needs of our community are met with dignity,” he said.

“I am honored to usher in the celebration of St Vincent’s 80th anniversary,” he added.

On Thursday, Sept. 17, St. Vincent’s 80th Anniversary Cruise and Celebration, “Under the Lighted Pines” will take place from 4:30 to 9:00 p.m., as their inaugural celebration of 80 years of hope.

The event includes a sunset cruise aboard the Mish-an-Nock, a barbeque and seated dinner at Camp Lutherhaven, storytelling, live music and a paddle raise by auctioneer Matt Batts.

“I believe strongly in the mission of SVDP, which is to serve every individual and family in need in Kootenai County, providing a hand up to achieve self-sufficiency,” he said.

Scott will complete his second year as executive director at SVDP on Nov. 4.

“Coming to SVDP has been the culmination of a unique and fun journey to expand my professional experiences in nonprofit management serving those impacted by housing insecurity and other barriers that life presents,” he reflected.

Scott’s passion for service and leadership began when he was a teenager growing up in Portland, Ore.

“I was lucky to have a family dynamic rooted in faith and justice,” he said. “These values of humility, patience and generosity all reflect the Christian faith I have today.”

Throughout his educational and vocational path, Scott said his family provided strong support.

As age 16, he began serving in a ministry called Young Life, an important early invitation into service and leadership.

“It taught me that leadership begins with building authentic relationships, showing up consistently for people and being willing to serve wherever there is a need,” he said.

“Over time, what I learned helped shape my understanding



Scott Ferguson finds his niche with St. Vincent de Paul.

of servant leadership and opened the door to greater opportunities to serve in nonprofit, educational and community leadership.

Scott said his perspective was also shaped by experiencing poverty and homelessness while serving at the Dream Center in San Francisco, Calif.

“That experience shaped my perspective about the impact of housing insecurity, food insecurity and true poverty,” he said.

It led him to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA member for two terms, developing volunteer infrastructure to meet the needs of people experiencing housing insecurity in Portland.

He also began his professional journey in higher education then, as the director of community engagement at Concordia University in Portland.

“During my time at the university, I developed a passion for higher education and teaching psychology at the university level,” he recalled. “In addition, I had the opportunity to serve with the fundraising development department at the university. This inspired my passion for philanthropy and community engagement.”

Scott earned his doctor of education from Concordia in 2020. His dissertation focused on “Empowering Student Affairs Professionals through an Action Research Study: Developing Culturally Responsive Competencies to Meet Student Needs.”

He later felt inspired to diversify his professional career into nonprofit management.

After moving with his family to Post Falls in late 2020, Scott became executive director at Embrace WA in Spokane. In 2022, he transitioned to associ-

ate director of grants at Innovia Foundation.

“These experiences in higher education administration and nonprofit management allowed me to understand the nonprofit sector in the Inland Northwest,” he said.

Scott came to his present position as executive director of St. Vincent de Paul North Idaho in November 2024.

“After one and a half years of reflection, I feel this position is a perfect fit that allows me to utilize my professional background and leadership to continue the legacy and generosity, compassion and care that SVDP has offered for decades,” he noted.

“I believe my strengths complement the staff and board of directors, who continue to exhibit an unbending commitment to care for each person who calls Kootenai County home,” he continued.

For Scott, the most powerful evidence of SVDP’s impact can be found in the stories of the people it serves.

“An individual personally impacted by our services supporting solutions to alleviate homelessness, for which SVDP

is mostly known, is Annie Parker,” he said.

Annie is a young woman and veteran who experienced several challenges that led her to participate in the case management services.

“She now independently serves as our social services manager. She soon will complete her masters of social work degree at Boise State University,” he said.

“Her resilience and tenacity to overcome the barriers that brought her here to SVDP are nothing short of a divine miracle. She is a bright star who, with the support of SVDP, is a clear example of self-sufficiency,” he said.

Looking toward the future, Scott, the board and staff are committed to a newly adopted strategic plan focused on expanding affordable housing, developing workforce training, expanding social services to rural communities throughout North Idaho and strengthening social service support to families with children.

“These efforts not only prevent issues such as child abuse and additional social barriers,” Scott said. “They strengthen intentional opportunities for intergenerational storytelling and identity development.

As the SVDP enters its ninth decade, Scott hopes the organization’s next chapter will build upon the foundations established by the parishioners of St. Thomas the Apostle 80 years ago.

“As executive director, I hope that the next 10 years or more will galvanize passionate community members to serve their neighbors in need and transform the lives of every individual and family who come to SVDP now and in the future,” he concluded.

Scott announced two upcoming events.

North Idaho St. Vincent de Paul’s fall fundraising event, “Souport the End of Homelessness,” is planned for 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 15, at the North Idaho Fairgrounds, 4056 N. Government Way, Coeur d’Alene.

For the event, local chefs donate and serve their favorite soups while hundreds of community members gather to taste, vote for their favorites, enjoy inspiring stories and make a meaningful investment in ending homelessness in North Idaho.

In addition, from 5:30 to 9 p.m., Friday, Nov. 20, the Hayden Chamber of Commerce will launch a new tradition, Winter Glamour with a Heart: A Fashion Show for a Cause, at Best Western Coeur d’Alene Inn, 506 W. Appleway Ave.

This event will feature a fashion show showcasing clothing from SVDP thrift stores, highlight the organization’s impact and benefit the St. Vincent de Paul Winter Warming Center for neighbors experiencing hardship.

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Korean Presbyterian member hopes Ezra 3 project enhances growth

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

Kevin Lee, a member of the Korean Presbyterian Church of Spokane, speaks supportively about the opportunity the church's Ezra 3 project grant is giving the church on this 50th anniversary of the church's foundation.

"The Ezra 3 project gives us a chance to build a more sustainable church and as a businessman I support this," Kevin said. "When I heard about Ezra 3, I signed us up and now am doing something I am passionate about—mentoring youth and young people to become leaders in society through our Book Club and the Running Club," he commented.

The money for their Ezra 3 project was part of \$800,000 the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest received from the Lilly Foundation to help assess how the buildings of churches with declining congregations could become an asset to help a community flourish.

The church was founded about 1976 by the Rev. Joseph Doh. It originated from home gatherings and Bible studies held by early Korean families in the area.

The congregation later moved into its current building on East Pacific Avenue in 1991.

It holds its services in Korean with English translation for the non-Korean speakers who are often the spouses of Koreans they met during the war. Committed to Korean culture, it houses the Korean Language School, which teaches students to speak, read and write the language and helps them express the culture.

Its current pastor is the Rev. Eun-Bae Moon.

After the Korean Presbyterian Church decided to participate in the Ezra 3 Project, the pastor put together a design team who followed an educational program, Rooted Good's "Good Futures Accelerator." They met with the other four churches in their cohort five times during the year to share ideas and at the end of that year applied for \$10,000 seed money to implement the project staffed by Kevin as a volunteer.

"The project is still in its first year and follows the school calendar, so we are not meeting in the summer. We will start again when school begins," Kevin explained.

"We started small with a weekly Reading and Writing Club," he said. "We're working within the resources we currently have, and our focus is on building something sustainable and meaningful before expanding further."

The Book Club has two age-group classes which meet on Fridays at 5 p.m. One is for grades one to three, and the second, for grades four to six. The students



Kevin Lee supports opportunity for church to be sustainable.

pay a small fee to participate and together they read, write and discuss what they are reading, similar to what might happen in a learning center.

Because the church is small—with around 50 active parishioners—outreach to encourage enrollment is a particular challenge.

A Running Club meets on Saturday mornings and is for the families of the grade school children and the kids themselves.

"What I like about the project is that it is not a handout but a step in regenerating the church and using our existing property to turn things around," said Kevin.

Through the project, he participates in an activity that meets several objectives that are important to him. 1) It serves the community. 2) He contributes as a community member and as a Korean community member. 3) It is goal driven.

"Our hope is that this will eventually grow into a program that provides educational support, mentorship and leadership development opportunities for the youth where young people can learn from both Korean and Western values and traditions," Kevin said. "We believe there is a unique opportunity to help students develop a strong sense of identity, character and service by drawing from the strengths of both cultures."

"Ultimately, our goal is not just academic enrichment but mentorship," he explained. "We want to help raise young people who are equipped to lead, serve, and make a positive impact in their schools, workplaces and communities."

As a first-generation Korean who moved back and forth between Korea and the United States as a young person, Kevin brings elements of both cultures to his mentoring of the young people he works with.

He was born in Korea and lived there until he was seven. Then, because his father worked for Korean Airlines, the family moved to Los Angeles for several years before moving back. He finished middle school in Korea in what he describes as a very traditional setting with its pressure for academic success.

"I was an above average student, and I learned a strong work ethic. Growing up my family emphasized academic success, and I'm grateful for that foundation," said Kevin.

"As I grew older, I learned that achievement isn't everything. Strong character, the way you support and inspire others and our ability to lead and bring people together matter more than individual accomplishment," he pointed out. "Even the greatest individual achievement can't match what a group of people can accomplish when they work together toward a common purpose."

After finishing middle school in Korea, the family moved back to the Bellevue, Wash., area and Kevin attended Newport High School there. Later they moved to Beaverton, Ore., where he finished high school and went on to Portland State University and then to the University of Washington.

After graduation, Kevin began his career at Cerner, a major provider of electronic

health record technology. He spent 18 years there in roles spanning solution architecture and consulting leadership. His work took him across the U.S. and internationally, including to the United Kingdom, where he worked with health care organizations on complex technology and transformation initiatives.

When Oracle acquired Cerner in 2022, Kevin continued with the company and transitioned to his current role, serving as an account executive for Oracle Health, covering British Columbia.

The travel required for his work can make balancing time with his family and the church challenging.

"I try to manage my schedule so I can be here when I need to be," said Kevin, who, with his wife, Hannie, has three children—Aaron, 17, who aspires to be a doctor; Jenna, a junior at Gonzaga Prep, and Kaitlyn, seven, who attends a Spanish immersion school in Spokane Valley.

Drawing from his experience growing up between Korea and the United States, Kevin wants his children to understand the different cultures and perspectives firsthand.

When Aaron and Jenna were younger, they attended schools in rural communities where they encountered people from different backgrounds and gained an understanding of cultural differences, including the realities of racism and prejudice.

Kevin believes those experiences helped them develop perspective, empathy and a better understanding of the world beyond their own community.

Having Kaitlyn in the Spanish immersion school gives her an experience of what it means to know different languages and experience different cultures firsthand, Kevin said.

His children also participate in the Ezra 3 project.

Kevin hopes the project, while it is about enhancing sustainability and growth, can help move the church from the status quo and allow people to experience it as a place where they can truly become strong Christian leaders in society.

For information, email klee80@gmail.com.

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Editorial Reflections

The march for freedom, justice, equality and voting continues today

The March on Washington continues. It continued on Friday, Aug 28, on the 63rd anniversary of the march in 1963. It continued the days before that and it continues the days after that.

We have fought hard for a better world for our children and their children. We have fought against discrimination, segregation and economic inequality. We have fought for justice and opportunity for everyone.

We still need voting rights, civil rights, economic rights, education rights, human rights, religious rights and immigration rights. We need legal rights to assure free speech, health care, gender equality, environmental protection, and access to food, clean water and a safe place to live.

If one person or one group lacks access, we all lack access. We are neighbors, friends and family, so we care when anyone is excluded, denied, dismissed, belittled, injured or killed because of their race, beliefs, gender, identity, health or immigration status.

All of our faiths call us to care and walk in solidarity with each other. All of our faiths call us to challenge those in power who would exclude, deny, dismiss, belittle, injure or kill our brothers or sisters.

We remember and celebrate the courage of those who marched in 1963 and have marched many days before and since then.

The focus this year, “Defend the Vote,” is crucial as every day we read of efforts to change the election laws and processes,

to suppress the vote by confusing people, redrawing congressional districts, changing mail-in voting policies in a power grab before the November midterm elections.

We must work to restore and update the Voting Rights Act to reaffirm and reestablish what has been eroded. We must challenge all threats to voting that are arising.

It is not a time to sit back and be silent, but to make our voices heard by making phone calls, speeches and visits, writing emails, texts and letters, joining marches, protests and vigils. It is a time to act.

As civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton said recently, “We are not coming to commemorate. We are coming to continue and fight in this day and hour.”

Bernice King, the youngest child of Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, reminded that her father’s “I Have a Dream” speech called for the nation to fulfill its promises of justice, equality, freedom. She says that the dream “requires our participation.”

Participation now means making sure everyone has the right to vote, access to polls and ballots, and keep the opportunity to voice their choices.

Leaders then and today come from faith communities because it’s a moral, ethical and spiritual matter.

What will you do to make a difference, to give people their voices in these times?

**Mary Stamp
Editor**

Disasters help us overcome divisions and work together for all

As our community continues to recover from fire, we continue to remember all those that were affected by fire and all those that worked tirelessly to help.

These last few days we have seen and witnessed how people come together and work together to help each other.

On August 23 we heard the news of the earthquake in Columbia. We know that aid and help are pouring in from different places, including through United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). We witness the message of Psalm 133 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”

It is good and pleasant for us to be together in unity and harmony in doing what is good and what is right.

If it is good and pleasant to come together, to live together, to work together for the good of all—why then do we only do that when disasters or bad things happen? Why do we not do it all the time instead of waiting for a bad time?

These last few days we see how many boundaries have been broken so that people are able to come together and work for the good of the community as a whole—helping each other.

The sad part is that, what always happens is that after everything seems to be settled, these boundaries will emerge again and divide us.

We remember when the Covid pandemic hit—the political boundaries, ethnic and other boundaries that separate

and divide us seemed to melt away and disappear. People came together to help each other and work together.

When things settled and became normal—those boundaries emerged again. Sadly, these old/new boundaries become harder to break or to overcome.

It is hard because we live in a time and in a society where individualism is so strong and the concept of the nuclear family dominates our way of thinking. We build boundaries and fences that cut ties even from our extended family and relatives.

When we are so focused on ourselves and forget others, we do not know how much we miss, how far we are behind in many things. We are created to live to-

gether as a community, to work together, to love and help each other.

Our safety is based on and bound to the safety of our neighbors. I cannot claim that I am safe when others are not safe. We learned that from the fires that happened. Some neighbors, fire fighters, first responders worked very hard to protect homes—and in doing so they were able to protect others too.

Our gifts should be an enrichment to our neighbors who do not have the same gifts.

Neighbors’ gifts should enrich all those who do not have their gifts.

**Ikani Fakasiieiki
Pastor of Liberty Park / St. Paul’s
United Methodist Church**



Reflections on ashes and action, loss and lament, faith and future

Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth of the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church

In the midst of the fires and smoke, grief and fear were real: Even when fire forces us to scatter, our love can still gather us. We will open our churches, our homes, our hands and our hearts. We will check on our neighbors, make room for those who have been displaced and accompany survivors long after the headlines have moved elsewhere.

Rob McCann, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington CEO / President

We are in this for the long haul. We know that, in addition to the overwhelming short-term necessities, there will be even more long-term needs as the community recovers.

Wherever you are, I invite you to lament. It is a way the Holy Spirit helps us move through grief.

Timothy Cobb, president of the Spokane Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As disciples of Jesus Christ during crises, we are reminded that we are all neighbors. We want to do our part to help relieve suffering, strengthen our community and remind our neighbors that they are not facing these challenges alone.

Namo Amida Butsu and JW Webb, Spokane Buddhist Temple

Our Shin Buddhist tradition reminds that people’s lives are interconnected. When our neighbors lose their homes and families are displaced, their suffering is not separate from us. These are people we work alongside, go to school with, and share this beautiful part of Washington with.

Rabbi Yisroel Hahn, director of Chabad of Spokane

Our goal was simple: to be there for our neighbors in a real and practical way. For a family that has suddenly lost its home, this is more than the loss of possessions. A home carries memories, photographs, keepsakes and a sense of security. We want these families to know that they are not alone.

It has been incredibly moving seeing how people have stepped forward to help one another. During moments like this, differences disappear. These are our neighbors, our firefighters and our community. When somebody is hurting, we have a responsibility to show up.

erosity, kindness, and selflessness. People have opened their homes, shared supplies, checked on one another and stepped forward without being asked.

That spirit reminds us that recovery is never the work of one organization. It is the work of an entire community.

Meggan Manlove, bishop of the Northwest Intermountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

We celebrate the heroism of firefighters, the way the community came together, the acts of kindness, including all who welcomed evacuees into their homes.

The day after an online VOAD meeting, I gave a presentation to 40 partners at Wartburg Seminary on the Synod’s rural ecumenical program, United at the Font: Partnering for the Future.

I teared up when I pulled up the map of our synod. Grief surprises us! It reminds us God’s love is in our hearts and bodies. As we celebrate all the good, I want to say that our faith tradition also makes space to lament. The movement from gratitude to lament to anger to sorrow to hope and back is not linear. From my experience, it has always been more wavy or cyclical. We have many lament hymns and the help of poets for those facing loss.

The fires are a painful reminder of impermanence. Things built over a lifetime can disappear in an afternoon, yet amid that loss, we have watched people open their homes, share what they have, care for strangers and simply ask, “How can I help?”

This is where Buddhist teachings become real. Compassion means recognizing our shared humanity and asking how we can be present for one another when we are needed.

Episcopal Bishop Gretchen Rehberg

I invite members in the diocese to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Our hearts and prayers are with everyone who has been displaced or is suffering loss from the fires. We want them to know they are not alone.

Sheryl Kinder-Pyle, executive minister of the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest (PIN)

Spokane suffered tremendously from fires. After evacuations for the Spokane Complex Fires were lifted, residents in affected areas began the long road to recovery. We continue to pray for all who are suffering loss and displacement.

Julie Honenkamp, CEO of SNAP, and Amber Johnson, incoming CEO

For 60 years, SNAP has stood beside the community through moments just like these. When a crisis changes someone’s life, the need does not end when the emergency is over. It is only the beginning. Families suddenly need safe housing, help keeping the lights on, reliable transportation, financial guidance or support navigating an uncertain future.

This is the work SNAP was created to do. One of the things we love most about Spokane is how quickly people come together when neighbors need help. We have already seen countless acts of gen-

Jason Clark, CEO of Second Harvest Inland Northwest

I’ve been watching this community show up for a long time. These recent weeks have reminded me why.

Second Harvest was born as an emergency food bank. In 1971, our founder Kay Porta started the food bank in response to a crisis—because she believed neighbors should care for each other when things fall apart. That instinct is in our every fiber. It is who we are.

Recent weeks have been heavy. We redeployed staff from Pasco to Spokane, moved some into temporary assignments, held eight mobile markets, several with Partners Inland Northwest, who showed up with diapers, clothing and hygiene items for families who left home with almost nothing.

We spent seven days at the Disaster Assistance Center, delivering 15,000 pounds of food a day. After it closed, we opened a daily market in our parking lot.

Mostly what we’ve seen is people come together from all over. We’ve seen people in shock. People in grief and many in hope, neighbors helping when they themselves are struggling, people opening their homes, their cars, their wallets and their time.

Since 1971, together, we’ve helped neighbors through everyday hardships and major crises. We’ll do it again this time for as long as it takes.

Calendar of Events

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

- Second Harvest Mobile Markets & Food Sorting** 2-harvest.org
To Sept 30 • Longest Table Events (through October), innovia.org/the-longest-table
- Mons** • **Stress-Busting for Caregivers**, Frontier Behavioral Health Caregiver Support, Zoom, 2 to 3:30 p.m., 458-7450, caregiversupport@fbhwa.org
• **Culture Nights**, American Indian Community Center, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., 535-0886 aiccinc.org
- Tues** • **Passage Meditation Group**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 534-7954, spokanebuddhisttemple.org, Easwaran.org
- Weds** • **Practical Centering Yoga**, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 E. First, Ages 16+, 1:30 p.m., northwestmuseum.org/
• **Beginning Buddhism**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 6 to 7:30 p.m., sravastiabbey.org
• **Taizé Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartlettsgonzaga.edu
- Sats** • **Sharing the Dharma Day**, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Lane, Newport, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., sravastiabbey.org
- Sept 1** • **Green Amendments** for the Generations, GU Institute for Climate, Water, and the Environment, Hemmingson Auditorium, 6 to 8 p.m., gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents
- Sept 3** • **The Fig Tree**, development meeting (noon) and board meeting and orientation (1 to 3 p.m.), location TBA, 535-1813, mary@thefigtree.org
• **Solar for the Good of the World**, an EcoFaith Conversation, Meggan Manlove and Bill McKibben, Zoom, 3 p.m. PDT, ecofaithnwim@gmail.com
• **Rally for Spokane River Flows**, Spokane Riverkeeper, Centennial Trail, Barker Rd. Trailhead, Spokane Valley, 4 to 6 p.m., spokaneriverkeeper.org/river-conservation
• **Conversations with Julia Butterfly Hill**, registration for Colville Reservation and Spokane fire relief, Unity Center of North Spokane, 4123 E. Lincoln, 5:30 p.m., hellounitycenter@gmail.com
- Sept 3-7** • **Spokane Tribe of Indians Labor Day Celebration**, Wellpinit Powwow Grounds, facebook.com/events/1409955863415911
- Sept 4-7** • **The Five Forces**: Practices for a Lifetime, Sravasti Abbey sravastiabbey.org/event/labor-day-five-forces-2026
- Sept 5** • **Soul Food, Sips & Sounds**: The Magic Returns, benefit for History Holders Archive Project and Inland Northwest African American Museum, Downtown Spokane, 200 N. Wall, 12 to 5 p.m., eegvision.com
• **Lud Kramer Memorial Concert**, Spokane Symphony, Liberty Lake Pavilion Park, 727 N. Molter Rd., 6 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org
- Sept 5, 19** • **Nordic Dance Rehearsals**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, 11:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., 520-227-1769
- To Sept 6** • **The Mountains Are Calling**, Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, 2316 W. First, Tues-Sun 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., northwestmuseum.org
- Sept 6** • **Teaching Mass Series** – Catechesis through the Sunday Sacred Liturgy, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC) 6910 S. Ben Burr, 2 to 4 p.m., ihrc.net
- Sept 7** • **Labor Day Lud Kramer Memorial Concert**, Comstock Park, Spokane Symphony, 3012 S. Howard, 6 p.m., 624-1200, foxtheaterspokane.org
• **Latina Health Symposium**, endisparities@fredhutch.org, fredhutch.org/healthdisparities
• **PJALS Community Spirit Appreciation Party**, Finch Arboretum, Woodland Center, 6 to 8 p.m., slichty@pjals.org, pjals.org
- Sept 8** • **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference Planning Team**, Zoom, 3:30 p.m., 535-4112
- Sept 9** • **ED Coffee Hour**, Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA), Zoom, 9 to 10 a.m. nonprofitwa.org
- Sept 10-11** • **Executive AI Think Tank**, Gonzaga School of Engineering and Applied Science, gonzaga.edu/news-events/events/executive-ai-think-tank-9-10-2026
- Sept 10, 24** • **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733
- Sept 10, Nov 5** • **Grief Tending Circle**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 6:30 to 9 p.m., harmonywoods.org
- Sept 11** • **The Stars Tour**, Spokane Symphony and Anne Wilson, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, open 6 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org
• **English and American Masterworks**, American Guild of Organists – Spokane Chapter, 127 E. 12th, 7 to 8:15 p.m., 402-319-1716, ehurd1742@gmail.com
• **Walk in Praise of All Metals**, Myrtle Woldson Center, Martin & Edwidge Woldson Recital Hall, 7:30 to 9 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/events/walk-in-praise-of-all-metals-9-11-2026
- Sept 11-13** • **Readers Theatre**: The Guys, play by Anne Nelson, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, Fri/Sat 7 to 8:30 p.m., Sun 2 to 3:30 p.m., 838-6518, ddoyle@unityspokane.org
- Sept 11, 13** • **Die Fledermaus**, Inland Northwest Opera, North Idaho College's Schuler Auditorium, 800 W. Garden, Coeur d'Alene, Fr 7 p.m., Sun, 3 p.m., (208) 659-2491, mabullard@gmail.com, inland-nw-opera.com
- Sept 12** • **Hands Across Spokane**, Community-Minded Enterprises, Riverfront Park, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 242-3405, community-minded.org
• **Sandy Williams Annual Black Business Expo**, MLK Center, 500 S. Stone, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., amos@carlmaxeycenter.org, carlmaxeycenter.org
• **Red Dress Party**, Spokane AIDS Network, 232 W. Sprague, 6 to 10:55 p.m., sanmw.org/sanevents
- Sept 15** • **National Voter Registration Day**, Community Building, 35 W. Main, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., angela@community-building.org
• **Understanding Climate Migration** in the Local Context, GU Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment, Hemmingson Auditorium (basement), 6 to 9 p.m., climateinstitute@gonzaga.edu
• **Ask Before You Assume**, Buddhism Conversation,

- North Idaho College, Edminister Student Union Building, Lake Coeur d'Alene Room, 1000 W. Garden, 6:30 to 8 p.m., sravastiabbey.org
- Sept 16** • **SIMBA Member Morning Meet-Up**, Saranac Rooftop, 25 W. Main, 8:30 to 10 a.m., spokaneindependent.org
- Sept 17** • **Drum Circle**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 4 to 7 p.m., harmonywoods.org
• **Under the Lighted Pines**, Vincent De Paul North Idaho fundraiser, 80th Anniversary Cruise and Celebration, 4:30-9 p.m., (208) 644-3095, info@stvincentdepaulnorthidaho.org
• **Open House**, Olympus Living of Spokane Valley, 16914 E. Valley Ridge Ln, 5 p.m., 509-936-3923
• **Sabes Que**, Hispanic Business Professional Association meeting, Nuestras Raices, 1214 E. Sprague, 6 p.m., 557-0566, raiceswa.com
• **General Meeting**, NAACP Spokane Branch, SCC Building 6, The Lair, 6:30 p.m., naacpspokane.org
- Sept 18** • **Movin' and Groovin'**, Total Wellness Fair, Corbin Senior Activity Center, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., corbinseniorcenter.org
• **Anne Frank and Martin Luther King Jr.**: Legacies that Continue to Shape Our World, Human Rights Banquet, Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations, Best Western Plus Coeur d'Alene Inn, 5 p.m., idahumanrights.org/banquet-registration.html
- Sept 18, 19** • **Oktoberfest**, Downtown Coeur d'Alene, Fri 4 to 8 p.m., Sat 12 to 8 p.m., cdadowntown.com
- Sept 19** • **NAMI Walks** Coeur d'Alene, Riverstone Park, 1805 Tilford Land, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. (208) 416-4718, namicda2021@gmail.com, cdanami.org
• **Spokane AIDS Walk**, Spokane AIDS Network, Riverfront Park North Bank Shelter, south of the Podium, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., sanmw.org/sanevents
• **Saturday with the Symphony**, Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 E. Front, 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., cdalibrary.org
- Sept 19, 20** • **Spokane Symphony**: Romeo and Juliet, Masterworks Series The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, Sat 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., Sun 3 to 5 p.m., 624-1200, spokanesymphony.org
- Sept 20** • **Feast Fest**, Feast World Kitchen, 12 to 4 p.m., maisa@feastworldkitchen.org
• **Ecumenical Potluck**, Palouse and Tseminicium Clusters ELCA, John Lutheran Church, 648 W. Ash, Genesee, 2 to 5 p.m., (208) 285-1719
• **PFLAG Meeting**, Spokane Pride Office, 715 E. Sprague, 3 p.m., encouragement@pflag-spokane.org, pflag-spokane.org
- Sept 21-24** • **Association of Tribal Archives**, Libraries, and Museums Conference, Spokane Convention Center, 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., atalminfo@gmail.com, atalm.org
- Sept 21-25** • **5-Day Icon Workshop Retreat**, IHRC, 4:30 p.m. to 11 a.m., ihrc.net
- Sept 22** • **Inside the Salish School of Spokane**: A National Model for Language Revitalization, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., salishspokane.org
• **"Buddhist Cinema: The Medium and the Message,"** Arnold Humanities Lecture, GU, Cataldo Hall, 4:45 to 6:15 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/events/the-2026-arnold-humanities-lecture-francisca-cho-9-22-2026
• **Spokane Woman's Club Open House**, 1428 W. Ninth, 5 to 6 p.m., 838-5667, 868-1885, thewomansclubofspokane.org
• **The Psychedelic Frontier**, Exploring the Future of Mental Health, UW-GU Health Partnership, Gonzaga University Jepson Center, 6 to 7:30 p.m., 714-0797, cdepri25@uw.edu
- Sept 22-24** • **Fundraising 101**, Idaho Nonprofit Center, Webinar, idahocf.org/programs-calendar
- Sept 23** • **Letter to the Editor Workshop**, Faith Action Network, Zoom, 12 p.m., fanwa.org/events
- Sept 24-26** • **90th Annual Greek Festival**, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, 1703 N. Washington, 11 a.m. to 8 pm., 328-9310 info@holytrinityspokane.org
- Sept 25** • **The Third Cup**, Mahima conversation over tea, Women's Club of Spokane, 1428 W. 9th, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., 788-5947, info@mahimainternational.org
• **Freedom Friday**, Safe Kids, Strong Families, Eastside Gladiators at Vanessa Behan, 2230 E. Sprague, tour 3:30 to 4:30 and rally to 5:30 p.m.
- Sept 26** • **"In Our Own Voice and Our Own Words,"** Being There Conference with Women's Healing and Empowerment Network, Hillyard Baptist, 212 E. Wabash, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., whennetwork.com/being-there-conference
• **South Perry Street Fair**, 9th and 12th, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., streetfair@southperry.org, southperry.org/south-perry-street-fair
• **El Mercadito**, Latino Market, Latinos En Spokane, 402 S. Pittsburg, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., latinosenspokane.org
• **Songs by the River**, Spokane Symphony Chorale on the South Hill Bluff, 5 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org
- Sept 26-27** • **Valleyfest**, Mirabeau Park, Spokane Valley, valleyfest.org
- Sept 28** • **Taizé Sunday Evening Hour of Prayer**, IHRC, 6910 S. Ben Burr, 5 p.m., ihrc.net
- Sept 29** • **Summertime Spiritual Moment**, "Be what you're told," IHRC, 9 to 11 p.m., ihrc.net
• **"Budgets Are Moral Documents: Why We Defend the Millionaires Tax,"** panel with Rick Steves, Faith Action Network, Zoom, 6:30 to 8 p.m., fanwa.org/events
- Sept 30** • **Orange Shirt Day**, Fort Spokane Visitor Center, Lake Roosevelt Recreation Area, 44150 District Office Land N., Davenport/Miles, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., pennys@spokanetribalnetwork.org
• **Open House** at IHRC, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net
• **Rukavina Lecture: Loving Strangers**, Hemmingson Auditorium, 5 to 7 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events/
- Oct 1** • **The Fig Tree**, development (noon) and board meeting (1 to 3 p.m.), Zoom, 535-1813, mary@thefigtree.org
• **Into Africa Auction**, for Partnering for Progress, Gonzaga University Hemingson Center, 702 E. Desmet, 5:30 to 8 p.m., 720-8408, anna@partneringforprogress.org, partneringforprogress.org

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Fall 2026 Flannery Lecture in Catholic Theology

'From the Potter's Wheel to the Potsherd Gate: Material Agency, Prophetic Performance and Symbolic Imagination in Jer. 18-19'

Dr. Anathea Portier-Young

Tuesday, Oct. 6

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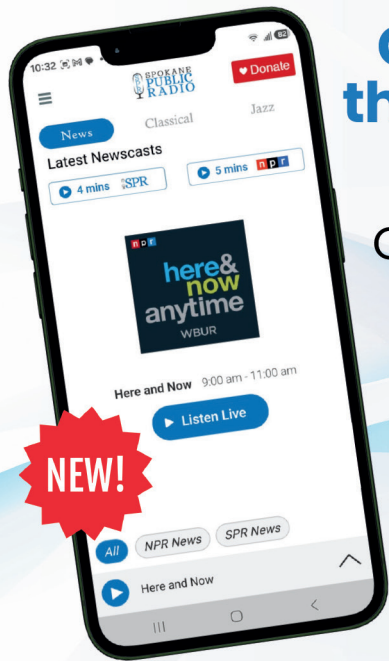
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Partnering for Progress comes alongside communities in Kenya

By Marijke Fakasiieiki
Partnering for Progress (P4P) was started in 2007 in Spokane by individuals who recognized the need to partner with the people in a remote community in Kenya to address infant malnutrition and other nutritional and health needs.

Its work expanded to include water and sanitation, then to education with scholarships and school supplies and into economic development in agriculture.

The geographic area P4P serves is in the western part of Kenya on the border with Tanzania, a place where it's hard to access services. It is one of few nonprofits serving in that region.

In 2007, four Spokane people visiting the village of Kopanga on a medical mission at a clinic saw extreme malnutrition. Two of them, Sandy Ivers and Stacey Mainor, returned home determined to do something. A year later, they started P4P.

"P4P comes alongside the communities as a partner, not saying that we know everything and we're here to save you," said Rachelle Strawther, co-president of P4P and the executive director of the Gonzaga University Center for Lifelong Learning. "We listen to them to understand their culture and try to work in culturally competent ways. What we do is not based on assumptions or promoting western ideas," she said. "We give community members a hand up, not a handout."

P4P has a history of rapport and trust based on collaboration. It is intentional in creating opportunities to help the people support themselves.

Following COVID, P4P experienced several leadership transitions, while also navigating the financial and volunteer challenges many small nonprofits face.

"Like other nonprofits emerging from COVID, we saw a drop in attendance at events, fluctuation in donor giving and volunteer burnout," said Rachelle.

"We realized we had an opportunity to step back and ask what was working, what wasn't and how we could operate more sustainably," she said.

The board decided to reimagine how to run the organization.

The programs in Kenya have continued and expanded, but the administration and operations in



Rachelle Strawther and Joan Muse are P4P co-presidents.

the U.S. changed. Rather than hiring a full-time executive director, P4P shifted to a leaner model with part-time paid administrative support and more streamlined operations.

The board simplified operations looking at what they do and what they do not need to do. They decided to drop a fundraising event because it took too much time without raising significant funds.

Now they're focusing on having one-on-one conversations over coffee with potential donors and interested people.

They simplified their communications, by doing less by email and embracing Google drive for documentation. The board and committees find it easier.

The part-time administrative assistant, Anna Miller, has taken on more responsibilities, including social media, graphic design and communications.

The board operates with two co-presidents. Rachelle manages administrative tasks an executive director would do and Joan Muse, an edtech consultant, manages the board. The mission and work have not changed but have grown.

Joan, who is from Western Kenya and joined P4P in 2025, brings important cultural knowledge and perspective to P4P's leadership.

The same is true of Rachelle, who lived in Kisumu in western Kenya for eight years with the Luo tribe, the predominant cul-

tural group in the area where P4P works. Her daughter is half Luo, and they last visited their Kenyan family three years ago.

Rachelle, who is a member of the Inland Northwest Unitarian Universalist Community (IN-UUC), said UUs draw from multiple sources of wisdom and truth.

"Connecting UU principles with P4P helps me to be curious about the world and open to different perspectives," she said.

Rachelle gave the keynote at the Nonprofit Association of Washington Conference in May, sharing P4P's story and inviting other nonprofits to step back, assess what's working and what they should keep doing, and give themselves permission to change.

"We're trying to be responsible with our growth so that we're not overstretching ourselves or moving too quickly," said Rachelle. "A key goal is to continue expanding to reach more people, especially with farming. Once we train people

in the farming method, they are better able to support themselves and their families.

The farming method, called "Farming God's Way," teaches climate-smart methods using biblical principles, so people understand the concepts. Because Christianity is the predominant religion locally, it makes sense to them, but it doesn't require anyone to have a particular spiritual or religious leaning, she said.

The organization, Farming God's Way, trains people all over Africa and has a training site in Kijabe, Kenya.

"We sponsored one staff member, Joshua Odhiambo, to do several years of extensive certification training so he can train the farmers in Kopanga and surrounding communities," Rachelle said.

Now those farmers are mentoring new farmers.

"We use local and regional expertise. All program staff in Kenya are trained. Of the four full-time staff in Kenya, three have university educations. They bring strong professional expertise to their work," she said.

Twice a year, P4P staff train 30 farmers on Farming God's Way. They receive a starter kit with seeds and fertilizer. They're trained on composting and mulching techniques that result in strong yields. Fertilizer helps them jumpstart their farming, while they learn how to create compost and mulch, so they don't need fertilizer in the future.

"Our farmers see a huge difference. Their maize harvest is typically double or triple what's grown through conventional methods, and it is more resistant to drought," said Rachelle.

Measuring impact has been a priority for the P4P board.

"In the U.S., people donate to organizations because they want

to make a difference. I think most of us want to know that the money we give to nonprofits is actually changing lives, not putting a Band-Aid on a problem to make us feel good," Rachelle said.

Donors want to know what difference their giving is making.

"It's reasonable to ask that of any nonprofit," she pointed out, noting that P4P works hard to track outcomes.

- More than 40 schools and clinics have received water tanks connected to gutter systems to provide the community with access to clean water for up to eight months a year.

- Nearly 800 girls have received "Days for Girls" reusable sanitary pad kits, which teachers report has significantly increased school attendance.

- On average, more than 90 percent of the farmers each donate 200 pounds of maize back to the P4P nutrition program during their first harvest, generating more than 5,000 pounds of maize twice a year to support malnourished infants.

P4P is particularly excited about expanding the farming program because agriculture is closely tied to their ancestry and cultural identity.

"When families can feed and clothe their children, pay school fees and save for the future through farming, it instills dignity, confidence and hope," said Rachelle. "That's at the heart of why P4P exists."

P4P will host its annual Into Africa Auction from 5:30 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 1, at Gonzaga University, to support its work in Kenya. The event features Kenyan cuisine, a performance by the St. Ann Kiswahili Choir, a live auction and stories from P4P's work in Kenya.

For information, visit partneringforprogress.org.

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