



Pacific Northwest CONFERENCE NEWS

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Summer 2021

PNC pastor leads General Synod workshop on cults

**Why do people join cults and cling to the beliefs?
How do they escape trauma and find healing?**

Allysa De Wolf, pastor at Wayside UCC in Federal Way since 2018, has used her family heritage to offer one of 50 workshops for General Synod.

The great-granddaughter of a cult founder said her upbringing and academic studies have given her a unique insight into how cults and conspiracy theories work and why people are attracted to them.

She prepared for the workshop by presenting a three-part extended worship on the same theme, "Conspiracies and Cults: What Defines Them and How You Can Help," from Wayside June 17, 24 and July 1 by Zoom to share with PNC churches.

Why do people believe what they do
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Alyssa De Wolf helps to build understanding of cults and traumatic experiences.

Photo courtesy of Alyssa De Wolf

Leader lends overview of AM21 and path to AM22

Annual Meeting 2021 (AM21) brought a surprise for everyone, said Tara Leininger, vice moderator of the PNC Board of Directors.

"We came into the PNC annual meeting still in pandemic mode, which meant it was online again. Special attention was given to the logistics of the event, so that access to all workshops, plenary meetings and hearings would be easy to navigate and business would still get done."

Workshops and gatherings were on topics ranging from anti-racism to the work of the smallest of churches.

Social gatherings were a time to share what is going on in and around the various churches. While this is simply much more fulfilling in a personal set-

**Annual Meeting 2022
planning underway
for in-person gathering
in Spokane.**

ting, participants engaged in wonderful conversations.

The hearing on the 2021-2022 budget, which runs from June 1, 2021, to May 31, 2022, and the anti-racism work within the conference garnered the most attention, Tara said. To reflect the commitment to anti-racism, the budget allotment for anti-racism work was increased from \$2,000 to \$50,000 with a pledge to raise those funds.

The slate of officers and committee members presented by the Ministry Resources Committee was approved.

While AM21 was a success on so many levels, the AM22 planning committee is looking forward to Spokane next spring.

Those with input as to what they would like to see at AM22, may let member of the committee know their ideas.

A preliminary format includes not only being together physically in one place, Spokane, but also online aspects.

How this will work will be one of the challenges for our first gathering together in two years.

For information, email mf-cucc1911@yahoo.com.

The Bible and history can be complicated

Conference Comments



By The Rev.
Mike Denton
Conference
Minister

Taking
time
to look
back
can
help
us
move
forward.

Anyone who reads the Bible knows that history is complicated. The Bible is story after story of imperfect people succeeding and failing in just about every way imaginable.

Some of the same people involved in amazing, miraculous moments are some of the same people involved in soul-crushing depravity. Some of the ancient interpretations of actions by God or humanity as heroic end up being horrific to our modern eyes.

Some of the rules and laws that made sense because of what was understood to be true thousands of years ago make little sense based on what we know now.

The history represented in the Bible is complicated because people—then and now—are complicated. Our viewpoints on what we read are dictated by what we see in our context, where we live, who our friends and family are, and what we are taught is true.

The identities we choose and those identities given to us are like a prism that adds its own angle and perspective to what we read. Our self-interest plays no small part. I don't know who said it first, but the idea that sometimes we read the Bible, and sometimes the Bible reads us, rings true.

These realities about the history represented in the Bible apply to history overall. Whether that history is a week-old or thousands of years old, all these same factors are at play.

So, when we look at our history, we have to be careful and adventurous. We can accept history doctrinally and base it on what we believe, regardless of facts that might seem contradictory to what we were taught was true, or mindfully so that we understand it deeply, honestly, and sometimes even confessionally.

Winston Churchill's version of an often repeated saying was, "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

A perspective we uncritically adopt as our own or receive as uncritically true can be part of that failure. Failing to learn from and about our history causes catastrophic pain in the lives of others and can trap us in prisons of

circular thinking. Being deprived of truth can inhibit our growth and development in ways that crush the world.

As we in Pacific Northwest Conference learn to live into our commitment to oppose racism, part of what we have to do is learn from our history so that we're not doomed to repeat it and don't doom each other to suffering.

Like all history, ours is complicated, too. Taking time to look back can help us move forward.

Murder at the Mission by Blaine Harden is a book that came out this April. It reflects on the legacy of Marcus Whitman. When I first moved here, his name was a name I heard a lot when learning about the Protestant church history and frontier history of the Northwest in the 1800s.

He was affiliated with both up the Congregational Church and Presbyterian Church in different parts of his life. Eventually, he was sent by the Presbyterian and Congregational American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Pacific Northwest to Christianize and "civilize" the Native Americans who lived here.

In one version of this history, Whitman becomes a martyr and a hero, but history is complicated. This book tells a much fuller story, and some of it is ours. I've already started it, and it reads like a novel. I'd like to invite you to read this book with me this summer.

Those interested may order the book and invite other members of their congregations to do the same. After reading and discussing the book together, there will be an opportunity to participate in an online conversation about the book. For information, email mike@pncucc.org. I'll send information on when we'll meet in the second half of July.

History is complicated because we're complicated, but learning about those complications helps us to live fuller, more honest and more just lives with each other, the kind of lives I'm convinced God offers to all of us if we open our hearts to receiving it.

Transitions announced

Corey Passons, who has been serving the Community for Interfaith Celebration in Olympia since August 2016 as a licensed minister, will be ordained Aug. 22 at Priest Point Park in Olympia. He will continue as minister leading interfaith liturgy, teaching, holidays and spirituality. He will also continue as program director of Interfaith Works, a coalition of 30 faith communities in Thurston County and Olympia's largest service provider for vulnerable adults experiencing homelessness. The organization also fosters an interfaith network and supports educational and relational opportunities for interfaith cooperation, understanding and peace-building.

Elizabeth Stanhope Gordon was ordained May 23 to a call as a per diem clinical pastoral care provider at the University of Washington Medical Center. She is also a fellow in Older Adult Spiritual Care at the VA Medical Center on Beacon Hill. She recently became a board member of Plymouth Healing communities, which serves individuals who are living with mental illness and who have experienced homelessness. She previously taught at Seattle University and did disability rights advocacy.

Sam Rennebohm was ordained June 27 into a specialized ministry in clinical psychology in covenant with Prospect Congregational UCC, the PNC and Swedish Family Medicine Residency - First Hill, where he is a member of the faculty. He completed a master of divinity degree at Pacific School of Religion in 2009 and became a member in discernment. He earned a doctoral degree in clinical psychology at Seattle Pacific University in 2019, followed by a post-doctoral fellowship in family health at the Seattle VA. In the Swedish health care system he teaches and coaches medical residents, supervises graduate psychology students, provides psychotherapy for patients and conducts research.

Conard Edwards, who died June 24 in Bremerton, earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master of divinity degree from the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley. Ordained by the American Baptist Churches in 1961, he served churches in Idaho, California and Washington and also was an Army chaplain in Europe, Panama, Korea, Vietnam and the U.S. He and his wife, the Judi Edwards, transferred to the PNC in 1997 and served

churches His memorial service was June 26 at St. Paul's UCC.

Bobbi Virta, pastor at Ferndale UCC, retired on June 13.

Disciples offer classes

The Northern Lights Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is offering second Saturday educational and spiritual growth opportunities focused on congregational transformation, justice ministries and spiritual growth.

The July 10 session is on "The Use of Story in Congregational Settings." On Aug. 14, the theme will be "Built to Change - Adaptive Leadership in the Congregation. The Sept. 11 theme is "Shining a Light on the Table: Exploring a Wide(r) Welcome."

For information, visit <https://northlightsdisciples.org/second-saturdays>.

General Synod is July 11-18

The national UCC is holding a Special Virtual General Synod 33 from July 11 to 18 on the theme, "Rooted in Love."

The opportunity to view 50 workshops during and after synod is included in the registration.

Resolutions include advocating to change the cash bail bond system to eliminate racial and social injustices; banning conversion therapy; commitment to gender safety and equity in ministry settings; ending 128 years of war between the U.S. and Hawaiian Kingdom; declaring a just peace between Palestine and Israel; affirming the rights of nature; becoming a church of contemplatives in action; declaring and responding to racism as a public health crisis; recognizing the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015 to 2024) and protecting workers at churches and religious institutions.

For information, visit generalsynod.org.

UCC Webinar is on Climate

The UCC is offering a webinar, "False Solutions: Climate Policies that Fail," at 1 p.m. ET on Thursday, July 22.

Leah Stokes and Gabriela Sarri-Tobar will discuss how some proposed climate policies fall short of meeting the moral demands of science, equity and justice. Leah is author of *Short Circuiting Policy* and Gabriela serves as the energy justice

campaigner with the Center for Biological Diversity.

To sign up for 1 p.m. Thursday or receive a recording, visit ucc.zoom.us/webinar/register/1116246392293/WN_Zzi-YoFxiS2KZKuVWrK593w.

PNC partners with Colombia

At its Annual Meeting, the PNC voted to establish a partnership with Justapaz and the Peace Committee of the ecumenical agency, CEDEPOL. They work for justice and peace with those who have been displaced by violence in Colombia, said Mary Olney-Loyd, co-chair of the PNC Global Ministries Committee.

Global Ministries of the UCC and Disciples of Christ (DOC) is raising \$115,000 to help support a couple from Puerto Rico to serve as mission co-workers in Colombia. They succeed Andrew Larsen, who served as a mission co-worker with Justapaz.

Alex Maldonado Lizardi and Xiomara Cintrón Garcia will work with Justapaz to build its capacity on peace issues with regional church leaders. Xiomara is a middle school teacher at a Puerto Rican Christian School. Alex is a Spanish teacher at the Laboratory School of the Inter-American University in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

For information, call 317-713-2555, email myrtos@comcast.net or visit donate.globalministries.org.

Admiral has Theology Thursdays

Admiral UCC in Seattle has been offering virtual Theology Thursdays on fourth Thursdays of each month of 2021. Speakers have included Darrel Goodwin in March on "What Is Finished? The Possibility of An Anti-Institutional Church." Amy Johnson, the April 22 speaker discussed "Sexual Assault Awareness Month/Theology of Consent." The May speaker, An-eelah Afzali talked on "Practicing the Faith (Islam). June's speaker was Queerology podcast host Matthias Roberts on "What is a Queer Theology?"

"Secret Revelation of John: a Second Century Healing Text" is the theme Shirley Paulson will address on July 22. Rabbi Kahn will speak on "Judaism and Christianity" on Aug. 27. Judith Laxer will talk Sept. 23 on "Paganism: Nature Worship and the Divine Feminine: Autumn Equinox/Earth Based Spirituality. October, November and December events are being planned.

For information, call 206-932-2928 or visit allevents.in/org/admiral-congregational-united-church-of-christ/9410052.

Conference
News
Briefs

Pastor understands those traumatized by abuse

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despite evidence against those ideas? Why do people join harmful sects, movements or cults? In addition to demystifying and de-stigmatizing those who are candidates for and members of sectarian groups, participants will learn how different dynamics of race, gender and sexuality influence or change the way these groups behave.

Allysa first gave the workshop for the Next Generation Leadership Initiative group with the Pension Board when colleagues asked for resources on the topic.

It's a topic much in demand during these times with QAnon, NXIVM, Anti-Vaxxers, Scientologists, Flat Earthers, Quiverfull Movement Followers and Trump devotees, and made more prevalent by internet and globalization.

She uses insights from her grandfather's experience breaking from the Church of Scientology, which his father founded.

"My father was six when his father broke away. His family was harassed and traumatized by the church until he was 16. Then the family changed its name and stopped litigation against the church," she said.

Until recently, cults were considered something from the 1960s and 1970s.

"I was raised not to talk about our family's ties to Scientology because of what my father experienced. An older cousin and I have been vocal. He has experienced threats," Allysa said. "It's important to tell our story, because it helps other people tell their stories. The more people can tell their stories of abuse, the more they are freed so healing can occur."

Previously, she had only talked about it one to one.

"There is expertise in personal stories and family history," she said. "It's important for the church to see what happens when an organization lashes

out against people who stand up to challenge it.

"I am aware of how destructive organizations and cults work," said Allysa.

She grew up in Southern California attending an Assembly of God Pentecostal church until she was 18. She had a "mountain top experience" as a teen, when she made a commitment to enter ministry.

With the UCC a church with many "refugees"—people coming out of traumatic religious experiences—she works with people from conservative Christian organizations, many of which function the same way.

Allysa spent 10 years on the East Coast for undergraduate and seminary studies. At New York University, she attended the Gallatin School of Individual Study, in which students design their own majors. Hers was "civil disobedience and ideal societies from ideology to application."

"Many people take sacred texts to create ideal ideas of society—Quakers, Lombards and Shakers to the French Revolution and civil rights movement. "People can take ideas from the same book, the Bible, and make extremely violent or peaceful societies," she said. "Similarly, cults and conspiracy theorists take scripture and apply it to a world view they think is better than anyone else's."

In the workshop, she helps participants understand who joins groups, why they join and how to help them.

"Anyone can be in a cult or follow a conspiracy theory," Allysa said. "People are in a vulnerable position when they join a cult, because cults prey on their vulnerabilities and then practice systemic abuse.

"No one 'joins' a cult. Cults draw in normal people seeking to fill basic human needs. Most do not know they are in one. It's hard to leave. It takes patience and time to help people

leave," Allysa said.

A first step for those not in groups is to take away the stereotypes and mystique. Cults may arise in the secular world or in any church. They are not just about big organizations.

"The UCC can help prevent cults, because its policy places power in the people not in a central leader, because of its ethos that all are welcome and because it values curiosity," she said. "Many people in UCC pews experienced trauma in other churches. We need to understand their backgrounds so we do not increase their trauma but let our churches be spaces for healing."

Allysa graduated in 2010 and chose to study at Yale, because it is ecumenical. While she had left the denomination she grew up in, she remained Christian, but not part of any denomination. She wanted to do interfaith work.

After "deconstructing" her faith at NYU, she was ready to build on her faith at Yale, where she was introduced to the UCC, to which she could bring all of herself and be challenged as "a Pentecostal UCCer."

"I did not have to sacrifice my faith or identity, and found the UCC my church home," she said. "Yale and the UCC were also welcoming, also allowing me to come out as queer."

While at Yale in New Haven, Conn., she served as a pastor at the New Town Congregational Church when the Sandy Hook shooting occurred.

She was pastor two years during seminary and one year after graduating in 2012.

"I was pastor to people who had been through trauma," she said. "I saw the community reacting in courage and being positive in the midst of a horrible situation, and being an example for dealing with the subsequent national horror of school shootings."

Allysa developed crisis

management and other skills to deal with journalists, politicians and calls from the White House. "People around the world wanted to help, sending things and offering counseling," she said.

Allysa also worked with youth, helping them deal with being in the spotlight and learning that they were more than "a kid from Sandy Hook."

She has taken what she learned in that ministry and used it in her ministry since in the midst of shootings, natural disasters like wildfires and the pandemic.

While at New Town, the church celebrated its 300th anniversary, giving her an opportunity to learn more about the roots of the UCC.

From 2014 to 2018, she was pastor of the UCC church in Santa Barbara, Calif., before she came to Wayside.

"We have worked here to refocus and identify who we are as a church, developing new mission and vision statements, and looking at how we can better connect with and be witnesses of Christ in the community," she said.

That has included looking how the congregation and building can better meet the needs of the community.

"We have been partnering with the LGBTQ community to be more visible and provide more access to resources. We planned the first Federal Way PRIDE before the pandemic," she said. "We are building connections with other churches in town to build partnerships, such as helping another church put on a monthly meal."

Allysa works three-fourths time with the church and is also a chaplain with Multicare Hospice, where she also is helping people through a time of trauma.

For information, call 253-838-0915 or email pastor@waysideucc.org.

Samoan churches lead Saturday worship service

The Rev. Kelekolio and Danette Koloï of the Samoan Cong Christian Church #2 in Seattle led the Saturday morning worship at Annual Meeting on Zoom.

“We have been part of the PNC-UCC for almost 40 years and have found it to be a true friend and great supporter as we share spiritual gifts, fellowship and properties,” he said. “When we, the Samoan CCC failed you, you did not judge us or turn your back on us, but continued to remain a close, loyal friend. May we be more involved with each other.”

Danette, who serves on the Conference Board of Directors, on the Church Development Committee and as a General Synod delegate, said she, her husband and son have been pastoring the Samoan Congregational Christian Church in Seattle.

“The theme, Rooted in Love, is what the PNC-UCC continues to be to the nine churches of the Samoan Congregational Christian Conference that are also in the PNC. Through Zooms, break out groups, live streams and emails, you reach deeply and firmly into our beings with your love that sees no status or color,” she said.

“**Thank you for making** the word love a verb not a noun. Let’s take in a deep breath of God’s love and breathe out our doubts and fears. Worship God with praise, glory and honor,” she said. “I may speak the language of angels but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may have faith to move mountains, but if I have no love, I am nothing. Three remain, faith, hope and love and the greatest is love.”

Kelekolio said that although “we are not gathering in person, we are thankful for ways made possible like Zoom so the church carries out its responsibilities. We enter the day with hope—for each leader, commit-



Danette and Kelekolio Koloï, top, led an opening prayer and comments. Nofoaiga and Apaula Moi and children sing. Rex and Roselynn Gatoloai of the Ala o le Ola Church #5 shared a message, concluding with their choir.

tee, delegate and volunteer.

“**Spirit of the most high** breathe into us the spirit of newness, give us courage to discuss important issues that affect our lives, communities, nation and world—immigration laws, racism, hunger, homelessness, climate change, global warming, fight for equal rights and justice, ending violence in communities, the ongoing power struggle of political parties, the pandemic and many other issues.

“What is our response as a church given that God has blessed and gifted each of us with thoughts blessings and courage, given each of us tal-

ents spirit and commitment. May our discussions and decisions be rooted in love so we make a better place for you, me and the world,” he prayed.

“May our God, Lord Jesus, come near today. We give the glory to Jesus and tell of his wonderful love,” he said.

The Rev. Nofoaiga and Apaula Moi, and children of the Samoan Congregational Christian Church #4 sang. He has been pastor since 2011.

Nofoaiga prayed for blessings on the PNC Annual Meeting so when people speak they will benefit gospel for missions around world. “May courage

dwell in our hearts so we rooted in love. May we be filled with fullness of love,” he said.

Their song expressed rejoicing for blessings God has given—food, shelter, shoes and love.

The Rev. Rex and Rose-lynn Gatoloai of the Ala o le Ola Church #5 read Ephesians 3:17-19, that the least of God’s people might preach the riches of Christ so Christ will be in “our heart, rooted in God’s love.”

Rex called for Christ to dwell in the hearts of people in the Conference so they will be rooted in love. Paul, writing from prison to the people of Ephesus, said that Jesus came to the world to right wrongs through his life and death.

“**Without Christ,** there is no unity in the world. Without Christ, people and nations are against each other in a battle between good and evil,” he said. “People live in hatred, killing one another. We have racism and politicians fighting. That is not God’s purpose. God’s purpose is to fix the unity that is spoiled,” he said.

“As Christians accept Jesus as rooted in their lives, so Christians blossom with Christ as the root,” he said. “Be rooted in Christ’s love so Christ will live and dwell in our hearts.

“**Christians need to do** our part, to exercise faith and allow Christ to be the root of our lives to make the world a better place so we can live in harmony,” Rex said. “If we are blinded by hatred and addicted to despair, we not live with God’s love in our souls. God gave love to heal the world may peace.”

The choir of Ala o le Ola Church #5 sang a song, calling for people to care for the living, to heal the world and make it a better place for you and me and the entire human race.”

For information, call 206-981-1346 or email koloij@yahoo.com.

PNC takes time to revise budget to reflect anti-racism priority

Hillary Coleman - moderator

Annual Meeting committed to anti-racism, amended its Bylaws and Constitution and passed an amended budget.

More than 250 PNCUCC community members gathered from across the region via Zoom for our 2021 Annual Meeting. It was good to be in community. We were reminded throughout the weekend that we all make up the Pacific Northwest Conference of the UCC and we have lots of work to continue together to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

Here are a few highlights of the business votes Annual Meeting took.

On Friday, the Annual Meeting voted to affirm the Covenant Agreement between the Northern Lights Region DOC, Pacific Northwest Conference UCC, Justapaz, and CEDECOL's Peace and Justice Commission.

This builds upon work that our Global Ministries Committee has participated in since 2017 to create a new partnership.

Annual Meeting delegates also endorsed the General Synod Resolution: Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers (AACM), which will recognize the already formed AACM as a self-created group in the UCC, supporting those who serve in a staff or called position doing conference ministry in the support of conference ministers and conferences. PNC Minister for Church Vitality Courtney Stange-Tregear gave leadership in the formation of this group and resolution.

On Saturday, as delegates began conversation of the Fiscal Year 2022 budget, the spirit moved as questions were raised about how the PNC commitment to anti-racism is reflected in the budget.

In the budget as presented, there was a \$2,000 line item for

an "Advisory Committee on Racism," in addition to staff, camp and committees spending time addressing racism in their work. A conversation followed about the \$2,000 line item being much too small, recognition that no amount of money is "enough" to undo years of oppression and racism, and the need for the conference, including churches and members, to commit to and take strong actions to be anti-racist. This conversation was important, necessary, and is ongoing.

Ultimately, after delegates voted on the Constitution Change: Anti-Racism Commitment to reflect the conference's commitment to dismantling racism and other forms of oppression, they passed a budget that was amended to reflect the implementation of the bylaw change on anti-racism, by adding "\$50,000 to the proposed operating budget to implement a plan to work towards becoming an anti-racist conference. The Board of Directors will identify the group that will administer the funds. An action report will be brought to the 2022 Annual Meeting."

As moderator, I heard clearly the need for us as an institution to do more to become truly welcoming of everyone, to recognize our past and present racism, to center the voices of community members of color in this work, and to honor work that people have done to bring us where we are today and continue this work.

We are called to use an anti-racist lens in all of our work. The board will work with people across the conference, building upon conversations already happening, to move this work forward.

We also voted on a bylaws change related to the work of the Committee on Ministry to bring the PNC Bylaws into conformance with current practices in place as part of



Hillary Coleman, bottom, her laptop and gavel.

Photos courtesy of Hillary Coleman

the PNC's covenantal connections and responsibilities with the wider United Church of Christ, specifically to ensure that our bylaws state that COM will support people "using the current Manual on Ministry for procedures and guidelines."

Annual Meeting finished its business by voting on the nomination slate of new and returning Conference leaders.

Thank you for all who at-

tended and contributed to Annual Meeting, as well as for all in our conference who will be part of our important collective work continuing forward.

More information on the business of Annual Meeting, and recordings of worship and some of the time together is available at pncucc.org/new-page-1.

For information, email hillarycolemanucc@gmail.com.

Anti-racism gathering raises ideas for action

At the 2021 Annual Meeting gathering session on “Our Call, Our Work: Antiracism to Reparations,” Lin Hagedorn of the PNC Dismantling Racism Task Force said that work began as pastors of color experiencing racism called attention to it, especially at the 2019 Annual Meeting.

Participants in the gathering sessions shared thoughts on why it is urgent to undo racism. Their responses included:

- “We are called to recognize each other as beloved children of God but racism gets in the way.”
- We can’t undo racism until people to acknowledge they are racist.”
- “We need to understand white privilege to see how we share in racism.”
- “People are dying every day from police violence to environmental pollution because of white privilege.”
- “For many, their lives are not fully lived because of

deaths, murders, incarceration and struggles for people of color in their neighborhoods and schools.”

- “The concerns of color permeate our society. Culture will not survive if we do not undo racism.”

- “**The UCC legacy** also includes Amistad, civil rights and global engagement. It’s about being in touch with people of different races and cultures around the globe and locally. It’s about seeing genocide in our communities, like the link of uranium mining on the Spokane Reservation to nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands.”

- “Dismantling racism is liberating for us.”

Participants then considered how the UCC might look at life and faith through an anti-racist lens:

- “We need to look at white Jesus images and ask why we hang onto them.”
- “We need to see how we continue to perpetuate positive

images of ‘light’ and negative images of ‘dark’ in theology.”

- “Racism is not about being a good or bad person, but recognizing we have histories and learning in humility a new approach, realizing we did not understand what we learned before but now having an opportunity to shift.”

- “Should a predominantly white church be more diverse? Is that self-serving.”

- “**Congregations might** partner with other congregations to worship together and work on projects such as feeding and housing people.”

- “Sometimes a predominantly white church may be blind to Asian, Hispanic and Pacific Islander members as people of color, because they are not black.”

- “Some churches are good at reading books, but need to go out of our doors and be more present in the community to empower voices in communities doing things in line with our

view of God’s message without trying to be the white savior.”

- “We need to join existing work.”

- “**We need to see and value** our own ethnicity as enriching.”

Lin and Christine Hanson of the Dismantling Racism Task Force encouraged people to read the PNC anti-racism document and move from study to concrete action.

“We need to work in our communities,” said Christine, “and to involve more people of color on our PNC committees.”

Lin said, “We need to go from head to heart and from hands to feet. Our next step is to come together as a conference and commit to the work of challenging oppressive systems.”

Participants agreed on the need to share what congregations are doing, call for coming together as a conference to commit to anti-racism and challenge oppressive systems.

For information, email hansonchristineann@gmail.com.

PNC takes time to revise budget to reflect anti-racism priority

In considering the budget, PNC Moderator Hillary Coleman said budgets are moral documents and uplifted the need to look at conference resources through an equity lens.

PNC Conference Minister Mike Denton said, “Part of the reparations conversation on racism has impact on how we do the budget. Budgets reflect values. We are not there, but we are getting closer.”

Here are other comments that helped in the flow of thinking to formulate the amendment for that line item.

One attendee found the line item to promote equity and inclusion at \$2,000 offensive, as if “the skin God put me in” was a “competing priority.” Another expressed urgency that “We have been waiting 400 years.”

Hillary and Mike agreed

that the budget is a proposal and can be changed.

An attendee from Seattle said: “The Spirit is moving. It is an invitation for all of us here. It’s not just about sticking a budget line as a placeholder in response to many lives lost and the work around anti-racism and colonialism in the conference. We shouldn’t change the budget because it is a moment of shame related to black, brown and indigenous people. We should have known it would be a conversation. It’s a called out moment, a Spirit of God moment.”

An attendee asked: “Is this moment gifted to us to make a change?”

He offered an amendment to reflect greater investment in diversity, equity and inclusion, “in the spirit of recognizing the prophetic words spoken today.”

The budget be tabled to allow for more discussion.

Another attendee said: “no one is suggesting a dollar amount be placed on 400 years of oppression, but \$2,000 does not lend to the idea that inclusion is a priority.”

Then another commented if anti-racism work is not done now, the PNC is not doing God’s work.

There was a call for “a prophetic budget.” The figure of \$50,000 was suggested as an amount that would help the PNC make a start.

Another attendee suggested the goal of dismantling racism is not just a piece of the budget but to be integrated in all the work of the conference at every level.

There were suggestions on ways to make anti-racism a priority: PNC leaders and churches

witness to defund police, listen to area black, brown and indigenous people, look at bylaws, policies and curricula. .

Expressing gratitude for the prophetic voices, an attendee challenged: “Do you believe because you have seen? Blessed are those who believe although they have not seen. We need to believe in the possibility of being an anti-racist church although we have not yet seen one in the context of U.S. white supremacy.”

After some discussion on details, Hillary suggested: “We don’t want to get it right and move on, but we want to make sure we take input from leadership, voices and clergy of color across the conference,” she said.

The amendment passed and the amended budget passed overwhelmingly.

Stewardship Committee plans action on budget vote

Ed Coleman, member of the PNC Stewardship Committee and of University Congregational UCC in Seattle, recently reflected on stewardship.

What a time we have had over the last year witnessing and responding to impacts of COVID-19 on our lives and the lives of those around us.

Through these challenging times, we have had revealed to us many opportunities for stewardship. God's call for us to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly has been loud and clear.

The pandemic has stressed society, particularly those who have historically lived, for unjust reasons, at the margins.

Many of us who have had blinders on in the past or who had taught ourselves to look the other way when faced with justice challenges have been moved to confront the immediate needs of our brothers and sisters as well as to strive to understand the specific and systemic factors that have disproportionately put some at greater and need than others.

One way the PNC has responded to the call for focus on justice is an action taken by the delegates during our recent conference annual meeting.

When reviewing the conference budget, questions were



Ed Coleman shares comments from Stewardship Committee.

raised regarding a \$2,000 line item to fund expenses of an Advisory Committee on Racism.

While this line item does not represent all of the resources including staff time that PNC devotes to this area, many delegates found this level of funding embarrassingly low given the overall size of the budget.

As comments were shared during the budget approval agenda time it was clear a more in-depth discussion was needed.

The leadership re-organized

the meeting agenda to allow for quality time to consider changes to the proposed budget.

In the end, \$50,000 was added "to implement a plan to work towards becoming an anti-racist Conference."

The budget with this amendment was overwhelmingly approved.

While the meeting increased the expenditure side, the question of where the funds would come from was left to be addressed later. Later is now.

The PNC Stewardship Committee recently discussed this. One option to bring the budget into balance would be to draw more heavily from PNC reserves. That would significantly increase our annual use of our limited reserves resource. If reserves are the only revenue source for this \$50,000 increase that would put us on a course to exhaust those reserves in approximately seven years.

Clearly that is not a sustainable path for us to follow.

While specific plans are not yet in place to make a direct request of PNC member churches and individuals to step forward with donations earmarked for this racial justice task, I think now is the time to for each of us to make that part of our call. Annual Meeting delegates

spoke clearly to the need to be meaningful in our financial commitment to this purpose.

As a member of the PNC-UCC Stewardship Committee, but acting as an individual ahead of any committee action, I ask those so moved add this to their humble walk toward seeking justice and kindly offer what they can to move our budget in the direction of balance.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful gift to the Board of Directors that its focus on racial justice actions could be centered around how to use this resource to the greatest benefit rather than spending precious time and energy debating where these funds are to come from?

Any donation sent to the PNC earmarked for this purpose would be greatly appreciated.

Blessings to every PNC church and individuals as we navigate the stewardship issues, at both the conference level and locally, that emergence from this COVID-19 pandemic brings to light.

We have weathered the pandemic itself together and will also navigate the emergence more successfully if we lean on each other and remember to be our siblings' keepers.

Anyone interested in donating may visit www.pn-cuccnews.org/donate.

Giving is integral to the life of faith for anyone

Leah Atkinson Bilinski, pastor of Fautleroy in Seattle and member of the Stewardship Committee recently shared the following reflection.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. -Deut. 6:5

I commonly hear from people explaining why a family member or friend doesn't attend church is that they believe the church is out to get their money.

I heard this so much at my last church in rural Missouri

that one day, when a member said this about a brother, I replied, "He's exactly right. We're out to get his money." The member stared at me with a smile, expecting I was joking. I wasn't. Instead, I continued: "We want him and his heart and faith, courage, strength, determination, questioning nature, loyalty, commitment to good efforts and all the other beautiful things about him, and we want his money. We want all of him just like God wants all of him."

There's a story of a person

who wanted to be baptized but when the time for immersion came, they paused to remove their wallet and hold it out of the water. It's a ridiculous picture. The ridiculousness highlights the truth: it is impossible to step into the embrace of God, commit ourselves to discipleship with Christ, and hold our wallets aloft and separate. God wants all of us. There is nothing that we are or that we have that doesn't get immersed.

I don't encourage members to give because I'm fear-

ful about meeting the church's needs or my needs. I encourage members to give because I love them enough to point to full immersion in God's love and their walk of faith. I want them to know the joy of giving their whole self—all their heart, soul, might and enough of their wallet's contents that they feel they've faithfully given all they could from that, too.

May all our hearts, souls and might lead each of us deeper into the joyful, all-in possibilities of God.

Walla Walla accepted responsibility for community

At First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) in Walla Walla, the whole congregation and board leaders understood that they had “a sacred responsibility to care for the community health of congregation and wider community through the pandemic,” said the pastor Nathaniel Mahlberg.

“Abiding by sound science as it’s emerged about how to be safe, has been an important priority for us,” said the pastor of the 150-member church.

“By checking in on our neighbors, and checking in through our calling tree, friendships and relations have been deepened and formed,” he said.

Their priority has been “to be church, do church and care for the spiritual and emotional health and physical health for their people, finding a creative balance.

While no members were sick with COVID, they’ve had close relations become sick and some have unfortunately died, so members were personally impacted.

“Folks have struggled with anxiety, depression, and the emotional and spiritual toll being isolated from one another,” said Nathaniel.

Worshipping online provided a creative possibility. They set up low-wave radio transmitters, and had people come to worship in their cars. They returned to in-person worship with masks, ventilation and social distancing for Pentecost Sunday and restarted small groups.

Nathaniel found that the United Church of Christ Pacific Northwest Conference was helpful, forming online communities for church leaders to help them navigate the pandemic, developing skills in live streaming and discerning the steps forward.

“I’ve benefitted from our denominational support and guidance,” he said. “Being a



Masked parishioners decorate cross outdoors for celebration of Easter Sunday.

Photo courtesy of Nathaniel Mahlberg

non-hierarchical church, local congregations decide what we want to do. Our leaders could urge, but not forbid or require.

For a long time, First Congregational UCC shared a food ministry with other churches in town, providing one to two lunches a week. Wednesday is the community lunch. Before the pandemic, they served people in the church dining room until the pandemic hit.

During the pandemic, each church has prepared lunches with a little crew, serving them at an outside central location.

Walla Walla’s Christian ministry organization, Christian Aid Center, stepped up to serve lunches churches prepared and delivered to them.

Leaders of the church ministries, which also has a Sleep Center that provides lunches, connected with the county health department and adjusted how they were doing that so it was as safe as possible.

First Congregational UCC wrestled about the several addiction recovery groups it has hosted. Many adjusted to online meetings, so until recently no group or recovery group were meeting on site.

ness,” said Nathaniel.

For folks who were nervous or reluctant, some members talked them through that.

“Understanding the science behind that is reassuring, I find,” said Nathaniel. “Understanding that medical professionals who developed it have asked the right questions, also reassures.”

Education on vaccinations has been more one-on-one between pastor and congregant talking about it or other members of congregation stepping forward to help people get vaccinated.

Individuals have volunteered at county effort.

“Vaccination makes a big difference, that has been key in our church determining that we are being wise in returning to in-person worship in the sanctuary,” he said.

“If we weren’t at a place where such a strong level of our people had been vaccinated, it would have been a difficult decision. It would be really difficult for me to learn if somebody contracted a deadly virus because of participating in something at church. I feel responsible to protect their health,” he said.

The congregation is on board.

“God doesn’t demand human sacrifice to worship. I’ve not felt the need to rush it in to do it in an unwise way,” said Nathaniel.

The congregation has been among the privileged in this pandemic with many working folks able to continue to work, either because they are in professions that adapted—health care, education—or working class in sectors like building, farming and health care where they kept their jobs. Folks on fixed incomes were managing, he said.

Stresses in the congregation have been more emotional,

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Two other church-related organizations in town held in-person meetings, but First Congregational has been erring on side of caution, said Nathaniel. It was hard but the groups were resilient stayed in touch.

The church put out surveys in mid-May, so they estimated that 80 to 90 percent of those who attend had had two doses of the vaccine and the remainder “are expecting and intending to get vaccinated,” said Nathaniel.

“Our ‘reopening with care’ taskforce, helped guide our decisions. We have a doctor and a nurse, so we have tried to be objective in assessments. We did not make assumptions or just take anecdotal evidence on whether people had been vaccinated,” he said.

For people who were not on computers or had difficulty to navigating to sign up, members of the congregation helped with that.

“Our people are inclined to trust data-driven medical science and were overjoyed when the vaccines were deemed safe and were available. Some volunteered at vaccination clinics, seeing that as a public service to care for community’s well-

'The pandemic offered a sabbath opportunity'

It provided an opportunity for people in the congregation to slow down, reflect and think about their priorities in their lives and spiritual practices, said Steve van Kuiken, pastor Community Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) in Pullman.

"In my congregation, some people really took advantage of that," he said. "The level of their engagement is heightened and they are now more engaged than in the past.

"**Their spiritual path** was heightened by the pandemic. In a sense, it has served as a year-long sabbath," he said. "Some folks have been able to find a richness in that forced pause in their lives and opportunities to continue their spiritual search."

COVID impacted everything—all the in-person things they would do, including hosting homeless families in Family Promise. Such in-person ministries had to stop.

Community Congregational UCC did Zoom worship, trying to stay connected with each other that way.

They added a food pantry outdoors at their church for people to come by and take whatever they want.

Many activities were on hold or are in a holding pattern,



Community Congregational UCC in Pullman gathered in person outdoors for their Easter Sunrise Service.
Photo courtesy of Community Congrega-

but none of them were closed.

"Sometimes the church emphasizes the journey outward through engagement. The pandemic established and reconnected us with our roots, a good root system from a spiritual perspective," said Steve.

"**We are not human doings,** but human beings. Spiritual activism that forgets to grow its roots is short lived," he pointed out. "From my perspective as a pastor, the pandemic has offered the opportunity to focus on the journey inward."

Steve estimates that a high percentage of the congregation are vaccinated—90 percent or

more as of mid-May.

"We are pretty unanimous at this church that being vaccinated is an important thing to do, both for personal protection and for protection of the broader community," he said. "We share with each other and our friends the importance of vaccinations informally, but have had no formal role in that."

The church moves to in-person worship in the summer.

They were able to meet in smaller groups according to restrictions, while still in Phase 2 in Whitman County.

"Some members are traveling now," he said of the open-

ing of restrictions.

Having a heightened awareness of food security issues, the congregation established an food pantry outside the front doors of the church.

The church was aware and involved with homelessness on the Palouse before the pandemic. That hasn't changed that much, he said.

"There's also a heightened awareness of public health and importance of the safety net in our local community and broader community," Steve said.

For information, call 332-6411 or email steve@pullmanucc.org.

Faith helps people weather challenging times

Continued from page 9
psychological, and spiritual.

The eviction moratorium has kept homeless numbers from going up. Those with homes and kitchens who needed food assistance have been going to the food bank. Their numbers have increased. The line is blocks long every week, Nathaniel said.

The lunch program serves those living in more precarious situations.

"The housing market in Walla Walla continues to be

bonkers, hard to afford homes, and it has gotten worse over time," he said, uncertain what's ahead in housing.

"**We have weathered** the pandemic ok," Nathaniel said. "Many churches are struggling because of splits, dividing members on understanding of soundness of vaccinations or whether this pandemic is serious. Our congregation has been on board with treating this seriously and being cautious, careful and creative, and being church for each other," said Na-

thaniel.

"**I've appreciated** how deep the roots of our faith are in experiences of upheaval, catastrophe and challenge. The testimonies of the Bible come from challenging times, in which people relied on their experience of how God was at work," he said.

"**We benefit from our-**roots. Our church community has weathered depressions, world wars and pandemics before. We have a history of resilience. Elder members who

experienced World War II have let us know we will get through this together. It's just another thing to weather, we will be ok," he said.

"There is a sense of tried and true wisdom I've really appreciated. There's a light at the end of the tunnel," Nathaniel said. "We'll just keep moving. People come together to care for each other when times are tough."

For information, call 525-8753 or email pastor@fcchurch.net.

Metaline Falls pastor shares pandemic experiences

What affects the town of Metaline Falls has affected the churches, said the town's mayor Tara Leininger, who is also pastor of the Metaline Falls Congregational United Church of Christ (MFCUCC), who shared comments in May.

"Not all churches in our area followed guidelines," she said. "Many did not enforce masks, social distancing or other recommendations. We at MFCUCC did.

"Thankfully, there were no super-spreader events in the North County, except at the school, but they were handled quickly," she said.

For the first few months, Tara sent bulletins and a written sermon, which most of the congregation appreciated.

"When we could meet, in late June 2020, it was with social distancing, masks, no coffee fellowship, hymnals or Bibles. Tables and pews were cleared and I was Lysol-ing



Tara Leininger

Photo courtesy of Tara Leininger

everything," she said. "No one in the congregation was ever ill, and those we knew personally who did have COVID were saved from the worst, except some I knew as a pastor in other areas. I knew of some tough cases and three deaths.

In Metaline Falls, businesses struggled, but "they've always struggled a little so we were able to support some with COVID grants," Tara said.

Most followed mask mandates. Some individuals did not, so the town often reminded them to wear them, Tara said.

"We are still feeling a bit ahead of the curve, so there is some frustration about 'opening up' more," she said, "but I keep warning everyone to not let their guard down yet. We're starting to see the spring tourists arrive—not a lot, but they are on the move."

Tara said vaccinations have been and are readily available either through the Tri-County—Pend Oreille, Stevens, Ferry—Health District or through the local clinic.

"There was a good initial rush, but we have many anti-vaxxers up in this area so things are slow," she said. "I think we are below the State average for

percent vaccinated, but those of us shot are thankful for it."

Interestingly, as a mayor and pastor Tara has been able to attend more meetings because they are offered on Zoom and other online means. It saves her the cost of travel and time.

"We are learning that meetings can be effective without throwing in miles and time, and from my corner of the state that is saying something," she said.

A meeting in Spokane is a four-hour round trip—180 miles on average. A day is shot for a two-hour meeting.

"Online meetings are a blessing," she affirmed. "We are going to see a great deal of change on how we do business in the future, but for MFCUCC, worship will be the same. With our small numbers of 10 to 15, we've been social distancing for years."

For information, call 446-3301 or email mfcucc1911@yahoo.com.

Colfax church reverted to 'snail mail' in COVID

Lynn Nelson, pastor of Affirmational United Church of Christ in Colfax, said that because members lacked "fancy cell phones" going online was not a practical option. So when COVID shut the church down, they did church by "snail mail."

She started mailing a letter with words to two familiar hymns, comments that she called "letter babble" and a worship sheet with prayers, scripture and her sermon.

By "letter babble" she means she shares her thoughts about what is happening in the world and her life.

"Sometimes I've shared my thoughts on days I'm spiritually down," Lynn said. "Often those are the ones I have the most reactions to, because people can identify."

Lynn found she was touching bases with more people



Lynn Nelson in Colfax

than before. At the eye doctor's office, she saw a non-church-going parishioner who said, "Oh, I just read your letter."

The letter goes to 61 people in four states, and she will

"never not write it again, because I reach members who are not able to come to church or just don't come to church."

In the small, older church, little may seem to be happening, but if there is a need in the community the church would help.

"The people in Colfax are weathering COVID well," Lynn said. "We are a small community with close connections and family around."

Lynn herself has roots in Colfax and when the church needed a pastor she stepped in as a lay person and worked to be ordained in the United Church of Christ.

"We're a small rural community and look out for each other," she said.

AA stopped meeting in the building for a while, but they are back.

The church has donated food to the local food bank and donated items for the domestic violence shelter.

With many older members, Lynn guessed a good percentage were vaccinated. She knows of only one 90-year-old woman in the church who died of COVID.

"I haven't heard anybody in congregation speak against it," Lynn said. "I would think the town would run positive, too, but some may be against it.

Meeting in May with the moderator, they shared that nobody seemed to be in a rush to go back, but as they have learned about more being vaccinated, they have decided to open to in person worship on June 13.

For information, call 208-1088 or email lynn.nelson1945@gmail.com.

Everett UCC shares its outreach, plans for future

Everett United Church of Christ on the corner of Everett Ave. and Rockefeller in downtown Everett refers to itself as “a small but mighty activist church endeavoring to do God’s work,” said Rev. Ruth Brandon, retired UCC Pastor and Everett United Church of Christ’s (EUCC) vice moderator. The community refers to the church as “The Rainbow Church.”

Much of its community outreach focuses on homelessness and food insecurity.

There is a homeless shelter in space rented by the county and being run by the Everett Gospel Mission in the lower level of our church. There is also much use of the fellowship hall on the main level for meals, movies, TV and a quiet place to be that is bigger than a bed. Forty people currently reside in the shelter.

On Thursdays, the church serves a free dinner that feeds not only those in the shelter but also any who need a meal.

Indoor meal service was recently resumed, however takeout meals continues to be a popular option. About 75 to 125 meals are given out each Thursday.

Mercy Watch, a Snohomish county nonprofit medical

team, regularly provides medical services in a separate room of the church during the Thursday meal. COVID-19, shingles and hepatitis vaccinations are given. Staff is also available to assist with other medical needs. These services are free.

It runs a small “pantry,” which is open on the last two Mondays of each month to give out bags of food in three categories: 1) for people able to cook, 2) for those with no access to cooking and 3) snack bags for those living downstairs who already have three meals a day. Church members donate food.

The congregation is in the midst of planning with Housing Hope, a Snohomish County nonprofit housing organization, to replace the current building with a new one, Ruth said.

The church will be on the main floor and parts of the second. In the six to eight floors above, Housing Hope will run 80 housing units and services for people 55 and older. Half of the residents will be recently unhoused and all will be in need of affordable housing.

Housing Hope will come with staffing and access to a diverse set of services, so many may have short stays as they move on, although that will not

be required.

As part of Everett Faith in Action, Everett UCC with representatives from the city and county has formed a Public Toilet Coalition of Everett to try to make downtown toilets available. Currently the lack of toilets is an issue.

The church has given permission for placing port-a-potties on its—admittedly limited—land but there are many options being considered about what would work both temporarily and long-term for the homeless, the public, businesses and neighboring residents.

Besides its own congregation, Everett UCC shares its space with three rental churches: one Micronesian, one Marshall Islander and one Latinex.

Everett UCC has nearly 60 members. Its young, black, gay pastor serves a second congregation in Seattle and also has a secular position doing school consulting.

“We are excited about the work we do and try to always be open to where the Spirit leads us,” Ruth concludes.

The church’s vision is to “become more of an urban, multicultural and multiracial congregation of Jesus’ disciples” welcoming one another as “beloved in God and gath-

ered by the Spirit to call forth, equip and share the gifts of all persons, while we intentionally encourage and build a reconciling, compassionate Christ-centered community.”

EUCC’s vision statement continues: “We seek Christian unity and interfaith dialogue through diversity in age, abilities, culture, race, economic status, gender, sexual orientation and creation-keeping. Through biblical and theological inquiry we keep as our guiding spiritual law the practice of the two Great Commandments to receive and offer God’s unconditional love.”

Members from diverse backgrounds have found a home at Everett UCC, which celebrates and embraces people from a broad variety of traditions in its life—Catholic, Evangelical, LDS, and Pentecostal, including gay and lesbian Christians not welcomed by other churches.

EUCC’s outreach also includes Bread for the World, Church World Service, Earth Ministries, Faith Action Network, Meaningful Movies and Neighbors in Faith.

For information, call 425-252-7224, email churchadmin@everettucc.org or visit everettucc.org.



Photo of the Everett UCC congregation on the opening page of its website at everettucc.org.

Photo courtesy of Everett UCC

Camps, retreats resume with safety at N-Sid-Sen

Quilters, dancers, Sufis, women's retreats, families-at-camp and several PNC youth and family camps are shifting N-Sid-Sen Camp and Conference Center on Lake Coeur d'Alene from COVID quiet times to fuller more active times.

While most coming are vaccinated, Mark Boyd, managing director has posted "Pick 2, Stay Safe" signs around the camp.

While Families at Camp rented lodges and cabins last year and continue to rent spaces this year, COVID prevented those groups from having much connection. This year, food services are offered.

Mark has been pleased to welcome back partners, beginning in March with the Palouse Patchers, who arrived masked and social distanced to quilt.

"We have navigated the constantly changing Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines," he said.

From January to late May, Mark appreciated having the help of Shirley Asmussen, a retired camp manager colleague from Ohio.

"With her assistance, we began the daily process of weaving through the COVID protocols so we could have folks coming home to the lake. We had Zoom conversations with camps across the lake and across the country, asking what worked, what didn't and their plans for this year were," he said. "Out of those many, many conversations we believed we had a good plan, and we still do.

"We are using the Pick 2 motto as our safety protocol: Lovingly Distant, Be Outside or Wear a Mask. As long as campers adhere to two of the three, they are good to go," he said.

On the final day of the fully-vaccinated Sufis silent retreat in early June, the American Camp



Tevita, Frances and Daniel Fakasiieiki, background, prepare to paddle one end of the dock while Ethan Steinmetz helps Randy Crowe push it offshore. Photo courtesy of Marijke Fakasiieiki



Dylan Osborn, Connor Farrand and Allegra Ritchie make campfire music at Young Adult Camp. Photo courtesy of Mark Boyd

Association (ACA) announced its agreement with the CDC guidelines of no masks for fully vaccinated folks.

"It seemed that our world had turned a long, long, long corner. We all took a deep

breath together and sighed," Mark said. "For all our camps this summer we will still be asking for proof of vaccinations, a health check questionnaire and temperature checks on arrival.

"As long as all folks are fully vaccinated, we can resume most activities. We will still be asking folks to sanitize and wash their hands more often than we have in the past," he said.

In mid-June, youth from Westminster Congregational UCC came with youth leaders Linda and Randy Crowe, former N-Sid-Sen managing director, and two other adults to repair and put together the swimming docks—that had been damaged in a storm—paddle them out to put in position and build a new ramp to them.

Mark said they also did some much needed trail clearing.

"The trails were more overgrown than usual without the steady self-trail clearing of people walking the trails," he said.

The Young Adult Retreat, led by Allegra Ritchie and Mark with fully vaccinated campers and staff on the theme, "What's Next for Us at Camp and How Do We Get There," was held June 17 to 21.

The group explored the history of camps in general, and N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs in particular.

"We wandered into parts of camp previously unknown to many," Mark said. "We discussed how folks could be more involved in camps, churches and the conference as a whole."

More than 50 Lady of the Lake Dancers were at N-Sid-Sen June 24 to 28. All were vaccinated. They danced outside, distanced, but spent more in retreat time than dancing.

"It has been a long time since I was able to feel safe gathered with a group this large," he commented.

Mark has been begun meeting with the directors for the Senior High and Junior High camps as staff roll out how camp will look with the new relaxed guidelines.

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Pilgrim Firs ends COVID center after 15 months

June 30 was the last day for Pilgrim Firs Camp and Conference Center in Port Orchard to host the Kitsap County COVID quarantine and isolation center after more than 15 months of partnership. The site housed and fed 183 guests who were able to enjoy the serenity of this sacred oasis, said Wade Zick, managing director.

“Our guests, who were exposed to and/or were COVID positive, ranged in age from a three-day-old baby to individuals in their 80’s,” he said.

Guests also included people from the homeless community, first responders, neighbors with vulnerable housemates, sobriety-house residents, newly released prisoners, migrants and multi-generational families.

Many of the guests enjoyed fishing beside, kayaking on and walks along Lake Flora.

“We helped bring healing about in different ways,” said Wade. “It was a ministry that is now part of our story. We celebrate how we lived into our mission during the pandemic in brand new ways.



Supplies for COVID quarantine/isolation center are packed to be moved out of Pilgrim Firs.
Photo courtesy of Pilgrim Firs

“This would not have been successful without a team and staff that committed themselves to this work,” he said. “There was not a day off since March 20, 2020, from either serving our community actively or awaiting the call that a guest would be arriving.

“This was necessary work, soul-fulfilling ministry and exhausting service,” he continued. “There is much gratitude for the hard work of the staff at Pilgrim Firs.”

In addition to Wade, staff making the ministry possible were Chris Berry, Michael Stasser, Alex Siedlecki, Jean Scott, Melina Schue, Ruby Johnson, Kay Jackson, Ellie Jackson, Jay Jackson and Jon Scott.

“We are now in the process of deep cleaning and sanitization, getting camp back to its more typical layout and preparing for our summer groups and campers,” said Wade. “We are also finishing up the thank you notes to the many individu-

als who were generous in their donations of financial support, toiletry items, clothing, games, books and supplies.

A final piece of this ministry will be hosting a thank you picnic and celebration for the county volunteers and guests in on Aug 1.

“This overall effort for the last 15 plus months was successful because a community came together to take care of their neighbors,” he said. “We are extremely grateful for that partnership and their dedication.

While he described serving as a COVID quarantine and isolation center as “a pretty weird journey,” he noted that “we made a difference together.”

For the summer, Wade expects about 50 percent usage compared with typical summers with stone sculptors and musicians groups coming, along with family weekends with people from churches.

There will be a Pride Luncheon fund raiser on Aug. 22.

For information, call 360-876-2031, email wade@pilgrim-firs.org or visit pilgrim-firs.org.

Having campers fully vaccinated is the key

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“Having campers be fully vaccinated will be the key, but some of the youth campers will not be fully vaccinated, so protocols will be tighter,” he said.

Janet Taylor, Erin Jensen and Taylor Mohr are directors of two family camps, one July 15 to 19 and the other July 22 to 26.

Ryan Lambert, Amy Johnson and Janet Malley are directing the family camp they are calling, Camp Somehow, for “somehow we’re going to have camp.” That camp is July 29 to Aug. 2.

Mark said there is no overall theme. He added that N-Sid-Sen is seeking lifeguards

for the camps, noting that other camps around the lake, the area and nation are struggling to find staff.

Aug. 5 to 9 will be the Senior High camp, led by Holly Hancock and Anna Colwell, and the Class of 2020 camp, led by Mark. The Junior High camp is Aug. 12 to 16, led by Steven Hadden and Lyn Stultz.

Through the rest of the summer, there are still a few weekends for Families at Camp and partner groups returning.

“Each group is roughly a third the regular size. The lower numbers will certainly affect our budget, and we are working hard to control every penny spent, but we are back,”

Mark said. “Every day is a little bit easier as we celebrate being together in person, fully vaccinated.

Sept 10 to 12, Westminster, Colville and Chewelah churches will hold their retreat. The Pullman-Richland church

retreat is set for Sept. 17 to 19.

Partners like the quilters, Lady of the Lake dancers, Unity and Unitarian women will be back for retreats in September and October.

For information, call 208-689-3489 or visit n-sid-sen.org.

N-Sid-Sen Staff—Will Mailhot, Jesse Burdick, Greta Guess, Mark Boyd, Camilla Fettig, Smokey and Shayla Felix at East Side Fire District pancake feed.

Photo courtesy of Mark Boyd

