



Pacific Northwest CONFERENCE NEWS

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March-May 2020

Hillary Coleman prepares to be PNC moderator

Through the Justice Leadership Program she served with the Seattle King County Homeless Coalition

Hillary Coleman, whose parents, like her, were born and raised in University Congregational UCC in Seattle, is currently vice moderator and slated to be the new moderator of the PNC.

She is not new to the Board, having served on it as a youth representative when she was in high school and then serving more recently as a young adult representative. Two years ago, she was asked to be vice moderator.

“I wanted to be sure younger voices are on the board so we can lean into the future of the conference in interesting times, changing the PNC with anti-rac-
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Hillary Coleman speaks during the Fall PNC Gathering at Shalom UCC in Richland.

PNC seeks to put parts of Annual meeting online

By Wendy Blight and Hillary Coleman

We bring greetings to you on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Conference. You are in our daily thoughts and we pray for your ministry in these difficult and uncertain times. At the same time, we celebrate the amazing ways you are responding to the current challenges with online worship, meetings and social gatherings.

On Monday, March 16, the Board of Directors affirmed a recommendation brought forward by the Annual Meeting Planning Committee to not hold an in-person Annual Meeting in April 2020. This decision was difficult but given the state mandate and the likelihood that COVID-19 will still be with us in April, the Board felt this was the best decision.

Annual Meeting cancelled.

We are working on how to replace parts of the meeting virtually and will communicate with the Conference about this as plans unfold. Our Annual Meeting Planning Committee was doing a great job planning a rich weekend together and we are grateful for their work. We realize that there are some parts of the weekend that we will be able to offer online. We are still working out the details but here is part of the plan:

We will offer an online connection, probably worship, during the weekend of April 24-26 in coordination with Conference staff, Conference leadership, the

Annual Meeting Planning Committee and others. We have been inspired by the many ways people are finding to connect virtually and will build upon this for a conference-wide connection. Please watch for details!

The main business items that we planned to vote on at the 2020 Annual Meeting were the slate of new Conference leaders, the 2020/2021 Budget, and four sets of bylaw changes. Our current bylaws give the Board of Directors the authority to act between Annual Meetings of the Conference and so the Board will act as necessary to keep the Conference functioning. We will also do our best to keep you involved and informed about the actions of the Board.

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Difficult times bring significant disruptions

Conference Comments



By The Rev.
Mike Denton
Conference
Minister

‘When
I am
afraid
I put
my
trust
in
You.’
Psalm 26

The following excerpts are from Mike’s emails sent out via the PNC-UCC Google Group (see next page to join):

2/26 We want to get together when times are hard—related to 9/11, the 2004 Tsunami, acts of mass violence, funerals, tragedies, failures and personal pain. We need each other, we belong to each other, and we want to be together when things go wrong.

We need to ask: What social justice concerns will be exacerbated by this crisis? How can we help and prepare for these realities?

These days ahead are going to be challenging but together, with God’s help, we will find our way through.

2/29 The temptation among some will be to panic or ignore some of the more difficult news along the way. Neither approach is helpful.

These days will pass! With God’s help, we will be able to significantly reduce the impact of COVID-19, together.

3/4 Take a deep breath. Let it out slowly. Take another deep breath. Let it out slowly. When you’re ready, try saying these words from Psalm 56 a few times: “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You.”

These are not easy days in our corner of the country and in many parts of the world. We’ve all been learning about pandemics, epidemics, and disease outbreaks and much of what we’ve learned has been anxiety-producing.

COVID-19 is a new disease to humans and there’s a lot of uncertainty about it. Some of what we’re hearing is pretty frightening. I admit I’m eyeing every cough, snuffle and sneeze with more than a little suspicion. I’m thinking about my health and the health of all those I love and care about all the time.

That includes all of you. I’ve had at least one meeting every day about this topic in an effort to think about all the different ways we might cope with this outbreak. Each day comes with a new realization, a new risk or a new solution.

It will be the combination of a loving absence by many combined with the loving recognition of that absence by many others that will help us get through this moment. We need to figure out how to be present *for* each other even if we can’t be present *with* each other.

The next few months are not going to be easy. They’re just not. I’m also confident that God is with us and in the coming days we are going to expand our creativity, love, covenant, and faith in more ways than we could have imagined.

Sometime in the not too distant future, we are going to look back with awe at all the new ways

we learned to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. May it be so.

3/5 An 1888 snow storm and a few others that came afterward, spurred on the creation of weather early warning systems that helped people know when a storm so that they could prepare for it; have emergency supplies, limit their travel, and stay at home.

Our public health system was created out of similar experiences with historical health problems. Their job is to let us know about health risks so that we can plan and adjust our behaviors accordingly.

I suggest you not have in-person worship and cancel face-to-face church gatherings and meetings until given guidance that it’s OK to so. I suggest having conversations with groups that use your building about doing the same.

By working together and following the advice of our public health departments, we have a chance of ending this outbreak and helping save dozens of lives. That, my siblings in Christ, is holy, sacred work.

Being together for worship and ritual are vital parts of our life together but Micah suggests that it shouldn’t get in the way of doing justice, doing acts of loving-kindness, and walking humbly with God.

Heeding recommendations of public health departments and canceling in-person worship is ultimately an act of justice, kindness, and wisdom. It is a temporary step but an important one.

3/6 The prayer attributed to St. Francis for us to be instruments of God’s peace reflects a sense of faith and care that so many are expressing these days. In your email exchanges, I have been touched by what you have been sharing with each other.

These times are weird and disconcerting. I’ve found so much comfort and inspiration from what you are sharing and the spirit with which you all are sharing it. The creativity and faithfulness represented in the ways you’re sorting through worship options, pastoral care, and administration are deep and beautiful.

It’s sometimes hard to remember that there’s going to be another side beyond this moment but there will be. Over time there will new cures, practices and preventative measures we’ll learn and adapt to.

We will be changed by this and, while honoring who we lost, we will recognize ways this crisis that, while demanding we are apart for a while, ends up bringing us together. We need each other and that is what makes humanity so

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Transitions announced

Gary Southerton, pastor of Broadview Community United Church of Christ, Seattle, has been appointed as the new PNC-UCC representative to the Horizon House of Board of Trustees. He replaces **Kathy Turner** who served in this position for the past 10 years. The UCC representative helps the board of trustees consider the values of the denomination in the governance of the Horizon House.

Kathy also reported that **Mike Ostrem** is now the new CEO of Horizon House. Mike and Kris Ostrem have ties with Plymouth Church in Seattle, where Kris served as associate minister for several years. Kris is now a spiritual director at ostrem.kris@gmail.com.

Many UCC church members live there and a UCC Pastor **Linda Purdy**, is the spiritual care director.

The PNC has historic and continuing connections with Horizon House.

Annual Meeting decision

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Here is our current thinking:

The Slate of new Conference Leaders – the Board will vote on the full slate at their upcoming meeting.

For looking at the 2020/2021 Budget, the Board will offer some online opportunities for people to hear about the budget and provide input before the Board votes on the budgets for Conference operations and the two camps. We'll provide more information about these online meetings in the coming weeks.

The Bylaw changes require an affirmation by 2/3 majority at a meeting of the Conference. So we will push any voting to the future. However, the Board share information about the suggested changes in the months to come.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate leadership of the Conference in unusual times. We are grateful for the Rev. Andy CastroLang and Westminster UCC for their willingness to host the Annual Meeting, and to the AM Planning Committee for their great work.

We know you are ministering to people in compassionate, thoughtful and creative ways in the face of great uncertainty. Thank you.

Google Group launched

Arlene Hobson, the PNC's executive administrator, said that the conference launched the PNC-UCC Google Group because Yahoo Groups changed their rules.

"People could no longer join on their own, but had to be added by an administrator," she said.

The two clergy, who originally set up the group and were the administrators, were no longer continuing in that role and none of the staff were administrators, so they could not add people.

"Now the office is in control of the administration of the Google Group and we are able to add new people as they request membership," she said.

There are currently 325 members.

It is intended for conference announcements, prayer requests, questions, reflections on gatherings, ideas or invitations to events.

It has been a center of conversations related to how churches might respond in the coronavirus crisis. Mike Denton, pastors and others sharing offered faith reflections to these times. Mike has set the following guidelines for participating:

- Those posting are to assume that all the members on the Google Group will read the message, not just the one sending the message. Those with a question about a post need to send a new email to the person who sent it.

- Arlene said those posting are to "treat the virtual space of the group "as a professional setting and a sanctuary of sorts."

- "Chatter, banter and excessively long postings are inappropriate for this group," she reported from the guidelines. "If something upsets you on the list, please wait to respond or respond privately to the person in question. Patience, generosity and good humor can go a long way."

- The PNC-UCC also reserves the right to remove anyone's ability to post on the list if that person consistently violates the guidelines after being reminded.

Arlene has added pastors and committed members with only occasional glitches.

Use of it has been particularly helpful as Mike Denton, conference minister, encouraged churches not to meet for worship and to livestream their services.

That followed with pastors sharing their experiences with different technologies, such as Cameron Sharp sharing that

Conference News Briefs

ONE LICENSE would offer gratis licenses through April 15 to help congregations cope with COVID-19 challenges and be able to have licenses to use music and copyrighted materials.

Anyone who wants to be part of the Google Group can email her and request to be added.

For information, email pncucc@gmail.com.

UCC Disaster grant given

UCC Disaster Ministries sent a \$5,000 solidarity grant as part of the growing ecumenical response to the coronavirus emergency in China. Funds will go for the purchase and air shipment of medical standard masks and robes to the Amity Foundation, an independent Chinese social organization founded in 1985 by Chinese Christians.

It also gave \$5,000 to fire survivors in Australia, \$10,000 for typhoon and earthquake survivors in the Philippines, and \$12,500 for winterization for Syrians struggling in war, displacement and deprivation.

Donations of \$1 million from across the UCC have been used for relief and recovery in the U.S. and around the world.

For information, visit <https://www.ucc.org/disaster>.

Singing on Facebook

Camp lovers on N-Sid-Sen (we love it, that we do) are sharing in a Camp Song Challenge. Janet Malley and Erin Lys Jensen started it on a coronavirus lunch break by a backyard campfire, opening with "This Pretty Planet." Margaret Johannesen posted family singing "Country Roads"; Amy Johnson, "Gum Chewing Song"; Brian Rapp, "Feeling Groovy." *To join, go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4887409558/>.*

Pilgrim Firs will assist

Wade Zick, managing director of Pilgrim Firs Camp and Conference Center, announced on Facebook that the "pandemic just became a little more real" as Pilgrim Firs signed to be a county quarantine center. Guests are expected to arrive by the end of next week.

He expects they will be serving the most vulnerable population in the community, those who are sick but have no place to be because hospital beds are for the most severe cases.

"We will provide beds and food, with the county doing direct care," he said.

For information, visit pilgrim-firs.org.

Hillary is committed to anti-racism work

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ism work, deepening relationships and understanding issues the church faces.

“We look to how the conference members see church beyond Sunday morning and are looking for ways to do ministry and do church together related to camps, recovery groups using churches, and clergy and lay presence in marches for justice,” she said.

Hillary believes it is important to continue anti-racism work in the PNC, specifically focusing on what that means in conference leadership for the conference and congregations.

She appreciates the collective work the PNC began at Annual Meeting in Bellevue and hopes to continue these conversations and actions in all the different PNC contexts.

“There is positive movement in that work,” she said. “I am also looking to deepen relationships across the conference.”

Her family lives in Lake Forest Park. Both sets of her grandparents attended University Congregational UCC, and her parents were also raised there.

Hillary has participated as a youth in some camps at Pilgrim Firs, as a young adult in a retreat at N-Sid-Sen, as an leader for National Youth Event in 2016 and for the Western Regional Youth Event in 2018. She also went to three NYEs.

She has lived in the Pacific Northwest all her life except for going to Connecticut College in New London, Conn., where she double majored in psychology and Hispanic studies. Her studies also included participating in the Academic Center for Public Policy and Community Action.

“I knew I wanted to support other people and make the world a better place, so I focused on the social side of psychology,” said Hillary who

graduated in 2014.

The campus was predominantly white, but she was involved with Students Organized Against Racism, helping people understand where others come from, and understand white privilege and anti-racism.

During her college years, Hillary studied the spring of 2013 in Cusco, Peru, with other 16 students in an academic program on indigenous people and the effects of globalization.

They connected with local Cusqueña families, living with host families, speaking Spanish and learning about life.

“I learned how to be present in the moment. to learn by deepening relationships and talking with people, as well as by participating in activities, like Holy Week parades and other Catholic and local celebrations,” she said.

“I made sure to know people for who they are and understand how history, especially the ugly side, and discrimination influence how people walk in the world,” Hillary said.

Although she was active in church growing up, she did not attend a church in Connecticut, but she found her soul fed being in the Gospel choir on campus.

Hillary returned to Seattle to participate in the PNC’s Justice Leadership Program for young adults. She served as an intern with the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, which is where she now works.

“I learned what it is to do advocacy work,” she said. “In college, I learned about service with a focus on advocacy.”

She lived with one roommate with a UCC background and two with other backgrounds. She attended All Pilgrims Church in Seattle, singing in the choir and leading a class on economic inequality with Steve Clagett, chair of the PNC Justice Witness Ministries Committee.



Hillary Coleman at Annual Meeting 2019 at Bellevue First.

“I participated with other churches working on economic justice during my JLP year from 2014 to 2015,” said Hillary, who found the work with the Coalition on Homeless a good fit.

“I began as mobilization coordinator and I’m now the community project manager, running work to help people experiencing homelessness register to vote, and doing advocacy at the state, county and local levels.

“It’s important to look at systemic change. There is much to be done to address homelessness in the region,” she said. “The coalition works with 60 member organizations that provide direct services, so

our advocacy is informed by the experiences of those working with the agencies and the people they serve.”

The work is grounded in community organizing to challenge policy makers.

“We look at the amount of financial growth in King County and call for an increase in finances for housing people who were formerly homeless. We collaborate for he hard to house,” she said noting that there are many effective services. “We don’t need funds for new programs but we need to be able to fund what is already in place.”

For information, call 206-321-4344 or email hillarycolemanucc@gmail.com.

Learning new ways to be present without being present

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frustrating and so beautiful. Today, I clearly see that beautiful part because it's so easy to see it in each of you.

3/8 I am thinking about all of you this morning as we worship together in different ways and with different concerns than many of us have had as part of our lives before this moment. In a way, we now join those in many parts of the world who have had to deal with similar or worse anxiety more regularly than we have. We join with those in our history who had to deal with it, too.

3/9 I know many of you, based on health department suggestions decided to simply close your doors this week and are looking for remote worship options for next week.

3/10 By the grace of God, the skills of worship leaders, and the faithfulness of those who ventured to worship online, it is clear that this was an overall positive experience. Many of those churches that had the means to see the numbers of folks participating in worship this way actually saw a higher number of people participating than would on an average Sunday!

We're going to be different on the other side of all of this but we're going to make it through.

3/13 Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Go ahead and do it again. We're at another one of those key moments in the COVID-19 pandemic when the Governor of Washington State closed all schools in the state until, at least, April 24.

A couple of weeks ago, I suggested that each church put together plans to prepare for the disruption COVID-19 would cause. I recommended following the direction of your local health department.

I suggest we put these plans into action, so we can join the effort to limit exposure to our-

selves, our communities and all those we care for and love.

I suggest that congregations:

- Not have in-person worship for, at least six weeks.
- Cancel or postpone all face-to-face meetings and gatherings, including funerals and weddings.
- Suspend face-to-face pastoral visits and switch to video conferences, phone calls, emails or letters.
- Set protocols to inform congregations when members test positive to respect their privacy and inform those who may have been exposed.

• Converse with groups who use your building about suspending their use of the building and offer to share video or phone meeting options.

• Promote online and mail-in giving.

• Begin designing a recovery plan for when this is over.

• Decide if you will offer your building for emergency use.

Hospitals are reaching their capacities to care for those who come to them. More space will be needed and, in the 1918 flu outbreak, many churches offered their space for both emergency operations and care of those infected. Let your local health department know and email me mike@pncucc.org. 3/18 - There are also requests for space for overflow from homeless shelters.

These days are challenging and they will not be without pain. I know we would rather choose some pain now to protect others from suffering and death, rather than go on as usual and be part of causing suffering and death. That's our choice.

This is our call at this moment. A conservative estimate is that 480,000 could pass away from this infection. Our behavior and willingness to participate in social distancing, hand washing and disinfecting could

lower this number significantly.

There is another side of this. We will celebrate and worship together again. In the meantime, may God help us answer the call before us at this time.

3/14 I appreciate the compassion expressed to folks in recovery who have 12-step programs in our churches.

It's important to converse with groups who use your building. If things continue to progress, there is a chance one of these groups will inadvertently become a point from which disease is spread and will have to stop for a while. Second, there is a chance that the health department will recommend we close our buildings.

3/15 I know there is a lot of preparing, testing and probably a little bit of finger-crossing going on this morning in many, many places throughout the conference and, actually, the world.

May you be blessed as you do this holy work. May your technological glitches be few but, when they happen, may we receive them with patience and grace. May you feel the presence of a Body of Christ that is bigger than any distance.

We may be apart but we're in this together. Thanks be to God.

3/16 These words have become part of my daily readings these days:

"The possibility of paradise hovers on the cusp of coming into being, so much so that it takes powerful forces to keep such a paradise at bay. If paradise now arises in hell, it's because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way." Solnit, Rebecca. *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*. Penguin Books, 2010

The title tells you what this book is about. I read it several years ago. The idea quoted is

one that's helped me remain hopeful at this moment. I know we're probably not quite feeling that paradise vibe at this moment. We're still in the middle of this slow-moving tsunami, but these words remind me there will be another side to this. It's coming.

Take a deep breath here. It's going to take a bit to get used to this idea. Humans might just be a hell of a lot better than we thought.

There have been some stories of behavior that's far from ideal but I've received far more questions from folks asking about helping others and caring for others than anything else. I've heard and witnessed far more words of encouragement and support than anything else. I've had more people reaching out to offer help than anything else. I'm hearing account after account of other people experiencing the same.

People are not perfect but they are good. We're going to do the best we know how through the next months and we're going to figure it out. Yes, there will be suffering and grieving, but even though we might not be able to be there with each other, we will be there for each other.

This is our opportunity to see how irrelevant and fragile systems are that have held us apart for so long. Solnit says, our tendency to be in community is so strong and powerful it takes a tremendous amount of resources to support systems that keep us apart. As they fall, we will rise.

The days ahead are going to be difficult and deadly. However, in the coming days, I think there's also a good chance we're going to exceed our expectations. On the day the vaccination comes, I will celebrate with the rest of the world. I will also hold on with my whole being to this new thing we will have built together: this new life.

CastroLangs give witness at Spokane City Council

Usually Spokane City Council Monday meetings are sparsely attended, except for “a grumpy old white man who usually comes to reprimand the Council for its wasteful, corrupt actions,” said Jim CastroLang, pastor of Colville First Congregational UCC who lives in Spokane.

One recent Monday evening, the chambers were overflowing from 6 to 9:15 p.m.

The City Council was considering an ordinance to strengthen the noise provisions in the law and give more clarity so police know when the decibels are too high, so they can stop it. It permits police to carry decibel meters so they can measure levels and know when they exceed that the ordinance permits. The ordinance, which passed, also still allows organizations like Planned Parenthood to challenge such groups in civil suits.

Both Andy CastroLang, pastor of Westminster Congregational UCC in Spokane, and Jim were there wearing their clerical collars, hugging friends and allies—about a third of the crowd. They were there to stand for justice. Andy was the only pastor who spoke in support of the ordinance.

“Part of the crowd used the name of Jesus and the Bible as a law book. They stood ready to condemn, certain they had listened to God and were God’s warriors ready to do battle,” said Jim.

“They had no need to listen to our stories or arguments. They had no need to know us at all. They were there for their God. They were right, and were sure we were evil,” he said.

They were there from what they call the “Church at Planned Parenthood,” which holds “worship services” regularly outside Spokane’s Planned Parenthood facility.

They blast messages of



Andy CastroLang testifies at Spokane City Council.

judgment and condemnation with concert-like speakers, so patients and medical staff in exam rooms hear them clearly.

“They sing songs of praise to their God, who condemns right along with them. It is cruel and heartbreaking. These are ‘true believers’ who have no need to listen to any perspective but their own,” Andy said.

Andy went for two reasons:

1) to make sure patients can access Planned Parenthood health care services without bullying or harassment, and 2) to stand as witness that not all Christians are “vicious, manipulative, spiteful and judgmental.”

Jim described about two-thirds of the crowd as “hostile white male Christian leaders.”

“As they stood up, they denounced, yelled at and harangued the community leaders, calling them despicable names,” said Andy. “We were deeply offended for our City Council members.”

Jim said some women, caught up in the male rage were doing this as well.

“We wanted to run from this rage because it was like a poison to our bodies, tempted us with anger in our hearts, and brought harsh thoughts into our heads,” said Jim.

Some of the people were not from the city or state.

“We wonder if our city council might find that they

should limit the ‘open forum’ to residents of our city and county,” she said, wondering why Trump hats some wore were allowed in city council.

“We were appalled at the lack of civility and courtesy among the crowd of angry men, and women who followed their lead,” said Andy. “Council president Breean Beggs, who was tolerant and civil, was reviled by them.”

“We acknowledge there was anger and dismay voiced towards these ‘Christian’ speakers from our side of the issue,” she said, “but the negative energy and intensity from the ‘other side’ was overwhelming. When we got home, we felt we had run a full marathon, being punched every step of the way.”

Jim and Andy recognize this could have been about any hot button issue that has divided society in this generation.

“It seems like these Christians on the far right are in a different religion from those of us in the United Church of Christ,” they said. “They describe a God we don’t recognize.”

In the open forum at City Hall, people said they were defending their first amendment right to freedom of speech. The CastroLangs felt it was pushing the boundaries of “human speech,” sliding rapidly into “bullying speech” and “igno-

rant, hate-filled speech.”

Jim and Andy felt the talk was meant to intimidate and silence others. For those with memories of being bullied, the fear this rhetoric brings up is real, they said.

As a woman, Andy said she has experienced this more than Jim. She has memories of being bullied, harassed and mocked, whether as a girl child on the playground or as a woman in the work force.

That evening, a man looked Jim in the face and said, “You should be ashamed, take off that collar, you disgust me.”

At that moment and in that setting, Jim struggled with what it would mean and what it would look like to “love your enemies.”

“It was hard to be in that environment with people locking us out and not listening, so we did not know how to respond, he said

“This is what we do in the UCC. We stand for justice. We stand with allies,” he said. “We work our hearts out for a more loving and just world. The measure passed and we prevailed.”

That night and online later, many thanked Jim and Andy for their courage.

“Andy spoke to the Council that night and it showed our allies what we mean as we follow Jesus in the United Church of Christ,” Jim said. “In the face of harassment, friends, colleagues, supportive strangers all need to join together and stand together.

“This is what we do. Does it take courage? We suppose it does, but in the UCC, this is what we believe we are called to do. This is us,” Jim and Andy said.

For information, call 998-7203 or 624-1366, or email jcartrolang@gmail.com or pastorandy@westminster.org.

Magnolia UCC holds second Community in Service

For the second year, Magnolia UCC organized a Community in Action Sunday on Feb. 23 for the congregation and other volunteers to go into the community and serve neighbors, instead of gathering for worship. More than 130 volunteered to participate in five projects, returning to the church for hot soup and cocoa.

They made the front page of the Queen Anne and Magnolia News <https://queenannenenews.com/Content/News/Homepage-Rotating-Articles/Article/A-different-type-of-service/26/538/40558>.

Marci Scott-Weis, senior pastor, said they “cleared brush, planted trees, made blankets, prepped comfort kits for the homeless, spruced up a tiny cabin village and did projects to support animals in a shelter.”

Of the 130 volunteers, 50 worked on habitat restoration and tree planting at Thorndyke Park, 25 did indoor and outdoor projects at the Seattle Animal Shelter, 40 created blankets for Project Linus for children in hospitals and entering foster care, eight created comfort kits for the Ballard Food Bank and 10 worked at the Interbay Village Tiny Cabins.

Volunteers from the church and community met at the church to start the day with a blessing and sending forth, Marci said. They divided into five teams for the projects, and returned for soup and cocoa.

“It was an amazing morning seeing folks from our congregation and community join together to help neighbors,” she said. “We had elderly folks and preschoolers working side-by-side on projects. We had strangers who came together for a common cause and became friends.

“It was fun. It was crazy busy. It was church,” she said.

Marci said the community matters to the congregation and



Girls prepare blankets for children in Project Linus.

Photos courtesy of Magnolia UCC

being of service matters, too.

“Our neighbors matter to us,” she said.

“It’s a different way to do church and be church in this world,” she said. “Instead of being inside at church and worshipping, we are out in our community, helping in whatever ways we can.”

Several members shared their experiences.

Melissa Rankin said the Thorndyke Park project brought together 50 Scouts, baseball players, church and community members to strop invasive holly and replace it with indigenous plants.

“The hard work created

camaraderie and a cooperative spirit among us,” she said. “It provided a great opportunity to get to know each other and make a noticeable difference in our community.”

Parishioner Diane Wheeler appreciated the opportunity to make a tangible difference in her community.

She appreciated being part of a group of men and women, girls and boys of various ages and experience, giving up their morning to be part of a crew that quickly became a team clearing blueberry brambles in front of a dog play area.

“We shared who we are and became friends, laughing while

pruned brambles stuck to our arms and pant legs,” she said.

Ruth Beckett found it an enriching experience.

“I met many wonderful, interesting people. It was fun to see the little girl with unicorns on her dress on the floor pushing bits of fringe into the little opening in the fleece along with the big girls,” she said.

She enjoyed watching one of the Girl Scouts teach a girl who had been at the animal shelter how to do the fringe on the blankets.

“It was gratifying to see people invested enough in the project to take them home to finish,” Ruth said.

Amy Kover worked at Thorndyke Park, appreciating how good it felt to move her body to something productive done outdoors. Working two hours, she barely saw her own “dent in the cleanup,” but when she looked around at what the crew of 45 accomplished, she saw the whole park looked different.

“It was a reminder of what numbers can accomplish,” she said.

She quoted another volunteer who said: “Through this we are fostering community, moving our bodies, getting outside and accomplishing something positive for the environment. There are no downsides.”

Sue Olsen worked with the group at Interbay Village, introducing themselves to the people living there.

“We said we chose to take part in Community In Action Sunday,” she said.

One task was weeding planter boxes in community spaces. One person commented when they finished weeding: “I can hardly wait to come back in the spring and fill the boxes with flowers.”

For information, call 206-283-1788 or email contact@magnoliaucc.org.



Amy Kover helps clear invasive holly at Throndyke Park.

Climate Change Team has successful action

Climate Change Action Team recently presented a report on their actions since the PNCUCC 2019 Fall Gathering, “Weaving Together to Win: Progressing from Value Statements to Concrete Action.”

One goal of the conference is to grow the PNC’s commitment and intention to pursue justice. Another is to build intra-conference justice connections with like-minded justice advocates, said Courtney Stange-Tregear, minister of vitality, who helped organize the event.

“At the Fall Gathering we took big steps towards achieving those goals. We practiced a process of moving from sharing personal struggles to taking specific action to change the world,” she said.

Lora Rathbone, who joined the Climate Change Team, said participants started by defining “a problem that we care about in a deeply personal way, then identified action steps for a specific positive outcome. To increase the likelihood of achieving success we used a process to focus narrowly, and make change in concrete, measurable ways.”

Several action teams were formed: Immigration/deportation, Health Care Access, Housing, Racial Justice and Climate Change. Team reports will be presented at the Annual Meeting; to learn from each other and encourage the start of more justice projects.

Lora worked with the Climate Change action team.

“We chose advocating for a Washington State bill as a concrete project with a measurable outcome. We chose the



Climate Change Action Team: Susan Champlain, Lora Rathbone, Meighan Pritchard, Lin Hagedorn, Lara Crutsinger-Perry and Kathy Dawson.

Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program (SB5947/HB2095) because of its bipartisan support and likelihood of success—it had passed the Senate last year—as well a potential effectiveness in reducing the carbon that causes climate change,” she said.

Lora offered details about Senate Bill 5947:

- It targets reducing carbon emissions generated in the state’s agricultural sector.

- It creates a grant program for growers to voluntarily adopt carbon-reducing and sequestration practices.

The program would fund work in three areas:

- It would reduce carbon emissions generated throughout farming and ranch processes, including from fertilizers, pesticides and fuels.

- It calls for adopting regenerative agricultural practices like no-till, cover-cropping,

manure, compost and biochar additions.

- It promotes Agroforestry, the addition of new trees and shrubs on agricultural and ranch settings that sequester carbon.

SB 5947 was sponsored by equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, said Lora.

In addition, many organizations support the sustainable farms and fields bill, including Carbon Washington, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, the American Farmland Trust, the Tulalip Tribe, Tilth, Audubon Washington, The Nature Conservancy, the Faith Action Network, Earth Ministry, dozens of farms, and more.

Lora listed the Climate Change Team’s Action Steps:

- They met during the Justice Witness Ministries Committee of the Pacific NW Conference Environmental Justice Team monthly meetings.

- The first step was to write a letter to each member’s state senators for PNC congregation members to sign.

- Requests for action by UCC churches were sent using the UCC list serve.

- Team members had their church members write postcards, sign letters and call their legislators.

- Lora encouraged attendees to support the bill at the Faith Action Network Advocacy Day.

- Steve Claggett, speaking for the PNCUCC, testified in favor of the bill during the public hearing in the House.

- The team also used media, including a NWPB story written about the bill and the environmental advocacy at Shalom UCC. The report is at <https://www.nwpb.org/2020/03/05/climate-stewardship-connects-eastern-washington-faith-and-farming-to-legislative-action-in-olympia/>.

An article on the Climate Change Team’s efforts is on the next page of this edition of United Church News.

“The bill passed, so the next step is to celebrate our success, and thank everyone, including our legislators, for their support,” said Lora.

The Climate Change Team is planning which project to do next.

“We met the goal of building Inter and Intra-conference Justice connections with like-minded justice advocates,” said Lora. “It was rewarding and inspiring and clearly showed the power of working together.”

Richland-Shalom member advocates for justice

One piece of action that has come out of the PNC Fall Gathering and the Environmental Justice Team that formed is passage of Senate Bill 5947, establishing the Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program

The legislation's passage means state funds go to farmers who voluntarily do practices that sequester carbon like no till, cover crops, planting trees, and reduced pesticide and fertilizer use.

It was signed by Governor Jay Inslee in early March

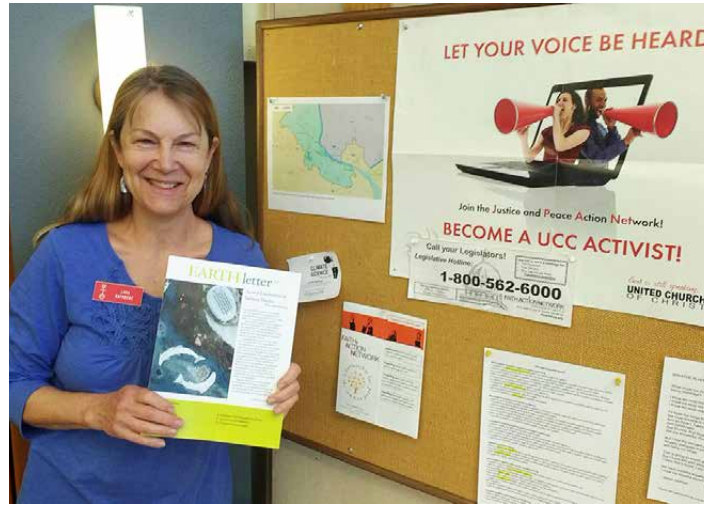
Lora Rathbone, a member of Shalom United Church of Christ in Richland's Mission Social Action Committee and the PNC Environmental Justice Team, said the bill was written by Carbon Washington in a way that would elicit bipartisan support and support from Eastern and Western Washington.

Lora also worked with the Tri-Cities Faith Action Network to spread the word and educate people at Shalom UCC, in the community and around the PNC on the Sustainable Farming Bill—working with Faith Action Network and Earth Ministry Interfaith Power and Light. They gathered signatures and urged people in congregations to contact their representatives and express support for passing the bill.

Lora succeeded in drawing reporter Courtney Flatt from Northwest Public Broadcasting (NWPB) to do a story that is online at <https://www.nwpb.org/northwest-news/>

Lora invited the reporter, Courtney, to come when her church was doing a service for Evolution Sunday, recognizing Charles Darwin's birthday by having a focus on climate change, with LeeAnn Beres, executive director of Earth Ministry, speaking.

In the report on how climate stewardship connects Eastern



Lora Rathbone works through her church's Mission Social Justice Action Committee to promote members' involvement in issues. Her passion is for environmental justice.

Photo courtesy of Lora Rathbone

Washington faith and farming to legislative action in Olympia, the reporter covered the service, the bill and a local farmer.

It included Earth Ministry, Shalom UCC, information on the bill and information on the Faith Action Network advocacy day in Yakima.

The story opens telling of members of Shalom UCC in Richland singing environmental hymns at its Feb. 9 worship.

"Climate change isn't a new topic for the progressive church, but it is perhaps tinged with new urgency. Survey results from the Pew Research Center show that congregations are delving into environmental awareness recently," the reporter said.

She then quoted LeeAnne saying that "climate change is the most important moral issue of this generation," and commenting that science and religion go hand-in-hand.

Lora, who moved to Richland in 1984 and has been a member at Shalom UCC since about 1990, said she had suggested that the Environmental Justice Team focus on the Sustainable Farms and Fields Bill, because she had been working

on promoting it and saw that the effort fit the focus of choosing an action item that could bring measured results.

Lora has been involved with the Mission and Social Action Committee for a long time. In April with Earth Day, it has usually focused on environmental issues, which are her passion, particularly climate change.

She is also involved with the Faith Action Network on environmental issues, with the Tri Cities Chapter of the Citizens Climate Lobby working on a federal carbon fee plan, and with the Go Green Tri-Cities website and Facebook page.

"Go Green focuses on green living information and has an event calendar," she said. "Our Facebook page has more than 800 likes.

"Church is the place for environmental work," said Lora, who has followed efforts of climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe to reach evangelical Christians on climate change.

"The issue of climate change has become politicized, so Republicans and some Christians feel it is a hoax," she said, hoping the witness of other

Christians concerned about climate change might raise broader concern. "Pope Francis has an encyclical about environmental protection. Our faith also is based on the idea that we are to be stewards of creation, and that caring about the eco-system is a way to care about people."

Lora shared in the report that she's aware progress often comes just in "baby steps," but the more people hear about something, the more likely they are to respond.

Nonetheless, she seeks to integrate advocacy into the life of the church

She told of Jessie Dye, formerly with Earth Ministry, coming to the Tri-Cities to speak with Catholic churches and having some people bristle.

"It's a long term goal to get the message to conservative churches and conservatives who are in progressive churches," she said. "We need to be careful in sharing."

Lora said that in the NWPB story, LeeAnne spoke of the faith community having the language and ability to articulate values in ways that cut across political and partisan divides.

Being on the Environmental Justice Team has been encouraging for her, because she often feels alone. So she values being with people who care about environment and knowing that others are working on climate change around the state.

Steve Eriksen, pastor at Shalom, speaks of the need to be stewards of the earth, she said.

In the NWPB story, he said churches connect people with differing social views and that "creation care is something we've all been called to do" as part of a "higher calling" to have an impact on the society and environment.

For information, call 509-375-1954 or email ldrathbone@outlook.com.

Couple's gift brings upgrades to South Lodge

Brenda Mallett's love of Pilgrim Firs from more than 35 years of going on University Congregational UCC's women's fellowship retreats the third weekends of January has translated into a gift for upgrading South Lodge.

In the early years about 35 would go and stay in South Lodge, doing most of their activities there and eating in Madsen. Over the years the retreats grew to an average of 60 to 80, so women also stayed in the cabins and Huckleberry Lodge.

Don became involved with the camp, drawn by his wife's enthusiasm and by being on the conference Stewardship Committee for about five years. He was asked to help with a capital fund drive for Pilgrim Firs, but found there was no donor base that could give major gifts.

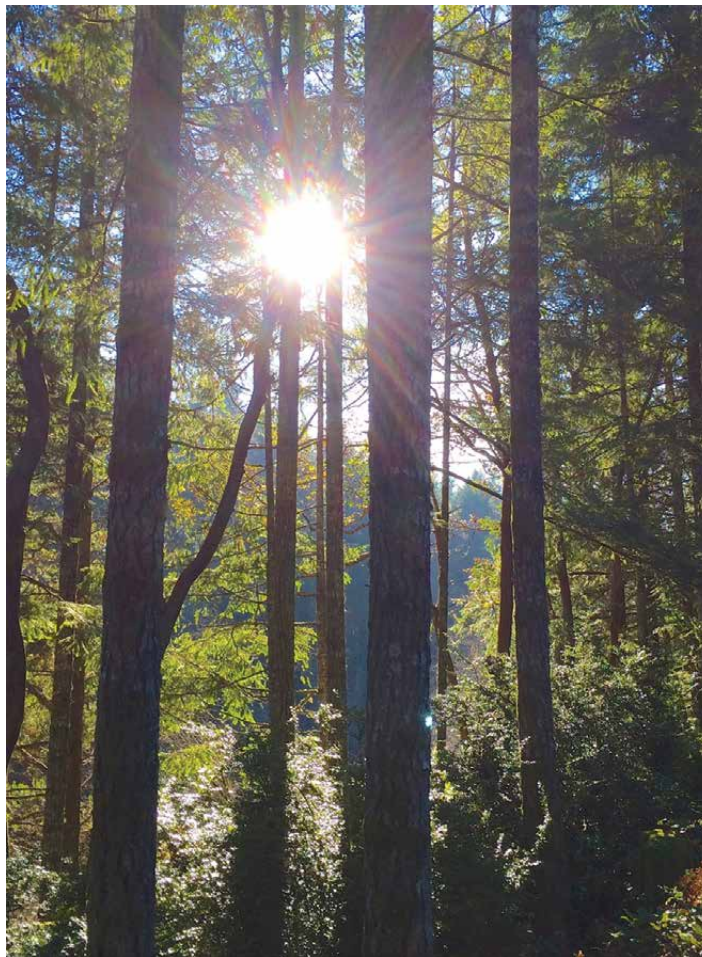
"When Wade Zick became managing director, I visited him and learned that South Lodge had saved Pilgrim Firs when it was built, but it had issues that had to be addressed," Don said.

It needed new heaters and better lighting and improved restrooms.

"I was impressed learning that Pilgrim Firs was bringing in enough income to meet its expenses. It is thriving compared to many UCC camps around the country that were closing," he said. "Both camps are operational, not draining conference funds, but paying for themselves."

Investigating the income more, Don found that much was from non UCC sources, many groups using the camp since the 1970s, like the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop and a Stone Artisan Group.

"In fact, they felt as much ownership of and love for Pilgrim Firs as UCC folk do. They also found it a spiritual experience to go there," he said. "I realized it was a jewel, so my wife and I made a financial



Brenda Mallett shared this photo as an example of why she loves Pilgrim Firs and finds spiritual renewal there.

commitment."

With that gift and others, Pilgrim Firs generated funds to upgrade South Lodge, bring cabins up to date and upgrade the septic system.

Don also arranged with the logging company that bought adjacent property it was clear cutting to allow Pilgrim Firs to reacquire land or to set up a conservation covenant so they did not clear cut all the way to the end of South Trail.

The logging company had paid millions for the 1,800 acres.

Now South Lodge has new heaters, upgraded bathrooms, a gas fireplace and LED lighting in common areas.

There's also work to do to upgrade themed-century cabins

and Huckleberry Lodge.

Brenda celebrated her 50th year as a member of University Congregational UCC in Seattle last May.

She and Don had moved to the area when he was in the Navy. He went to the University of Washington Law School, living on campus. Brenda lived to the north. They were overseas for a while in the Philippines at Subic Bay, where Brenda taught for a year. They returned and he was stationed at Sandpoint. Friends invited them to UCUC. Don left to serve in Vietnam.

He passed the bar and was part of JAG, four years on active duty and in reserves until retiring and starting his own practice.

After their children were in sixth and ninth grade, Brenda earned a master's in counseling and worked as a guidance counselor.

Don knew Pilgrim Firs was important to her. She went and stayed in the rustic cabins.

"I heard stories of families over generations going there, stories of grandparents who helped build the cabins and stories of grandchildren going," Brenda said.

"For me it was a spot to regain energy, serenity and stability," she said. "It fed my spirit to be in the open space, an oasis of calm in the midst of seeing so much building going on around the Seattle and Puget Sound Area. It was open land and forest.

"We need to be sure we have it and keep it so it is viable for use in today's world," she said.

Even though there have been improvements to Pilgrim Firs over the years, they have been "under the surface," so it seems to Brenda when she goes that it's the same, and that's comforting.

"I appreciate going with the group of women to this spiritual spot where I have deepened friendships and made new friends," she said.

The group always goes the third weekends of January, whether there's snow or beautiful weather.

"Each year we have a different theme, bringing in local or outside presenters. Along with chewing on the topic, we have creative activities—art, writing, movement and song—and breakout sessions," Brenda said.

Some come 24 hours early for a silent retreat that begins Thursday at noon. They stay until after worship Sunday.

For information, call brendajmallett@me.com or call 206-769-3596.

Lenten story sharing brings insights in PNC

The PNC Lenten Devotional Series was a successful means for people around the conference to share their stories and insights, said Courtney Stange-Tregear, minister for church vitality.

For 2020, submissions have come from around the conference sharing stories, voices and perspectives under the theme, “This Is Me.”

Stories are being shared at <https://forms.gle/xPXZ-erSRpeDWDaCA>.

Snippets of seven of this year’s submissions give a taste of what is being shared there.

Dee Eisenhauer of Eagle Harbor Congregational Church on Bainbridge Island said a breast tumor the size of her pinky fingernail sent her on a “strange side trip,” of time, energy and money in health care.

She was fortunate: It was caught early and non-aggressive. I have health insurance. It was relatively easily dealt with.

She gained from this “miserable unwanted” experience.

“I believe in our God who makes art out of garbage. I don’t think God gives us illness or misfortunes, but I think God can redeem any experience. I God is eager to help us realize what is beautiful in every circumstance,” Dee wrote.

Mary Luti’s “Be a Burden,” inspired her to accept offers of help, be a “helpee rather than helper.” Her communities offered food, gifts, rides, cards, messages and love, reminding her she is part of the Creator’s web of love. **Katy Lloyd** of the Welcome Table Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, in Seattle said, “being in a family with addiction taught me to behave contrary to my own wants and needs as a way to try to control the addiction.”

When she was eight, her mother went to a hospital and then to a treatment center pio-

neering in the 12-step approach and offering family therapy. Four years later, her father went into treatment, and they rebuilt their family. Today, her parents have 90 years of sobriety between them.

“It was rough at times, but it also miraculous,” she said. “They’re not perfect, neither am I, but by grace we were given tools to get better, love each other in healthier ways and deepen our daily relationships with God. My life is so much richer because of the help my family received long ago. This is why I can stand up on Easter morning and say I believe wholeheartedly in Resurrection.”

Jess Peacock, pastor of Chewelah UCC, said Ash Wednesday symbolizes emotional barrenness for him, the ash representing “what is left of me after a season of emotional wildfires, infernos that often leave me feeling like a smoldering and empty landscape.”

For him, Lent represents a process of rebuilding, regeneration, understanding “that wildfires are important to the continued growth of an ecosystem and to enriching the soil.” They remind him how the Divine “ushers us through the cycles of life.”

Easter is about renewal out of destruction—victory stolen from defeat, transition and moving forward to embrace the light of a new day, Jess said.

Jennifer Castle of Plymouth Church UCC, Seattle told of growing up in an Episcopal Church that was the center of her faith and social life, and being told in the 1970s by her priest that she’d be a good priest. Her parents divorced when she was 13. Her father left her mother for another church member, so she felt uncomfortable there.

She never found a place with the same sense of belong-

ing. In high school, a career aptitude test said “clergy.” She felt that door had closed. She rarely attended a church for 20 years, but wanted her family to attend church. Someone invited them to Plymouth, where she found “a place for us to grow in our faith.” Her faith matured, deepened and became central to her life. She began working part-time, coordinating volunteers. Now she is full time director of faith formation.

Feeling most alive, connected to God when doing clergy tasks—serving communion, imposing ashes, offering written prayers and preaching, she embraced her childhood call and is in seminary training to be an ordained UCC pastor.

Nathaniel Mahlberg of First Congregational UCC in Walla Walla said on Ash Wednesday a few years ago he prayed about what practice to take on for Lent and chose “Jubilee.” Then he noticed ways he needed to forgive, “not only in moral terms, but also in terms of that nasty little four-letter word that biblical Jubilee is literally about: Debt.”

He said house mate owed him “a chunk of money” for the rent. The house mate, who hid his struggle with addiction, owed many others money.

Over time, Nathaniel didn’t expect him to pay, but yes he prayed about Jubilee, that debt came to mind. He realized his bitterness about it, so he wrote the man and forgave the debt.

“He responded with gratitude. It has been weighing on him, too. It felt good that we were both a little freer,” he said.

David Weasley of Bellingham First Congregational UCC told of being ordained in March 2010 at his little church, Peace Community Church, in a small town in Ohio. The tradition is for a few people to come up and pray for the person being ordained. As music played,

sojourners and troublemakers stood around him, put their hands on him and prayed. Half dozen more and a half dozen more—mentors, teachers, family, friends, hippies, academics, rabble-rousers, old people, babies and teenagers.

Asked a few weeks later if he felt different, he said, “there was something different.” He felt like he would be harder to knock down. “I felt more firmly rooted, more deeply connected to the earth, subway platform or church pew,” he said. “It’s faded a bit, but I still feel it.

Ministry is hard sometimes, he said about sitting at the bedside of a dying child and talking to her parents about where they see God, or wrestling every day with the way patriarchy, racism and imperialism “have wormed their insidious ways into my heart, community and bones.”

Two constants are “the resurrecting love of God and the faithful presence of the church.”

Ron Patterson of Fox Island UCC spoke of a “cast of thousands in the cloud of witness” who have shown patience, witness and love, listened and forgiven, making his life and ministry possible.

They include a minister who watched and waited; an 80-year-old pastor’s widow who mentored him in college; a church secretary who made his fieldwork a ministry; a consistory of grandparent-aged leaders who loved him into leadership; a woman who told of life-transforming generosity; a conference staff person who checked so loneliness didn’t take over.

“Hundreds of people over the years affirmed my calling by just showing up and going way beyond my expectations, because their ‘cloud of witnesses’ had transformed their lives, too,” Ron said.

For information, email courtney@pncucc.org.

N-Sid-Sen is doing extra maintenance this spring

With coronavirus, groups have been calling to cancel retreats and gatherings at N-Sid-Sen, the PNC's Camp and Conference Center on Lake Coeur d'Alene, but Mark Boyd, managing director, said the message to summer staff is that plans continue for summer camp.

"We know things are changing day-to-day and Idaho rules are different from Washington," he said.

Other camps on Lake Coeur d'Alene, like Lutherhaven, have closed to any groups through the end of April. Some camps in the area are just seasonal, so responses vary.

"The question is how we will survive financial losses and if we will have any of the federal support being considered," he said.

With groups not coming, staff continues to be employed doing things that need to be done.

"We are doing cleaning and repair projects we have



Red cedar knocks cabin 8 off its foundation, twists structure.

not have time to do, caulking repairs in cabins, glazing windows and tearing down cabin 8," he said.

Staff can continue to do the repairs and maintenance projects until they run out of supplies.

Cabin 8 was knocked off its foundation and had its structure

twisted when a big red cedar tree blew down during a heavy wind storm in early February when the ground was soggy.

None of the windows were broken.

Another tree fell below Forrester lodge into the worship area. It fell between the benches. Other trees on the

property fell down, too.

The trees will be cut and split for firewood. Lumber from the cabin will be used to make benches

Mark is still waiting on bids and on a decision of whether to rebuild it with volunteer labor or with a contractor.

"Because we are a commercial organization, the county requires a different foundation with a crawl space, even though it will have no plumbing," Mark said.

The cabin will be rebuilt the same size and style with an open interior and changing space.

"If we need to limit contact, that will limit our ability to have volunteer labor," he said.

"Our need is to look at what will happen on the other side of the crisis and how to best prepare for 2020 and 2021," Mark said.

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

N-Sid-Sen still planning summer camps

"This Is Our Prayer" is the theme for the 2020 youth and family summer camps at N-Sid-Sen.

Intermediate Camp for those entering grades five and six, and Junior High Camp for those entering grades seven to nine will be held July 5 to 11.

Kids Camp for children entering grades two to four will be held July 12 to 15, overlapping a few days with Senior High Camp for those entering 10th grade through entering college, July 12 to 18.

Family Camp #1 is July 26 to Aug. 1, and Camp Together (Family Camp #2) will be Aug. 2 to 8.

The camps will look at the theme, "This Is Our Prayer," which is about longings of the human heart.

"As people of faith, we look to scripture and the traditions of those who came before us to see how prayer is used in their lives. People pray in different ways, yet that connection to God is at the heart of many happy endings. Likewise, in times of struggle and sadness, people have looked for guidance, comfort, hope and healing. Often those blessings have been realized through a form

of Prayer," said Kaila Russell, of the Outdoor Ministry Task Force.

The camps will use prayer each day in many forms. From the common morning prayers and meal time graces to the labyrinth and the prayer that before jumping into the lake, campers will look at how, why and when they pray. There will be inviting opportunities as campers play games, make crafts, hang in the cabins, hike to the point and explore how prayer has made N-Sid-Sen come to be the wonderful place that it is.

Fall retreats are scheduled Sept. 11 to 13 for Westminster, Colville, Chewelah and Newport UCC churches; Sept. 18 to 20 for Pullman and Richland churches, and Sept. 25 to 27 for Walla Walla First Congregational UCC.

Plans for the clergy retreat, "Time to Breathe," scheduled for April 13 to 15, the Women's Retreat May 15 to 17 and the Work Camp May 30 to June 5 depend on what happens with the coronavirus pandemic.

Registration will be online at n-sid-sen.org.