

They are our neighbors, their lives are equal in value to ours



STEVEN KOSKI
GUEST COLUMN

A wrong idea has taken root in the world — that some lives are less valuable than other lives. There's a lot of concern regarding finding good solutions for those who are houseless in our community. It's interesting to have these conversations at a time when Christians remember Mary and Joseph about to give birth to Jesus seeking shelter and being told there was no room for them.

We need to have healthy debates about the best solutions for our houseless neighbors and for our community — just as we would about education choices for our children, open space protection for our parks, and affordable housing that might help prevent homelessness in the first place.

What we ask our community to change is the way we talk about our houseless neighbors in demeaning and dehumanizing ways. We ask you, our community, to change seeing and treating our houseless neighbors as if their lives are less important than our lives — as if homelessness is the only thing that defines them.

A question we keep hearing is, "What do we do about homeless people?" as if they are a problem to be solved and not people who deserve love and respect. What if we asked, "How can we find solutions where everyone has a chance to flourish?"

An underlying assumption lurks in this rhetoric, implying that some people choose to be homeless. No one chooses to be homeless.

Roughly 90% of those experiencing homelessness find themselves in that situation due to unforeseen life circumstances. They are typically houseless for less than a year and then thrive again through access to available supports.

Roughly 10% experience homelessness as a chronic condition.

The chronically houseless are often talked about in dehumanizing ways. Many are living with a mental illness. A person struggling with schizophrenia, for example,

doesn't choose to live with that illness and deserves our compassion and not our judgment.

Many who are chronically houseless suffer from post-traumatic stress because of repeated traumatic events in their lives. Trauma is not a choice. Imagine if we had the kind of compassion that stood in awe at the trauma and burdens that those who are houseless have to carry, rather than standing in judgment over how they carry it.

Substance abuse is often a factor. Some will argue that's a choice but substance abuse is often an attempt to cope with devastating mental illness or trauma. Dealing with mental health issues or sobriety are hard enough when you are not living on the streets and next to impossible when you lack support, stability and resources.

The answer to the question, "What do we do about this?" is easy. We offer as much compassion as possible. Everyone deserves a warm and safe place to sleep. Mahatma Gandhi reminds us, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

Father Greg Boyle founded Homeboy Industries, which is the largest and most successful gang intervention and rehabilitation program in the world. Father Boyle believes what changes people is not efforts to rescue or save, but kinship. He said, "The measure of our compassion is our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with others."

As we continue searching for good solutions and sharing valid concerns, we ask our community to remember that those experiencing homelessness are not a problem to be solved but our neighbors whose lives are just as important as each of ours.

This piece was written by Steven Koski, lead pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Bend. Signing on to the letter were Rev. Chris Kramer, Nativity Lutheran; Rev. Jen Stuart, Bend Church; Rev. Jed Holdorff, Trinity Episcopal Church; Rev. Jane Hiatt, Unity Community of Central Oregon; Rev. Andrew Bansemer, Grace First Lutheran; Rev. Scott Rudolph, UU Fellowship of Central Oregon; and Rev. Erika Spaet, Storydwelling.

Professional violinist to play inspirational concert

PENDLETON — An inspirational concert featuring professional violinist Jaime Jorge is coming to Pendleton.

Jorge immigrated with his family from Cuba. His mom wanted him to be a violinist, and while he took lessons, Jorge dreamed of becoming a missionary doctor. During his second year of medical school, Jorge felt a calling to leave medical school and pursue music ministry.

The free event is Friday, Jan. 28, 7 p.m. at the Pendleton Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1401 S.W. Goodwin Place. From high school auditoriums and cathedrals to church buildings and Carnegie Hall, Jorge has performed around the globe.

For more information about the local concert, call 541-276-0882. For more about Jorge, visit www.jaimejorge.com.

Lions Club collects cans, bottles

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Lions Club hosts a can and bottle drive to help fund local projects. The event is Saturday, Jan. 29, noon to 3 p.m. at the Pendleton Convention Center, 1601 Westgate.

For more information, contact pendletonlionsclub@gmail.com or 541-238-5466.

Helix announces second quarter honor roll

HELIX — Middle school and high school students earning honor roll status for the second quarter 2021-22 in the Helix School District include:

• Helix Middle School: **4.0 GPA:** Kennady Alvarado, Natalie Boland, Kallie Joe Campbell, Paige Coiner, Brinley Curtiss, Emilee Dean, Sophia Estrada, Campbell Kinnaman, Andrew Kubishta, Makayla Makin, Nola Miller, Ellie Morris, Elizabeth Ottosen, Cara Phillips, Paxton Rasmussen, Sophia Rock-Villanueva; **3.75-3.99 GPA:** Hiram

COMMUNITY BRIEFING

Coiner, Lane Levy, Evan Reeder, Marissa Smith, Callahan Sovince; **3.25-3.74 GPA:** Sophia Anderson, Jace Hales, Ethan Harlow, Avery Hayes, Kate Hill, Melinda Kadyk, Lillianne Madden, Malaeloa Malumaleumu, Emmy Nava, Kaylee Rand, Colter Raymond, Kyara Thomas, Emma Ware.

• Griswold High School: **4.0 GPA:** Dean Boland, Victoria Morris, Elizabeth Reeder, Ethan Reeder; **3.75-3.99 GPA:** Ellery Flerchinger, Blake Harper, Kerry Jensen, Sam Kubishta; **3.25-3.74 GPA:** Kolby Ash, Karsten Bracher, Ryan Chalmers, Ainsley Curtiss, Brandon Hoffman, Darla Holden, Sasha Kovalak, Brianna Makin, Anitohi Mercer, Matyson Olson, Sean Phillips, MayaBella Texidor.

St. Anthony offers CPR/AED course

PENDLETON — St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton, is offering courses to certify people in CPR and AED.

The combined course follows the American Heart Association guidelines for CPR, AED and choking for adults, infants and children. After successful completion of the class, participants will receive an American Heart Association provider card good for two years.

The upcoming class is Thursday, Feb. 17, 1-4 p.m. in the hospital's conference room 2, 2801 St. Anthony Way, Pendleton. The registration fee is \$40.

To register or for additional information, visit www.sahpendleton.org and click "Classes & Events." For questions about first aid certification, call 541-278-4585.

Fishtrap to receive \$10,000 grant for youth writers

ENTERPRISE — Fishtrap is among the 23 arts organizations statewide that each will receive \$10,000 grant awards to support their educational projects in partnership with Oregon schools through the coming fiscal year, the Oregon Arts Commission Arts

Learning fund announced Tuesday, Jan. 25.

Shannon McNerney, executive director of Fishtrap, said the grant is critical to the group's funding and they have received similar grants for several years.

"It's a cornerstone for our youth funding," she said. "It's one of the key components."

McNerney said Fishtrap plans to use some of the money to bring in a playwright writer in residence this spring, as well as use the money to fund the scholarships Fishtrap provides to youths of about \$550.

The OAC's announcement said Fishtrap will use its grant to support the continuum of arts learning opportunities it offers to youths across Eastern Oregon. In 2021-22, it hopes to engage 500 young rural writers ages 7-18 with its youth writing programs.

"We're looking forward to getting kids writing again," McNerney said. "We miss their faces and look forward to seeing them this spring and summer."

Former town of Maxville subject of presentation

JOSEPH — Gwendoline Trice, founder and executive director of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center in Joseph, will give a virtual presentation on Maxville from 6-7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 3.

According to a press release, Trice will discuss the history of Maxville — a former logging town north of Wallowa — the current work of the interpretive center in Joseph and the future expansion and planned purchase of the 240 acres that includes the original Maxville city township.

Register for the free event at us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/.

The Joseph Center for Arts and Culture and Beyond Toxics are hosting the event.

— EO Media Group



Trice

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