

**THE PATH FORWARD
WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF
CHURCHES**

**REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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**“Whenever God’s people throw away fear in pursuit of
honesty, miracles happen!”
Eminent theologian, Duke Ellington**

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I. INTRODUCTION

At the January WAC board meeting we agreed that I would engage in listening to informed WAC observers to assess our past, current status and prospective paths forward. All told there have been 48 “listenings” to individuals representing these perspectives:

- Board members both past and present.
- Judicatory leaders.
- Leaders of WAC’s ecumenical partners.
- Leaders of peace and justice partners.
- Pastors and congregational staff.
- Former WAC staff.
- Long-time observers of the ecumenical enterprise both locally and nationally.

In several instances, I have had follow-up conversations with these folks. I am grateful to each person for being willing to engage in this important consultation about WAC’s path forward.

In March I attended a three-day conference with directors of state-wide ecumenical ministries. I presented to these new colleagues my preliminary report to the WAC board and received valuable feedback about the ecumenical landscape across the nation. In April, I traveled to Portland, Oregon for a consultation with David Leslie, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). This was particularly helpful because of the similarities of ecumenical and public life between Oregon and Washington.

As you consider my findings and recommendations, keep in mind this important factor: This is Puget Sound “centric.” Only three persons are from Spokane. While the judicatory leaders have responsibilities that extend beyond Puget Sound, all but one is based in the Greater Seattle area. The Puget Sound centrality is not because I am unaware of the importance of these other regions. Rather, the time required to handle my other assignments (fiscal reorganization, finding new office space, legislative advocacy, etc.) has kept me in the Puget Sound orbit to date.

II. NORTHWEST RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE: THE CONTEXT FOR UNDERSTANDING WAC AND ITS MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

The Minority Position of Historic Protestant Denominations in the Northwest

The following data and analyses are taken from “Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone”, edited by Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk. This book is essential reading for those concerned about the future of the religious enterprise in the Northwest.

The data are from 2000 and include Washington, Oregon and Alaska. Breakouts by each of the three states were not available. But even in their aggregated form, they provide a helpful context for understanding the significance of these judicatories in Washington State. (Washington population in 2000 was 5,894,121 / 59% of the combined population of the three states.)

WAC FOUNDING/MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

	# Adherents*	% Total Pop.	% NW Adherents*
Total Population	9,942,452	100.0	
Total Religious Adherents	3,699,074	37.2	100.0
Lutheran ELCA	186,004	1.9	5.0
United Methodist	115,882	1.2	3.1
Presbyterian USA	114,608	1.2	3.1
Episcopalians	72,653	0.7	1.9
American Baptists	46,866	0.5	1.3
Disciples of Christ	25,121	0.3	0.7
United Church of Christ	22,247	0.2	0.6
African Methodist Episcopal (2006 data)	3,693	0.04	0.1
Church of the Brethren	1,178	0.01	0.03
Total WAC	588,252	5.9	15.9

*Adherence means affiliation with an organized religious community. P. 11.

SELECTED OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

	# Adherents*	% Total Pop.	% NW Adherents*
Roman Catholics	1,118,731	11.3	30.2
Historically African American**	182,813	1.8	4.9
Unitarian-Universalist	9,650	0.02	0.001
Friends/Quakers	9,233	0.02	0.001
Mennonite USA	3,050	0.0008	0.0003
Jews	78,650	0.8	2.1
Muslim	22,158	0.2	0.6

**Includes African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ, Fire Baptized Holiness and an estimate for Black Baptist churches.

There are significant patterns that affect the context for WAC and other ecumenical ministries in the Northwest:

- Adherents of WAC member denominations are a significant minority both among the total population and among all religious adherents—5.9% of the total population and 15.9% among all religious adherents.
- When Roman Catholic adherents are combined with those of WAC member denominations, the combined groups still are a minority—17.2% of the population and 46.1% of all religious adherents.
- The Unitarian/Universalist, Friends/Quakers, and Mennonites USA, although not members of WAC, tend to have similar theological views on peace and justice to those of the WAC founders/members. But even combining their adherents with the WAC founders/members and the Roman Catholics, the minority status of these combined groups is still evident.
- The combined historically African American denominations have almost the same number of adherents as the Lutheran ELCA, the largest of the mainline judicatories.

The Decline of Mainline Denominations in the Northwest

This decline has been frequently analyzed and documented from a national perspective. It is useful to understand these trends in the Pacific Northwest, because of their impacts on ecumenical collaboration in this region. “All of the historically moderate and liberal Protestant denominations have lost ground in the Pacific Northwest since 1970, which is true nationally as well. Given the smaller population base that each had here compared to other regions of the country, the consequences of decline became visible sooner.” P. 36.

Summaries of Trends:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America: “The ELCA ranks as the sixth largest distinct denomination in Alaska, the fourth largest in Oregon and the third largest in Washington. All Lutheran groups have lost ground in the region since 1971, but not as rapidly as other moderate and liberal Protestant groups, having been protected longer by the strong ethnic identifications of Lutherans. As ethnic identification erodes, Lutheran patterns in the region may come to resemble more closely those of other moderate Protestant denominations.” PP. 33, 34.
- United Methodist: “The United Methodist Church has declined steadily in the region since the 1960’s, and has lost a greater percentage of membership regionally than nationally.” P. 34.
- Presbyterian USA: They “have lost members here, as elsewhere in the nation, since 1971, but at a slower rate regionally than nationally. The denomination...is stressed by conflicts between evangelical and more progressive or liberal wings, illustrated by the different historic and theological trajectories of Whitworth College in Spokane and Lewis and Clark College in Portland, both denominationally established.” P. 34.
- Episcopalians: “Since 1971 the Episcopal Church has lost members more rapidly in the Pacific Northwest than nationally.” P. 34.

- American Baptists: “Overwhelmingly Baptists in the region are Southern or Conservative which is a shift from the region’s earlier history. When the comity agreement between American and Southern Baptists regarding evangelization in the West ended in 1953, Southern Baptists began extensive evangelization effort...Over the past decade Southern Baptists have lost ground in the competition with Pentecostal and newer non-denominational conservative Protestant groups. American Baptists have lost more ground than either Southern or conservative in the last decade.” PP.36, 37.
- Disciples of Christ: “This frontier religious body has lost ground steadily since 1970. In 1980 this group accounted for 2.4 percent of all adherents, today it accounts for 0.7 percent.” P.34.
- United Church of Christ: “This denomination has declined more than any other in the Northwest over the past century and has lost ground faster regionally than nationally since 1971.” P. 34

Making Sense of Washingtonians Who Identify Religiously But Don’t Belong

This is the NW religious anomaly: 69% of Washington adults identified with a religious group, but only 38% reported belonging to any institution or community of that tradition. “This ‘**gap group**’ (31% of the adult population), those who identify but do not affiliate, is the wild card in any assessment of the role of religion in the public life of the region.” P. 28.

“Whatever the causes, those who identify with a religious tradition but do not participate in a religious community have some kind of tenuous connection to institutional religious sensibility...*Whatever that connection...its potential as a reservoir of religious commitment that can be mobilized around public causes has an influence on religion in the region’s public life.*” P. 40.

Can Mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews Continue to Shape the Common Good?

There is a history of collaboration among mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews to influence public policy going back 170 years. “From the onset of Anglo-European settlement in the 1830’s ...these religious traditions have exerted extraordinary energy in hopes of shaping the common life of all people in the region.” P. 51. “Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Reform and Conservative Jews have shaped public policies, social ethos, and the cultural landscape...even though they never achieved a cultural hegemony comparable to Lutherans in the upper-Midwest or Baptists in the South. *They overcame a paucity of resources, a population largely disinterested in institutional religion, and competition from alternative religious and spiritual movements to make their contributions.*” P. 52

The authors identify two primary issues that will determine whether these religious groups will continue to exert a significant influence for the common good:

- “The (religious) adherent pie is small in the Pacific Northwest. The public power of any one of these groups of like traditions depends in large part on their ability to attract allies from among other religious bodies, and even more importantly from among those who are not affiliated with a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque.” P. 40.

- Can the mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews appeal to religious sensibilities of the “gap group”, (people who identify with a religious tradition but do not participate in a religious community) that will encourage them to support public policies for the common good?

There is another strategic question emerging from these data: Can significant collaboration be established with the historic African American churches? As noted above, the total membership of these denominations is approximately the same as the Lutherans ELCA, the largest of the mainline Protestant churches.

Since WAC’s inception only one denomination of color, African Methodist Episcopal, has joined with other judicatories in full WAC membership. However, from time-to-time, pastors and congregations of color have participated in justice campaigns such as “Walk with the Workers.” Past and current WAC leaders have sought to engage congregations and denominations of color more directly in the WAC. But for reasons of culture, organizational style, the legacy of mistrust born of institutional racism, and perhaps other factors, the hoped for WAC engagement with congregations/denominations of color has had limited success.

III. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

Pre- and Post-World War II Forms of Protestant Ecumenical Collaboration

The typical form of these collaborations was characterized by the following:

- These ecumenical organizations—often called “councils”—operated in large cities and metropolitan areas, state-wide and nationally.
- Mainline denominations were the founding partners and committed substantial financial and staff resources to the ecumenical organizations.
- The councils often made public pronouncements on behalf of their member denominations on public policy issues as well as other matters of theological significance. The councils frequently operated human service programs.
- “Faith and Order” discussion was the primary theological interest. This focused on the traditions different theologies of baptism, Eucharist, scripture, ordination and the unity of the church.

Impact of Mainline Denominational Decline on Ecumenical Councils across the Nation

Declines in membership, revenues and staff capacity have focused the attention of denominational executives, clergy and laity on internal institutional survival. These dramatic changes have resulted in equally dramatic impacts on ecumenical councils:

- Substantial cuts in staff and programs.
- A number of state and local councils have gone out of existence. For many that remain, they are shadows of their former selves with small and in some instances part-time staff.
- Denominational participation has waned on council governing boards and programs.

IV. WAC: ITS HISTORY AND PRESENT SITUATION

Washington Association of Churches-1975 to 1989

Before identifying the impacts of denomination decline and other changes on WAC and other ecumenical ministries, it is helpful to summarize the major mission and ministries of WAC from its formation in 1975 through the retirement in 1989 of its founding executive minister, Rev. Loren Arnett.

- **Governance and Agenda Setting:** The board represented the founding historic Protestant denominations. A biennial assembly was held in Ellensburg at Central Washington University in which the delegates representing the member judicatories determined the WAC's agenda for the next biennium. A central feature was a keynote address on the "state of the church." The State Catholic Conference, the public policy voice for the three Roman Catholic dioceses, held its annual meeting in Ellensburg immediately prior to the WAC assembly so the three bishops and others associated with the Catholic Conference could attend the WAC assembly.
- **Direct Service Programs:** Bulk buying and distribution of food for food banks that at its peak was buying \$4 to \$5 million of food annually. (The original working capital was provided by a \$10,000 loan from the founding judicatories.) Refugee resettlement in cooperation with Church World Service from offices in Western and Eastern Washington. Washington Wheat campaign for Bangladesh in which farmers pledged wheat and congregations raised money to ship the wheat.
- **Ecumenical Dialogue:** Annual conferences with guest theologians on faith and order, spirituality, peacemaking in the nuclear weapons era.
- **Clergy and Congregational Education:** Clergy sexual conduct.
- **Farm Worker Advocacy:** Lobbied for industrial insurance, better housing, minimum wage.
- **Peacemaking in the Nuclear Weapons Era:** Bishops and judicatory executives provided theological leadership for major protests and spiritual support for those whose civil disobedience resulted in prison sentences.
- **Collegiality of Bishops and Judicatory Leaders:** Those in Western Washington met weekly for breakfast to pray, plan and consult with one another about judicatory matters.
- **Financial Support:** WAC relied primarily on judicatory contributions and income from its direct service programs. During this period it did not develop much of a donor base of individuals and congregations.

Impact of the Northwest Religious "Landscape" on Washington State Ecumenical and Interfaith Ministries

The following discussion relates not only to WAC ***but to all*** of the ecumenical, interfaith peace and justice organizations in the state. Most thoughtful observers have noted some or even most of these landscape changes. What has been missing has been a comprehension of the "gestalt" of these changes and its implication for ecumenical and interfaith ministry and, indeed, the ministries of judicatories and their congregations.

- **Proliferation of Ecumenical, Interfaith and Secular Peace and Justice Organizations Seeking Money and Volunteers from Congregations and Denominations:** Over the past 30 years there has been a huge multiplication of these organizations across the state. Note this large pool of organizations has expanded even more in the last few years as

interfaith groups have sprung up in response to the events of September 11. Ironically, the growth of organizations has occurred at the same time congregations and judicatories are struggling with shrinking resources—money and volunteers. This dynamic is leading to a culture of “scarcity” accompanied by competition and conflict among the various groups. This culture is at odds with the biblical message that God has provided enough for everyone--if we share God’s abundance with compassion and justice.

- Pastors Limited “Bandwidth”: Many pastors face declining and aging congregational memberships, reduction in financial contributions and the volunteer time their members can commit to church programs. Often they struggle with staff reductions. Pastors serve as the “gatekeepers” to vet requests by other organizations to solicit resources (volunteer time and financial contributions) from their congregations. Most pastors don’t have the capacity or perhaps even the inclination to evaluate these requests, particularly when there are so many ecumenical, interfaith and peace and justice organizations soliciting their support.
- Aging of Denominational and Ecumenical Constituencies: The aging of traditional ecumenical and mainline denominational constituencies is diminishing the support bases for ecumenical councils and denominations. Sandy Brown, Executive Director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, reported that a 2004 survey of “Source” subscribers indicated their average age was 68. (The “Source” is the CCGS newspaper). While this was not a scientific survey it points to the phenomenon of aging ecumenical and denominational constituencies. It is likely that well over two thirds of WAC’s individual contributors are 65 years of age and older. The aging phenomenon has two important implications: First, the financial base is declining both in absolute numbers and average contribution amounts. The reduction in average contributions reflects retirees diminished incomes. Second, the left-brain, linear style of messaging (the primary messaging mode that WAC and others typically use to communicate with our core constituencies) is not very effective in reaching younger people who are children of the digital age.
- Rapidly Growing Immigrant Populations: Bishop Paup remarked that he no longer tells colleagues that he serves in the Pacific Northwest. Instead, he substitutes the label “Far Northeast Edge of the Pacific Rim.” I suggested he could add “The Pacific Northwest Coast of Mexico.” These rapidly growing immigrant populations typically have not affiliated with either the mainline denominations or their ecumenical organizations.

Denominational “Ecology” and Its Effect on WAC

(Note: Not all judicatory leaders carry the title of bishop. Some are titled executive minister, executive presbyter, etc. For the sake of simplicity, I have used the title of bishop to refer to all judicatory leaders.) From WAC’s inception through the early part of this decade WAC’s activities from governance to public policy, program operations and funding were premised on the historic model of ecumenical councils. Bishops and their appointees would represent to WAC the interests of their respective denominations, including the needs and concerns of their congregations. In turn, the bishops would carry WAC messages back to their respective judicatories with the expectation these messages would reach all the way to congregations. The denominations would provide most of WAC’s financial core financial support. (Some observers questioned whether this model

actually worked in practice. But at least this was the prevailing theory as to how WAC was supposed to function.)

However, in the 1990's and early part of this decade, WAC's role as a convener among denominations and congregations steadily weakened as a result of denominational decline; the structure of the bishops day-to-day work; and the administrative structure of the denominations. Denominational financial support of the core operations declined significantly. Consider the following:

- Denominational financial support dropped 34% from \$125,000 in 1999 to \$83,000 in 2006.
- Denominational participation on the WAC governing board became so weak that several years ago most of these representatives resigned. Evidently these resignations occurred with the concurrence of the WAC executive minister and bishops. They were replaced mainly by representatives of peace and justice partners. While committed to WAC's peace and justice mission, these new board members' lack of denominational connections further weakened the WAC and judicatory relationships.
- A significant part of bishops' work and priorities is directed toward national and even international denominational assignments; many frequently travel out of state. This has three important implications for their leadership within their own judicatories, collegiality among themselves and their presence in the public square.
 1. The time and travel devoted to these assignments enlarge the distance between themselves and congregations.
 2. Communication and collaboration among bishops becomes more tenuous. This is particularly true in Western Washington. Those located in Spokane seem to have frequent gatherings. At one time WAC convened an annual retreat for the bishops. However, this has not happened for several years.
 3. They have little time to be present in public forums where their presence would be a powerful symbol of a unified progressive religious voice. A current example: During this past session of the legislature, WAC/Religious Coalition for the Common Good arranged four meetings with the four most powerful elected officials in state government—the governor, speaker of the house, senate majority leader and house minority leader. The purpose of these meetings was to lift up a strong and unified public witness by religious progressives on behalf of our legislative agenda. However, only three bishops attended the meeting with the governor. None attended the meetings with the three legislative leaders.
- Second and third tier administrative staffs of the larger denominations typically have more frequent and direct connections with congregations than do their bishops. (Please note there is no pejorative connotation to “second and third tier staffs.” These are terms to describe the functions these valuable leaders play in their denominational ecologies.) However, these staffs typically have not been engaged in WAC collaborations and are trying “to do more with less” in their day-to-day assignments. Much of their time is invested in filling pastoral vacancies and mediating congregational conflicts. It is likely these staffs do not consider the WAC and ecumenical collaboration a potential resource for themselves and the congregations under their care.

- Smaller judicatories with limited central staff rely more on commissions and committees to do much of the work connecting and serving congregations. Typically these commissions and committees are focused on institutional assignments both locally and with their national bodies. It is unlikely their members have considered WAC and ecumenical collaboration as a potential resource for their work. One observer who serves on his judicatory peace and justice commission commented that it had never occurred to him and his colleagues that WAC had the capacity to magnify their effectiveness by bringing them together with their counterparts from the other denominations' peace and justice commissions.
- There is no symmetry of geographical boundaries for denominations. For instance, it is unlikely that the district boundaries for a United Methodist district superintendent in central Washington are congruent with the boundaries for his or her counterparts with the other denominations.

Relationship of WAC and the Roman Catholic Dioceses

After several years of tension between the WAC executive minister and board and leaders of the Catholic dioceses, the Roman Catholics withdrew from WAC membership in 2001. The decision to withdraw from membership was based on these reasons:

- **Unresolved Issue of Institutional Authority:** In the Catholic tradition, there is a deliberative process whereby matters of public policy and religious pronouncements are vetted from the perspective of authoritative Roman Catholic doctrine and teachings. When this process is completed, the Archbishop and diocesan bishops speak with authority on behalf of the institution. As the WAC board evolved in response to the weakened connections with its founding mainline denominations, this influenced how the non-Catholic board members voted on public policy and religious issues. Apparently, those board members who were appointed by Protestant judicatories never were instructed by their appointing authorities to consult with their denominations for guidance before they voted on particular issues. As more and more board members were selected who had little or no denominational connections, they voted in accordance with their own values. This led to an inevitable conflict around these core questions, "If the WAC is in fact an association of churches, what is the source of its authority to speak on behalf of the churches?" "Is the WAC, in fact, speaking for Washington churches?"
- **Administrative Practices:** WAC's administrative style compounded the conflicts around authority, particularly requests for decisions on major policy issues that required fast turn around times, leaving very little time for deliberation.
- **Neglect of Ecumenical Dialogue:** WAC had evolved into total advocacy, moving away from its history when it balanced advocacy with theological and ecumenical dialogue.
- **Diminished Statewide Presence:** Although presenting itself as a state-wide association, the WAC no longer had a state-wide footprint.
- **Departure from Judicatory Consultation:** The WAC had moved away from a collaborative style in which policies and programs were developed through consultation with partners.

I completed my listenings with archdiocesan representatives with the sense they are willing to consider joint ministry projects, but not membership in WAC--at least as WAC membership is currently structured. Joint ministry projects would occur when the

opportunities for particular ministries either exceed the capacities and resources of individual judicatories or the very nature of the opportunity calls for unity. (An example would be preparing clergy and laity across the state to care for veterans and their families returning from the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and veterans from the first Gulf War. This potential WAC ministry will be described in the last section of this report.) In these situations, WAC would act as a convener, returning to its former style of operation by consulting with the partners about their interest in particular ministry projects and coordinating the mobilization of resources.

Religious Coalition for the Common Good (RCCG)—2007 Legislative Session

The RCCG, created for the 2007 state legislative session, was a novel achievement in WAC's role as an interfaith convener of faith communities. Its purpose was to magnify progressive religious voices by creating a common "brand", legislative agenda, and lobbying strategy. The eight founding partners were: WAC, Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center (Roman Catholic Women Religious), Associated Ministries of Pierce County, Church Council of Greater Seattle, Friends (Quakers) Committee on Washington Public Policy, Earth Ministry, Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle and Lutheran Public Policy Office.

These are the 2007 RCCG accomplishments:

- Common legislative priorities were negotiated on these issues: Affordable Housing. Healthcare, Living Wage. Poverty Reduction. Environmental Stewardship. Criminal and Restorative Justice. Tax Fairness. Coalition partners agreed to support the common agenda. But each partner was free to advocate for additional legislation. (Attached is a report on how the RCCG legislative agenda fared in the 2007 legislature.)
- The Lutheran Public Policy Office (LPPO) advisory board committed its director, Rev. Paul Benz, to serve as the WAC/RCCG lobbyist. WAC contributed \$1,000 a month to help underwrite Rev. Benz' compensation. The WAC interim executive director and office manager provided the logistical and coordinating support.
- The RCCG launched its campaign by sending a letter announcing its agenda to the governor, legislative leaders of both parties in the house and senate and to each of the 147 legislators.
- RCCG leaders met with the governor, speaker of the house and house minority leader and senate majority leader. A joint advocacy day in Olympia was held with LPPO.
- Paul Benz testified at numerous hearings on behalf of RCCG bills. WAC staff coordinated testimonies and email/phone calls by RCCG partners as the bills moved through the committees and floor debates.
- The governor and legislative leaders all said they preferred to meet with a broad coalition of religious groups instead of meeting with individual organizations. These elected officials agreed to meet with the coalition in the fall to consider the RCCG legislative and budgetary recommendations for the 2008 session.
- A post-session evaluation was conducted by the RCCG working group. The three main conclusions were: 1. RCCG had been remarkably successful given the limited time to organize itself before the session started. 2. Expand by recruiting more partners across the state and inviting the Catholic Conference and social justice/creation care commissions of member judicatories to join. 3. Begin this summer to prepare for the 2008 legislative session, so the RCCG legislative agenda can be presented to the governor and legislative leaders in the fall, so they can consider RCCG proposals while they are working up their packages for the 2008 session.

WAC and Its Ecumenical Partners

WAC has been connected to a variety of ecumenical ministries across the state through the years.

- Those with the longest tenure going back to WAC's founding in 1975 are Associated Ministries of Pierce County, Church Council of Greater Seattle (CCGS) and Church World Service. Both Associated Ministries and CCGS combine direct service programs and peace and justice advocacy and employ professional staff. Church World Service operates throughout Washington and other Northwest states. Its ministry is focused on international and domestic disaster relief and development, refugee assistance, and global economic justice advocacy. It is best known by congregations as the organizer of annual "Crop Walks" which raise money for hunger relief.
- Earth Ministry was founded fifteen years ago. It is seeking to expand its relationships with congregations throughout the state by hiring an organizer.
- In more recent years, other ecumenical ventures have emerged that are focused on specific geographic areas such as the Interfaith Association of Northwest Washington (Snohomish County), Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County, Kirkland Interfaith Network. These tend to be focused on direct service delivery with part-time or one person staffs. Spokane did have an ecumenical organization, but it appears to have closed.
- The School of Theology and Ministry, Seattle University, is a unique graduate ecumenical educational partnership of a Jesuit university and ten Pacific Northwest Protestant denominations. Ecumenical understandings and engagement are central features of the curriculum. The Reverend Jack Olive was recently appointed as the full-time interim associate dean for ecumenical relations.
- Until several years ago, WAC played a convener role with these various ecumenical ventures (except for Earth Ministry and School of Theology and Ministry). This consisted largely of organizing a monthly roundtable of ecumenical partners which included a conference call to connect those who could not travel to Seattle and an annual staff retreat. About three years ago, the staff retreat was discontinued. However, the monthly roundtables continued into 2006 and then were discontinued. It is not clear whether the monthly roundtables and annual retreat went by the wayside because of lack of participation or because WAC stepped away from its role as convener or a combination of these factors. In any event, several ecumenical staff lamented the loss to their work when these forums were discontinued; they urged WAC to resume its role as convener.
- WAC's relationship with the Church Council of Greater Seattle and Associated Ministries of Pierce County deserves special attention. From WAC's founding in 1975 until the early 1990's WAC and CCGS were located in the same office space. This co-location enhanced the notably collegial relationship between Bill Cate, president-director of CCGS, and Loren Arnett, executive minister of WAC. Both Bill and Loren were of the same post-WWII generation of ecumenical leaders who were (and still are) passionately committed to the ecumenical enterprise. The two men enjoyed a deep friendship. (Both Bill and Loren retired in 1989.) In the early 90's WAC moved from its shared office, in part, to establish a clearer organizational identity from CCGS. From time-to-time the WAC executive minister has served on the CCGS board and vice versa. WAC has an ex-officio position on the board of Associated Ministries. Dave Alger, executive director of Associated Ministries, had in the past served several terms on the WAC board, on the executive committee and as its treasurer. During the summer

and fall of 2006 the relationship between WAC and the two organizations became very strained. The principal reason was WAC's launching an organizing campaign—The Movement of the Faithful-- with congregations primarily located in King County. (Some effort was directed toward Pierce County congregations.) WAC hired an organizer who was directed to meet with pastors and to encourage them to engage their congregations in WAC's campaign to build a constituency around justice issues. The WAC board and its executive minister inaugurated this campaign for several reasons: First, they were seeking a source of revenue to help support the operating budget and to provide resources for organizing efforts across the state. Second, they were looking for a way to connect with congregations and felt that given the institutional disconnect between WAC and the judicatories, it made more sense to go directly to congregations. WAC board members believed that its executive minister had discussed this strategy with his counterparts at CCGS and Associated Ministries. This did not happen, so when the two executive directors learned that WAC was making direct appeals for support—money and volunteers—in congregations with which their organizations had relationships, they became very concerned. This led to a meeting of board representatives from WAC with the executive directors of CCGS and Associated Ministries. The immediate results were: 1. WAC suspended the organizing campaign. 2. WAC offered to organize a new collaboration--Religious Coalition for the Common Good--that would focus on the upcoming 2007 legislative session.

- There are several important learnings from this episode. These learnings should be interpreted in the context of the structural changes facing ecumenical, judicatory and congregational life that were described in the previous sections of this report.
 1. When the monthly ecumenical staff roundtables/conference calls and annual retreats were discontinued, the parties no longer had an institutionalized means of communication through which the needs of the various ministries and their proposed strategies could be discussed
 2. There needs to be a meeting of the minds and hearts about WAC's relationship with congregations and individual and institutional contributors in those regions of the state where there are local and statewide ecumenical organizations seeking support from the same constituencies. The issues to be worked through are the solicitation of resources—money and volunteers; program development and coordination; creation of the state legislative agenda and the organization of constituencies to support the legislative agenda and lobbying in Olympia. The immediate focus should be on King and Pierce Counties because of the recent history. Several observers have commented that CCGS is still operating on the basis of an agreement between Bill Cate and Loren Arnett that WAC would not appeal directly to congregations for financial support. However, that agreement reaches back to the era when the judicatories were providing the principal support for WAC. That is no longer the situation, thereby calling for a new resolution of this question.
 3. If CCGS, Associated Ministries and other ecumenical ministries find value in WAC acting as convener and coordinator of ecumenical initiatives, and providing the principal leadership for the legislative agenda, then they have a duty to help WAC generate the resources—money and volunteers—to carry out this mission.

The Challenges of Funding Ecumenical and Interfaith Ministry

- There is an exponential proliferation of peace and justice and direct service organizations—religious and secular--seeking funds from the same sources. This has at least three salient consequences:
 1. Heightened competition and conflict among groups scrambling for support. There are so many organizations holding annual fundraising events that it is difficult to schedule dates that will not conflict with events already announced by other organizations that are appealing to the same constituencies.
 2. Confusion and fatigue among contributors. A WAC board member who is engaged with a number of faith-based and secular peace and justice organizations expressed great frustration about the unending number of requests to attend fund raising events and showing up with pretty much the same folks at each event.
 3. Funders are demanding transparency, fiscal accountability and tangible results from the groups they support.
- “Sanctified” conflict and competition for money among ministries who testify long and loud about Jubilee generosity and rail against fear and greed is more than ironic! It is inconsistent with our calling to act according to the biblical promise that God has supplied enough for everyone if we commit to sharing our abundance with generosity and joy. *A number of observers noted we are living out of a spirituality of “scarcity” that operates out of competition and conflict rather than abundance and generosity. This is leading ministries to behave more like we are living on Wall Street than in the reign of God.*
- Fund raising for direct service programs can tempt us to elevate institutional survival over faithful prophetic witness. Over the years, some ecumenical organizations in Washington and around the country have introduced direct service programs to meet demonstrable needs but also as a means of maintaining their institutional life. Reliance on these sources—foundations, United Way, governments—carries a significant risk: If the funding priorities change or the funders take issue with the advocacy work of the recipients, this can undermine the financial viability of the organizations that are juggling direct service and advocacy. There is a constant temptation to soft pedal our prophetic witness to avoid offending funders whose support is essential for our direct service programs.
- There is a growing public distrust of funding institutions whose mission and activities do not have immediate and tangible benefits visible to those who are asked to provide financial support. This is evident in the nexus between congregations and their judicatories and ecumenical agencies. When I attended the conference of state ecumenical directors, one director pointed out, “Denominations are facing declining financial support from local congregations due to the absence of knowledge about what functions are carried out by the denomination’s structures, and due to the absence of trust for institutions beyond local control.” One of our judicatory bishops commented, “People in the pew no longer have denominational loyalties. They want to know how their money is being used. The money is in the pews—not in the denominations!”
- The mortality tables are not working to the benefit of ecumenical ministries and judicatories. The generation of lay and clergy who believed in the ecumenical vision is passing from the scene. A younger generation must be evangelized with that same vision if there is to be a source of funding and volunteers for the decades to come.

A Critical Mass of Transitions in Ecumenical and Judicatory Leadership

There is an unprecedented array of leadership transitions which will surely have a significant impact on WAC's path forward as well as other ecumenical, interfaith and judicatory ministries:

Judicatory Leaders

Four of the ten WAC judicatory members are in transition:

- Episcopal Diocese of Olympia-Retirement of Bishop Warner, WAC board member and consecration of the new bishop, Rev. Greg Rickel, on September 15.
- United Church of Christ, Pacific Northwest Conference. Retirement of Mark Miller, interim conference minister and his temporary replacement by Rev. Hollis Bredeweg. The conference is undertaking a search for the permanent conference minister and hopes that person will be in place by November 2007.
- Presbyterian Synod of Alaska-Northwest. A new Transitional Synod Executive, Rev. Joyce Martin Emery, will begin in July 2007.
- Disciples of Christ, Rev. Rebecca Hale is serving as Transitional Interim Regional Minister and President.

Ecumenical Leaders

- Church Council of Greater Seattle-Executive Director, Sandy Brown, will be returning to the parish in July 2008. A search for his replacement will be launched this summer.
- Dean, School of Theology and Ministry-The new dean, Mark Markuly, will be arriving in August.

V. A VISION FOR WAC'S FUTURE

Introduction

I have woven together themes that emerged from these “listenings” into a vision for WAC’s future. Although there was a frank recognition about the challenges of recent years, particularly WAC’s financial struggles and the need to repair some relationships, hopefulness about the future was the primary tone and tenor of the “listenings.” There was enthusiasm for renewing the historic connections to WAC’s founding judicatories and exploring new forms of collaboration with the Roman Catholics. There was excitement about magnifying the progressive religious voice for the common good; hosting ecumenical and interfaith dialogues; engaging congregations of color and white congregations in reforming our broken criminal justice system; and launching new ministries of healing and compassion for veterans returning from wars in the Mideast.

In almost every “listening” there was an acknowledgement of WAC’s vital importance; and several said, “If we didn’t have a WAC, we would have to invent it.”

Here in summary are the primary themes for this vision of WAC’s future:

CORE MINISTRIES

- Partner with Judicatories in Renewing Their Ministries.
- Religious Advocate for the Common Good and Organizer of Strategic Alliances.
- Host for Theological Dialogue.
- Organizer of Ministries of Compassion and Justice.

PROTESTANT JUDICATORY LEADERS

- Model the unity of the body of Christ by covenanting to be with each other for fellowship, worship, public witness for peace and justice and organizing ecumenical collaboration.
- Envision WAC as the venue through which they engage one another as members of the body of Christ instead of perceiving WAC as a distant institution only vaguely connected to their individual denominational ministries.
- Commit their second and third tier staffs and leaders of their boards and commissions to participate in WAC partnerships.
- Identify judicatory representatives to serve on the WAC board who have a passion for ecumenical collaboration; and then stay connected with their board representatives and guide them as they integrate WAC’s work with the work of their judicatories.
- Evangelize young people in their judicatories with the vision of ecumenical collaboration to build a constituency that will follow the ecumenical elders who are passing from the scene.

ROMAN CATHOLICS BISHOPS AND ARCHBISHOP

- Model the unity of the body of Christ by openness to explore renewed engagement with the Protestant judicatories through WAC.
- Recognize their critique of past WAC policies and practices has been taken to heart and that transformation is underway.

- Authorize the Catholic Conference’s participation in the Religious Coalition for the Common Good in the 2008 legislative session in order to multiply religious voices for justice and creation care.

ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

Model the unity of the body of Christ, the biblical values of generosity, economic justice and responsible stewardship in the following ways:

- Create a division of labor both local and statewide that honors the gifts and limitations of each partner and avoids duplication. This includes rethinking the relationships of statewide and local ecumenical partners to congregations and their members in fundraising and recruiting volunteers.
- Cooperate in sharing resources—money and volunteers— by trusting that God will provide enough for all the ministries, if competition and conflict are rejected as the dominant values. Consider developing an “ecumenical trust fund” to be funded from bequests of ecumenical elders.
- Craft a method for frequent communication and coordination among the ecumenical partners.
- Build a constituency for ecumenicity with young people who will follow the path blazed by the ecumenical elders. This includes creating venues to bring the elders and young people together so the elders can share their stories and wisdom.

OPERATING MODEL

- Small central staff to reduce overhead requirements.
- Project management for specific ministry projects that are funded outside of the general overhead.

Partner with Judicatories in Renewing Their Ministries

WAC has no *raison d’etre* except as an association of churches. The mainline Protestant denominations and Roman Catholic dioceses birthed WAC. However, WAC’s founding Protestant denominations have been in decline. WAC’s decline mirrors that of these judicatories. WAC’s future as an association of churches is ineluctably linked to the futures of these denominations.

The good news is WAC can add value to their work of renewal, because its ecumenical role places it in a unique position to convene clergy and laity across judicatory boundaries to:

- Identify common challenges.
- Coordinates strategies.
- Marshal resources to support those strategies.

Folks to whom I listened suggested a variety of opportunities. Some examples are:

- Urban and rural congregations with declining and aging memberships are struggling to support buildings with growing maintenance costs. Several cited the collaboration of University District Churches and the relocation of First United Methodist in Tacoma as case studies that would be valuable learnings for all judicatories.

- The crisis in health insurance—high cost and unavailability—is hurting congregations and denominations. Pastors report many congregants can't afford insurance while other members with insurance find their coverage is becoming more limited. They fear losing their jobs and the devastations that would follow from severe illnesses or serious accidents, because they lost their insurance. Judicatory budgets for clergy and staff health insurance continue to climb diverting money away from other ministries. Judicatories could collaborate in a "Movement of the Faithful" to organize their congregations as advocates for comprehensive health insurance. This "Movement of the Faithful" would encourage congregations statewide to multiply their voices by joining each other across denominational lines and by partnering with other justice advocates seeking comprehensive health insurance.
- Major agricultural shifts in rural areas like the Palouse are undercutting the economic base of communities, households and congregations. Collaboration could bring together congregations for two initiatives: 1. Sharing pastors, church programs and facilities. Some cooperation of this sort is already happening. More could be encouraged. 2. Engaging with secular partners who are working to restructure the agricultural economy to provide jobs and income for people still remaining in the rural areas.
- Rapidly growing immigrant populations from the Pacific Rim and Mexico typically have not affiliated with the mainline Protestant denominations. Collaborative forms of witness would "welcome the stranger and sojourners," multiplying what each judicatory could muster, if it acted alone.

Religious Advocate for the Common Good and Organizer of Strategic Alliances

Throughout its thirty-year history, WAC has been best known as an advocate for justice, peace and creation care in the public square—the common good. Its organizing strategy was directed toward creating alliances of two types of constituencies: 1. Communities of faith across mainline Protestant denominations and Roman Catholic dioceses, sometimes including faith communities from non-Christian traditions. 2. Peace, justice and creation care organizations that do not operate from an explicitly religious orientation, i.e., secular partners.

This organizing strategy—alliances between faith communities and secular peace and justice partners—was based on the pragmatic recognition that mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish adherents constitute a minority of the state's population. This strategy is consistent with the findings of Killen and Silk noted in the first section of this report, "*The (religious) adherent pie is small in the Pacific Northwest. The public power of any one of these groups of like traditions depends in large part on their ability to attract allies from among other religious bodies, and even more importantly from among those who are not affiliated with a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque.*" P. 40.

Expand the RCCG for the 2008 Legislative Session

The 2008 legislative session is an opportunity that WAC and the RCCG partners should seize with urgency. Beginning in September, legislative committees and the governor will start preparing their 2008 packages. The governor and legislative leaders agreed to meet with the RCCG in the fall to discuss 2008 legislation. Thus September through

November is the window of opportunity to influence their packages. It will be too late, if WAC and RCCG wait until January. (The 2008 session will last only 60 days.)

- Recruit more partners across the state and prioritize Spokane where there is a critical mass of interested potential partners.
- Invite the Catholic Conference to participate in the RCCG. (The Catholic Conference is the advocacy arm for the state's three Roman Catholic dioceses.) Most of the 2007 legislative priorities for the Catholic Conference and RCCG were identical. Catholic Conference and RCCG lobbyists often presented similar testimony on the same bills. It is likely this will continue to be the case for 2008 because of our longstanding shared commitments to reduce poverty, reform criminal justice, extend health care, etc. Given the pragmatic reality that Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants and Jews are less than 19% of the state's population, we will strengthen our advocacy by joining together.
- When the RCCG met with the governor and legislative leaders they all expressed their preference to meet with a broad coalition of religious groups instead of meeting with individual organizations. Lest the Catholic Conference be concerned its legislative agenda would be restricted to the RCCG agenda, the Catholic bishops and archbishop should be given assurances that RCCG partners are free to pursue legislation that is not part of the RCCG agenda. And, in fact, that happened in 2007.
- Request Catholic and Protestant judicatory leaders to be present when the RCCG presents its legislative agenda to the governor and legislative leaders.
- Request the Protestant bishops to commit their judicatory justice and creation care commissions/committees to participate in the RCCG for the 2008 legislative session.

Beyond the 2008 Legislative Session: Creating a Public Policy Framework Grounded in the Social Teachings of Member Judicatories

The Catholic critique (presented in the first part of this report) is valid: "If the WAC is in fact an association of churches, what is the source of its authority to speak on behalf of the churches?" As the WAC board evolved in response to the weakened connections with its founding mainline denominations, this influenced how the non-Catholic board members voted on public policy and religious issues. Apparently, those board members who were appointed by Protestant judicatories never were instructed by their appointing authorities to consult with their denominations for guidance before they voted on particular issues.

After the 2008 session is over, WAC should create a public policy framework grounded in the social teachings of its member judicatories:

- Evaluate the public policy statements and positions that have emerged in recent years from the perspectives of the social teachings of WAC's member judicatories.
- Conduct the evaluation with the assistance of the member judicatories' commissions that steward their denominations' social teachings on justice, peace and creation care.
- Agree on a public policy framework that reflects the member judicatories social teaching and use this framework for determining whether and how the board speaks on particular policy issues.

Host for Theological Dialogue and Learnings

WAC should recover an important element of its early ministry by organizing theological dialogue on subjects that matter to congregations, their denominations and communities from other faith traditions.

Recent events illustrate the urgency for WAC to take up this historic calling to host respectful and civil dialogues on subjects that are freighted with conflict and which the parties feel like they are at an impasse. These are examples of potential dialogues:

- Many of our most dangerous international and national conflicts have erupted from deep divisions between faith traditions and “intramural” discords within the same traditions.
- The Vatican’s recent publication of “Responses to some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church” has been deeply upsetting to many non-Catholics.

There are other needs for theological conversations and learning besides those that are controversial—conversations and learnings that could enrich the ministries of congregations, judicatories and communities of other faith traditions.

Washington State is blessed with remarkable assets that WAC could mobilize for dialogues on a broad range of subjects. These assets are the faculty and students at ten private universities, colleges and graduate schools of theology. These institutions have judicatory and ecumenical connections—three Catholic, two Lutheran, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Presbyterian and Free Methodist. In addition, there are five ecumenical campus ministries at public universities. The campus ministries could be the entrée to faculty at the public universities who could be invited to contribute to these dialogues.

WAC’s role would be to survey the interests and expertise of the faculty and students, determine which subjects have the greatest interest among clergy and laity, and then periodically organize dialogues around the state on subjects that have the greatest appeal in each region.

Organizer of Ministries of Compassion and Justice

Important WAC legacies are its ministries of compassion and justice such as refugee resettlement, the wheat campaign for Bangladesh and bulk buying for food banks.

These legacies offer two important learnings for WAC’s path forward:

- These ministries engaged congregations, bringing the grass roots into direct relationships with WAC.
- These ministries were statewide in their reach.

WAC is blessed with two opportunities to continue this legacy by involving congregations across the state:

- Good News to the Prisoners: Providing Hospitality and Reforming the Criminal Justice System.
- Healing the Wounds of War: Ministry to Veterans and Their Families.

**Good News to the Prisoners:
Engaging Congregations Across the Racial Divide in Hospitality and Reforming the
Criminal Justice System**

In the first section of this report, I asked the question, “Can significant collaboration be established with the historic African American churches?” My answer is yes! There is a signal opportunity to engage with African American and other congregations of color in a ministry that addresses one of the most urgent challenges facing these congregations. That challenge is the devastating effect of incarceration of men and women of color in Washington State.

Consider the following:

The most forsaken and forgotten people in our state are the 17,663 men and women locked up in prisons. People of color are disproportionately incarcerated (except for Asians/Pacific Islanders) Note: the following data do not include the county jails. Anecdotal information indicates the plight of jail inmates is far worse than that of men and women in the prisons.

	<u>% Population</u>	<u>% Incarcerated</u>
Black	3.2	19.7
Hispanic	8.9	10.1
Native American	1.4	3.9
Asian	6.8	3.0
White	76.8	62.9

- Male inmates: 91.5% Female inmates: 8.5%
- Reading below 9th grade level: 71% of males / 83% of females.
- Diagnosable mental illness: 55% males / 73% females.
- Incarceration rate of male children of inmates: 50%.

Men and women are incarcerated in 15 separate facilities around the state. About 1,000 have been transferred to prisons outside of Washington due to overcrowding and about another 1,000 are incarcerated in county jails. Many of the state institutions are far away from the Seattle metro making it difficult and expensive for family and friends to visit frequently. It is difficult to find volunteers to staff programs in the remote locations compared to the Monroe Correctional Complex which has a large group of volunteers because of its location within the Seattle metro.

97% of all inmates currently locked up will eventually be released. But 38% percent who are released will commit a new crime within three years—in part due to the virtual elimination of education, job training and drug treatment program within the prisons and paucity of transition programs for men and women once they are released.

Department of Corrections (DOC) is projecting an increase of about 6,000 inmates between 2007 and 2017—31% over current levels. This will require the expansion of six prisons.

The effects of these incarceration rates on children are mind boggling: DOC estimates there are almost 28,000 children under 18 whose parents are incarcerated and about another 65,000 children whose parents are subject to community supervision—a total of more than 93,000 children. According to Harold Clarke, DOC Secretary, 50% of male children of incarcerated parents will themselves be incarcerated.

The legislature appropriated about \$1.68 billion for DOC during 2007-09, a 12% increase over the prior biennium. The DOC operating budget is about 5% of the total state operating budget. The average annual cost per inmate is now \$29,055. The aging inmate population resulting from longer sentences is going to drive these operating costs higher.

WAC's advocacy to redirect state resources to housing, hunger and poverty reduction, education, environmental and other initiatives for the common good will be increasingly difficult as the DOC operating and capital budgets grow.

It is probable that a majority of congregants in every African American, Hispanic and Native American church in this state have friends and family who are locked up, been locked up or are on their way to prison. These church members experience first-hand the struggles of loved ones who are locked up and how their incarceration affects families and children. Many pastors and laity regularly visit incarcerated men and women, conduct worship services and bible studies and advocate on their behalf in court and with DOC. Some congregations provide housing and jobs for men and women coming out of prison.

Examples of ministries WAC could facilitate are:

Build Relationships among Congregations across Racial and Ethnic Divides

It seems probable that most predominantly white congregations across the state are unaware of the struggles afflicting their sisters and brothers in Christ in congregations of color. WAC could be the "container" in which the congregations of color invite white congregations to partner with them in ministries of hospitality and to transform the political culture. Examples of these ministries are:

Hospitality

- Congregations in remote part of the state offer overnight accommodations for families traveling long distances to visit their loved ones and friends.
- Visit incarcerated men and women connected to urban congregations where long distances make frequent visiting impossible.
- Volunteer in programs at near-by institutions.

Transformation of the Political Culture

The primary constituency base advocating for criminal justice reform is located in liberal legislative districts in the Seattle metro. Many congregations of color are located in these same districts, especially African American churches. Olympia legislative leaders of the majority party, particularly in the House, have resisted criminal justice reforms. Reason: They are afraid their caucus members who represent moderate and conservative districts

will be pilloried as “soft on crime,” if they vote for reform legislation. Unfortunately, the fears of the legislative leaders are grounded in fact.

Examples of strategies congregations can jointly carry out are:

- Confront the powers and principalities in their communities that pillory legislators as “soft on crime” who advocate for education, treatment for drug and alcohol addictions and mental illness, job training, reform of the “three strikes your out” sentencing laws, etc.
- Promote community education emphasizing communities will be safer if incarcerated men and women are offered education, job training, treatment for mental health and drug addictions and are provided transitional housing, job placement and other services upon their release.

Healing the Wounds of War: Ministry to Veterans and Their Families.

The prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in a heavy reliance on the National Guard and Reserves. In a number of communities around the state there probably are quite a number of men and women who have been deployed, are currently deployed and will be re-deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition to Reservists and Guards, there are many regular military veterans that have permanent homes in Washington. For instance around the naval airbase at Oak Harbor, there are Navy personnel who have “been in the sand”, i.e., they were retrained for infantry deployment because of the infantry shortages in Iraq.

The physical, emotional and spiritual wounds these veterans have suffered and will continue to suffer will not be limited to these veterans, but will afflict their families and communities.

Some observers have predicted these wounded veterans are the next generation of homeless folks, since so many of today's homeless are Viet Nam veterans.

Doug Waite, a United Methodist clergyperson and supervisor of all Navy chaplains for the entire Pacific Fleet, believes Guards and Reservists are particularly at risk for PTSD. Reason: When they return home they won't have the support systems available to regular military who, after their initial furloughs, will return to their regular units and be with comrades who shared the same traumas. By contrast Guards and Reservists are returning immediately to civilian life, surrounded by people who have not experienced the same horrors.

In addition to the emotional, spiritual and physical wounds, some Guards and Reservists have lost their jobs because of the lengthy deployments.

Should Washington state faith communities prepare for and undertake ministries to these veterans and their families? I have asked this question of clergy and laity, university faculty and organized labor. I am heartened by their unanimous replies, “No matter how we may feel about the wisdom and morality of these wars, we should unite in helping to heal veterans and their families who have been so grievously wounded.”

WAC could lead an interfaith initiative to train clergy and laity in outreach and ministry to these veterans and their families.

WAC OPERATING MODEL: SMALL CENTRAL STAFF AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The prior operating model was to engage a full-time staff of specialists, operations director and executive minister. Indeed, the current strategic plan is based on this same model. That plan, adopted in February 2006, called for expanding to a staff of six FTE's by 2011. This staffing level would require an operating budget growing 5% a year from \$500,000 in 2008 to \$640,000 in 2011.

In view of the dramatic changes in the ecumenical landscape identified above, this model is unattainable. It is unrealistic to expect that the board and staff could raise annually an operating budget in excess of half a million dollars that would grow 5% a year.

A more practical and sustainable operating model is a small central staff—a full-time executive director and full-time organizer of congregations and strategic alliances and a ¾ time office manager. During the next few years the executive director would focus on rebuilding trust and relations with the judicatories and Roman Catholics, fund raising and project management. The organizer of congregations and strategic alliances would focus on expanding the RCCG across the state by engaging judicatory justice and creation care commissions, congregations and secular partners.

WAC programs such as compassionate ministries and hosting theological dialogues would be conducted as projects. The projects would be conceived through consultation with WAC partners. The partners would collaborate in raising the funds to implement the projects. No projects would be initiated without the funds being committed. Project implementation would be handled through contracts with individuals/organizations with the requisite expertise. WAC's role would be to manage the project contracts—not to staff the projects.

VI. WHAT ARE THE COMMITMENTS OF WAC'S PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS TO THE ECUMENICAL ENTERPRISE?

I reached several conclusions at the completion of this report:

- If WAC is to have a future as the primary convener of statewide ecumenical engagement, the primary stakeholders must decide whether they are committed to WAC and back up their commitments with leadership and tangible support.
- WAC is the canary in the ecumenical mineshaft. The future of the ecumenical enterprise is at stake—not just WAC.
- A careful and prayerful dialogue among the stakeholders is required if they are to discern where the Spirit is leading.

As I was considering how to structure a process to engage the primary stakeholders in such a dialogue, an unexpected crisis created a *kairos time* from which the process has emerged. (A complete description of the crisis is contained in the letter to judicatory leaders attached to this report.)

In essence, the crisis was occasioned by one of WAC's largest member judicatories voting not to provide funds for WAC in 2008. Financial support is one of the conditions of judicatory membership in WAC. Thus it appeared that the judicatory would be withdrawing from WAC membership. This occurred just as the WAC board was launching a fundraising campaign among secular peace and justice partners to raise the cash required for WAC to continue operating in the fall. The board suspended the fundraising campaign because they could not with integrity ask secular peace and justice partners for support when it appeared one its largest denominational members had just voted to terminate its membership in WAC. It had done so without consulting the WAC board and the other ten WAC judicatory members.

Subsequent discussions with the judicatory revealed it intended to make a decision in January 2008 about its commitment to WAC. However, the WAC board concluded January would be too late because board members could not with integrity and full transparency ask individuals, congregations and peace and justice partners to support WAC as an association of churches when one of the largest denominational members had not declared its intention to maintain its membership.

Without a fund raising campaign WAC would be out of operating cash by mid-October and would be forced to close.

The WAC board by means of a letter and a meeting with leaders of this judicatory communicated the adverse consequences of waiting until January, explaining how this timing casts a shadow over WAC's future ministry. Regrettably, the judicatory has not responded in a manner that removes this shadow.

In view of the judicatory decision, the board realized it was in *kairos time*, confronted by these paradoxes:

- Through the “listenings” many current and past leaders of WAC’s member judicatories, ecumenical colleagues and peace and justice partners expressed the desire for WAC to continue and expand its ministries. Opportunities and needs call out for WAC’s leadership. Yet WAC does not have funds to continue past mid-October.
- WAC is confronted with this dire prospect just as it is emerging from a deep transformation evidenced by major budget cuts, staff reductions, improved financial management and operating efficiencies and continuing financial support from most of the member judicatories, the board and staff and other faithful contributors.

The board determined at its July 18 meeting there are two options:

1. Operate WAC from October through March 2008 as a “transitional ecumenical ministry” in order to pursue two vital strategic objectives:

Provide leadership and essential administrative assistance for the Religious Coalition for the Common Good for the 2008 legislative session.

Engage WAC’s primary stakeholders in dialogue about the future of the ecumenical enterprise in Washington State. This includes determining WAC’s future.

2. Close WAC by mid-October in a responsible and orderly manner.

The board’s recommended option is the ***“transitional ecumenical ministry.”*** This is how WAC could operate during this six-month transition:

PROPOSED PLAN FOR WAC DURING TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

Provide Leadership And Essential Administrative Assistance for the Religious Coalition for the Common Good for the 2008 Legislative Session.

The WAC/RCCG is vigorously working toward the 2008 legislative session. New partners are being recruited. Meetings are being scheduled with the governor, speaker of the house, senate majority leader and minority leaders. The legislative agenda is being prepared. There is excitement and momentum that creates an opportunity that should not be squandered.

WAC’s proposed contribution to the RCCG would be: .5 FTE support as RCCG prepares for and carries out advocacy during the 2008 state legislative session. Prior to the 2008 session the .5 staff would undertake the logistical and coordinating work to organize the expansion of RCCG into Spokane; recruit the social justice/creation care commissions of WAC’s member judicatories and cooperating members and partners; coordinate communication among the RCCG partners to be ready for rapid responses once the session commences; and produce media releases and press conferences. During the 2008 session, the .5 staff would coordinate advocacy days in Olympia and Spokane,

committee testimony and meetings with legislative leaders and the governor; produce the weekly email alerts; and organize media releases and press conferences.

WAC's support for RCCG would include maintaining the current office, computers, phone and fax, copy machine and mailings.

Engage WAC's Primary Stakeholders in Dialogue about the Future of the Ecumenical Enterprise in Washington State. This Includes Determining WAC's Future.

The fragility of the ecumenical enterprise is a gift, because it calls the stakeholders to a *kairos moment* in which to consider anew how to manifest our unity in Jesus Christ and how to share a common ministry.

The primary stakeholders are the WAC Protestant judicatory members and cooperating members and WAC's six major ecumenical partners: Associated Ministries of Pierce County, Church Council of Greater Seattle, Church World Service, Earth Ministry, School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University and Lutheran Public Policy. (Although Lutheran Public Policy is not strictly speaking an ecumenical ministry, it is so embedded in ecumenical relationships that it should be part of the stakeholders' discernment.)

Also, the three Roman Catholic dioceses and the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane will be invited to participate.

Stakeholders will not be alone in this dialogue for they will be blessed with wise elders in the ecumenical community. These elders have expressed their availability and willingness to sponsor and convene conversations among the stakeholders. The elders are retired judicatory and ecumenical leaders with long experience in ecumenism locally, statewide and nationally. Some elders were engaged as far back as WAC's founding in 1975 and can provide valuable institutional memories.

WAC's proposed contribution to the dialogue would be: .5 FTE support to staff the dialogue; maintain the current office, computers, phone and fax, copy machine and mailings.

Operating Budget for "Transitional Ecumenical Ministry"

The six-month budget is \$59,000. The sources and uses for this budget are contained in the attached spreadsheet, "WAC Transitional Ecumenical Ministry: Ecumenical Dialogue / RCCG Budget." The member judicatory portion is \$39,000. \$10,000 has already been contributed to support the RCCG. The remaining \$10,000 would be raised from other WAC contributors—ecumenical partners, individuals, congregations, peace and justice partners, etc.

THREE COMMITMENTS REQUESTED OF THE MEMBER JUDICATORIES

1. Judicatory Leaders' Participation in an Early October Meeting with WAC Board to Consider Whether WAC Continues as a "Transitional Ecumenical Ministry" or Ceases to Exist.

The two options to be considered at this joint meeting will be:

- *Operate WAC from October through March 2008 as a "transitional ecumenical ministry."*

- *Close WAC by mid-October in a responsible and orderly manner. This will include winding up its business affairs; dissolving its corporate status; and rescinding its 501 © (3) status with the IRS.*

Meeting together as a board and judicatory leaders is essential for two reasons:

First, a decision of such consequence compels us to gather together as colleagues in an atmosphere of prayerful dialogue and discernment.

Second, Washington law assigns legal obligations to a non-profit board and the corporation's members when dissolution of a nonprofit corporation is being considered. The board is required to recommend dissolution. But only the members have the legal authority to decide whether to dissolve the nonprofit corporation. Under WAC's bylaws, WAC judicatories are the members of the corporation.

RCW 24.03.220 "Voluntary Dissolution" "Where there are members having voting rights with regard to the question, the board of directors shall adopt a resolution recommending that the corporation be dissolved, and directing that the question of such dissolution be submitted to a vote at a meeting of members having such voting rights, which may be either an annual or a special meeting."

2. Financial Contributions, if a Transitional Ministry is Chosen.

- **Continue the 2007 contributions as scheduled through December 31.**
- **Maintain the same contribution schedule through March 31, 2008.**

The contribution schedules for the judicatories are contained in the attached spread sheet, "Judicatory Contribution Commitment."

3. Judicatory Leaders' Participation in the Dialogue with Primary Stakeholders about the Future of Ecumenical Enterprise in Washington State, if a Transitional Ecumenical Ministry is Chosen.

The following or a similar process would facilitate the depth of engagement needed to address the critical issues concerning the future of ecumenism in Washington State.

- Two-day retreat in November or December with other judicatory leaders, ecumenical elders and WAC staff.

- One-day conversation in January or February with the cooperating members, ecumenical partners, ecumenical elders and WAC staff.
- One-day meeting in March with the cooperating members, ecumenical partners, ecumenical elders and WAC staff to make a decision about the future of the ecumenical enterprise and WAC's role.

SEPTEMBER 29 DEADLINE FOR JUDICATORY COMMITMENTS

The board requested judicatory leaders to send their commitments on judicatory letterhead to the WAC office by Friday, September 29. The WAC board will then consider those commitments in a joint meeting with the judicatory leaders at a meeting in early October.

CONTINUATION OF WAC AS A “TRANSITIONAL ECUMENICAL MINISTRY”

If the judicatory commitments are adequate to continue WAC as a “transitional ecumenical ministry” through March 31, 2008, some members of the current WAC board are willing to continue in place during this interregnum.

Decisions about the continuance of WAC, its governance and board composition will be made by March 31, 2008 at the conclusion of the six month dialogue.

CONTINGENCY PLAN TO CLOSE WAC

Should the WAC board determine there is not sufficient support to continue as a transitional ministry and recommend closure to the judicatory members; and should the judicatory members vote to close WAC; it will be important to wind up WAC's affairs in a responsible and orderly manner. A contingency plan is being prepared for this purpose.

Should closure be the outcome, a worship service to give thanks and grieve our loss will be held later in the fall, should closure be the outcome.

TRANSPARENCY ABOUT THE DECISIONS FACING WAC

There are many individuals, congregations, ecumenical partners, peace and justice colleagues and public officials who have faithfully supported WAC through its three decades of ministry. The board has an ethical obligation to inform them of the weighty choices the board and judicatory members are considering.

Accordingly, they will be informed through an email alert and will be referred to the WAC web site on which will be posted the letter to the judicatory leaders and the report, “The Path Forward.”

VII. BLESSINGS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

WAC Board: I have served nonprofits, mainly faith-based, as executive director, board member, consultant, public funder and banker for more than forty years. I have never worked with a board that has consistently manifested such an extraordinary commitment in emotional and spiritual energy and personal financial resources as you have. And you have done this in the face of prodigious challenges. It is my privilege and blessing to serve you.

Judicatory Leaders: You face immense challenges to guide your congregations and judicatories in times of great stress and intense pressures to turn inward and neglect the unity that is ours in Christ Jesus. Trust and live out the promise—we are one in the Spirit.

Ecumenical Colleagues: I have journeyed with many of you for more than thirty years. Now I am old enough to be considered an “ecumenical elder.” (Or since this is my third “unretirement,” an unretired retread.) You continue to lift high the ecumenical banner. Bless you for keeping the vision before us.

Peace, Justice and Creation Care Partners: I know some of you don’t get this esoteric theological jargon about ecumenicity. But you are our valued companions in the struggle to do justice, be peacemakers and care for the creation. Keep this vision before us, lest we be distracted by our intramural ecumenical debates.

Duke Ellington, that eminent theologian challenges us all: “Whenever God’s people throw away fear in pursuit of honesty, miracles happen!” So be it.