

SUMMARY OF JANUARY 3 CONVERSATION ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

Present

David Alger, Associated Ministries of Tacoma; Paul Benz and Carol Jensen, Lutheran Public Policy Office; Linda Haydock, Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center; Lynn Magnuson, Church World Service; Jack Olive, School of Theology and Ministry, Seattle University; Sandy Brown, Church Council of Greater Seattle; Tom Ewell, Friends Committee on Public Policy; Mark McDermott, WAC; Loren Arnett, retired executive minister, WAC; Tom Quigley, retired executive director, Church Council of Greater Seattle; Darel Grothaus, WAC.

Purpose of Meeting

An opportunity for the ecumenical partners to dialogue with each other before the Working Group is convened to discuss their unique perspectives about the mission and witness of the churches in Washington State and their collective interest and stake in the development of a new statewide ecumenical vehicle.

Scripture

I Corinthians 12: Paul urges to us remember we are members of one another in the body of Christ. Translation from “The Message” is attached.

Clearing the Air: Disappointments and Frustrations in Recent Years.

- Denominational members and cooperating ecumenical partners have ambivalent and ironic relationships with WAC. *Denominations*: Their financial contributions have declined and some make nominal or no contributions—although under the bylaws denominational membership requires financial support. Ultimate governance authority is vested in the member denominations. Yet they have shown little interest in meaningful participation in WAC affairs yet appear to expect deference be given their opinions and critiques. *Cooperating Partner Members, i.e., Ecumenical Partners*: They have no obligations to provide financial support and some in the past have resisted WAC soliciting funds from their donors. Yet WAC continues to provide services to them, e.g., RCCG, without compensation. The bylaws give them a role in determining WAC policy and programming and a seat on the governing board.
- Relationships with denominations have not been tended. More effort has been directed toward secular peace, justice and environmental groups than the denominations. Public policy issues had become more important than relationships with the member denominations and their congregations.
- An exclusive focus on justice has supplanted other parts of WAC’s historic programming and relationships, i.e., theological dialogue and relationship building with denominations and ecumenical partners.
- Loss of Roman Catholic membership and participation.
- Loss of reliable, consistent funding led to the solicitation of fee income from fiscal sponsorships of projects that were only tangentially related to WAC’s mission.
- WAC had been a “connector” of local ecumenical groups around the state by hosting monthly staff meetings/conference calls and annual retreats. WAC dropped this role several years ago when it discontinued organizing the retreats and in 2006 when it stopped hosting the conference calls. In some areas, evangelical pastors and ministries have stepped into this connector role, frustrating ecumenical groups once linked through WAC, because they no longer have an institutional way to stay connected.
- Statewide footprint has shrunk to Seattle “centricity.”
- In 2007 WAC relinquished its role as coordinator of statewide disaster relief for the churches, because it did not have the capacity to perform this function given the survival mode it was

in. It is a missed opportunity for a statewide presence that can re-connect WAC with congregations all over the state and provide a vital service.

What Does the “World” Need to See and Hear from a Statewide Ecumenical Ministry?

- Our collective witness to *Interdependency* is a Virtue and a Value: In our fractured, fragmented and fractious world even our own religious institutions are pulling apart, looking inward and acting from scarcity and competition. The body of Christ in all its diversity can be a healing presence in the world by living out of abundance, reconciliation and hopefulness. The world does not care about the denominational distinctions that are so important to us. The world wants to know whether we can speak and act with a common voice for these virtues and values.
- Public policy advocacy for the poor and vulnerable, peace-making and care for the creation.

Gifts Offered by Ecumenical Partners to a Transformed Statewide Ecumenical Ministry

- School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University: Lay ministry training and theological dialogue for students and congregations around the state. STM has the strongest ecumenical relationships with WAC Protestant judicatories and the Catholics of any ecumenical institution in the state. There may be strategies to reinforce these relationships with WAC.
- Church World Service: Connections to 40 grass roots ecumenical organization and 350 congregations around the state.
- Lutheran Public Policy Office: Growing network of congregationally-based advocates.
- Church Council of Greater Seattle: Fiscal sponsorship to reduce WAC overhead for bookkeeping and audit. Support public policy work.

Issues for the Working Group Agenda

- Aging of the ecumenical and congregational constituencies without a strategy for recruiting a younger generation to the ecumenical vision.
- Proliferation of peace and justice and creation care organizations—both faith-based and secular—that is forcing competition and conflict for money and volunteers and program “bandwidth.”
- Relationships of ecumenical partners to each other in:
 - Competition for resources—money and volunteers—from congregations, individuals, foundations and other sources.
 - Program development, coordination and duplication.
 - Organization of constituencies to support advocacy on public policy.
- Decline of mainline Protestant denominations/congregations and a turning inward toward institutional survival, resulting in less interest and capacity to support ecumenical ventures.
- Ecumenical language and theological vocabulary and concepts don’t communicate. Even the word ecumenical has little meaning for younger generations. We need to find a new vocabulary for speaking about our identity.
- What do the member Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholics want from WAC?
- Congregations with younger people, i.e., “emerging churches” and new forms of ministry outside the traditional denominations and ecumenical partners should be recruited. Do they have the financial capacity to provide reasonable levels of support for WAC? See implications of this in the next bullet below.
- Potential tension between the interests of member denominations that provide a portion of WAC’s core funding and the need to reach out to new constituencies that may have a different vision for WAC than the traditional members and have lesser resources to contribute to WAC.
- *Vision-Mission-Identity-Programs-Sustainable Funding*: These elements frame the questions to be answered in the strategic plan.
- Three future program areas: Public Policy. Theological Conversation, aka, faith and order dialogue. Statewide disaster relief coordination for the religious community.

Public Policy

- There seems to be common agreement among the judicatories and ecumenical partners that WAC's role in public policy should continue as one of its constituent programs. Test this with the Working Group on January 12 and if there is concurrence, begin work immediately on how this should be organized.
- There are three parts to effective public policy advocacy:
 - Cultivation of personal relationships with public officials and other advocacy partners. Paul Benz was cited as being particularly effective in this way.
 - Credible policy research and theological/biblical grounding for the policies.
 - Mobilization of a broadly-based constituency across the state to advocate for the policies, i.e., *Movement of the Faithful*.
- Church people tend not to understand and act on the importance of two essential elements of effective advocacy for the common good:
 - Numbers count with elected officials. Religious leaders as symbols of moral authority make get us in the door for a polite meeting. But when we leave, elected officials ask, "How many people can they turn out to lobby their legislators and the governor on their agenda?" Indicative of our weakness is that we can turn out only 350 people on Advocacy Day--in a good year.
 - Partnerships with other advocates both religious and secular are required to leverage the influence of WAC's member denominations for the common good. WAC member denominations constitute less than 6% of the state's population. Add the Catholics at 11% plus other religious groups at 3% (Jews, Quakers, Mennonites, historically African American churches, Unitarian-Universalist) with similar views on most public policy. All of these religious groups combined are a distinct minority of 20%. Our Catholic, mainline Protestant and Jewish forbearers understood they were in a minority going back to their beginning settlements in the Washington territory. To overcome this they have historically built advocacy alliances with others around a common agenda for the common good. (See Part II of "The Path Forward" for a detailed analysis of this issue.)

I CORINTHIANS 12

“The Message”

What I want to talk about now is the various ways God’s Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable...God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere, but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere...God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits...All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful!

You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts---limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which Christ has the final say in everything. This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized. Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn’t just a single part blown up into something huge. It’s all the different-but similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, “I’m not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don’t belong to this body, would that make it so? If Ear said, “I’m not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don’t deserve a place on the head,” would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part* of. An enormous eye or gigantic hand wouldn’t be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, “Get lost; I don’t need your”? Or, Head telling Foot, “You’re fired; your job has been phased out”? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the “lower” the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, but not without a stomach. When it’s a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes *no* difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons.

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

You are Christ’s body—that’s who you are! You must never forget this!