

SUMMARY OF PATH FORWARD WORKING GROUP

January 12, 2008

Room 304, Piggott, Seattle University

Present

Steve Sallis and Joyce Cox, Archdiocese of Seattle; David Meekhof and Lyle Canceko, Church Council of Greater Seattle; Cheryl Williams, Disciples of Christ; Kristina Gonzalez, United Methodist; LeeAnne Beres, Earth Ministry; Lynn Magnuson, Church World Service; Paul Aita, Evergreen Assn. American Baptist; Paul Benz, Lutheran Public Policy; Tom Quigley, Loren Arnett, Darel Grothaus.

The Task Ahead and Context for our Work

Context:

- ◆ Time: Draft strategic plan recommendations by March 31 for consideration by judicatory leaders and ecumenical partners in early April. New board must be in place by May 31 and permanent executive director by June 30. Re: Current caretaker board will be resigning by May 31 and the interim executive director will be resigning by June 30.
- ◆ Funding: Anonymous contributor is expecting a strategic plan by April 30 as condition for making a \$50,000 contribution for 2008 and as the basis for raising funds for the last six months of 2008. There is not sufficient cash flow from traditional WAC contributors to continue past April without the \$50,000 contribution.
- ◆ The past twelve months have been devoted to listening to the stakeholders, transforming internal operations and finances and analyzing the “landscape” in which future ecumenical ministry will be carried out. This body of information has already been distributed to the working group and stakeholders. (Path Forward, Letter to Judicatory Leaders, September 25 public forum on WAC’s future, November 1 meeting of judicatory leaders, January 3 meeting of ecumenical partners.)

Task:

Recommend a viable and faithful future to judicatory leaders and ecumenical partners for a statewide ecumenical ministry. This assignment is based on the clear consensus of WAC member denominations arising from their November 1 meeting. (See summary of November 1 meeting.)

Revised Meeting Schedules *New Dates are in italics and bold*

- ◆ All meetings in Seattle. Re: Only one representative from E. WA.
- ◆ January 26, Saturday. Seattle University, Piggott Room 304.
- ◆ ***February 25, Monday. Steve Sallis has invited us to St. Benedict’s in Wallingford, if attendance will be no more than 15, because of space limitations at the parish school.***
- ◆ ***March 27 or 28 or 29 (Thursday, Friday or Saturday). We agreed to be flexible while we wait for word from Michael Kinnamon, new general secretary of the National Council of Churches) about the date(s) best for him. He prefers the 27th or 28th. We will make a decision at our next meeting on January 26 about the date.***
- ◆ April 19, Saturday in Seattle.

Invited Resource for January 26 Meeting: David Leslie, Ex. Dir. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

- ◆ David has led EMO the past ten years through many challenges similar to ours.

Mission and Identify

- ◆ Mission and Identity will drive all other elements—membership, constituencies, programs, geographic scope, funding and staffing.
- ◆ Read John chapter 17 and I Corinthians 12 for biblical grounding on the unity of the body of Christ.
- ◆ Paul Aita, working group member, has provided a useful clarification of the implications for the choices in mission and identity: “If the mission is *primarily to create a new kind of unity among Christians*, not only must this be the programmatic focus, but it should be accompanied by a realization that it may limit the number and kinds of actions that the organization will be involved in. Actions that cannot wholeheartedly be endorsed by participants will have a negative effect on the unity of the body. I’m not suggesting that such a body can’t have as one of its goals a willingness to be stretched and to venture into new areas together. But such ventures would need to be cautious to carry everyone along—not for mere political expediency, but because keeping everyone together is itself a primary goal. On the other hand, if the purpose of an ecumenical organization is *primarily to express existing unity through needed action in the world*, then those actions need to be the programmatic focus, accompanied by a realization that it may limit the scope of those who wish to participate. This does not mean the organization should not try to reach out and involve others—but that would come as those others see the value of the programs and realize that participation can help them express their own passionately held values. I’m suggesting it is not realistic to say that both the *creation of new unity* and the *active expression of existing unity* can be the principal purposes of the same organization. If such an organization is to be effective, it needs to be for one of these or for the other, and to acknowledge the limitations and challenges that may well attend its choice. I find myself wondering whether the current difficulties that WAC finds itself in are the result of an attempt to do both of the aforementioned things in a day and an age when that is no longer possible.”
- ◆ Additional implications that were identified: (1) Robust public witness for justice and peacemaking would probably be muted if the mission and identity were primarily focused on broad inclusiveness of Christian groups, because of different views among members and their constituencies on these issues. This would mean a significant change of course for statewide ecumenical ministry, because WAC has been identified as “progressive” and “liberal” on many public policy matters. (2) Demonstrating unity among Christians that have deep disagreements could be a valuable witness to the world which is riven with conflicts over religion. (3) What is the geographic scope of the mission? Statewide? West of the mountains? Puget Sound? Seattle? In recent years WAC has become “Seattle-centric.”
- ◆ Christian Churches Together (CCT) is a national ecumenical ministry whose mission and identity are primarily focused on a “new kind of unity among Christians.” CCT was suggested as a possible model for us to consider. (Go to its website www.christianchurchestogether.org. to find out about its mission, programs, structure, governance and financing. Also, see the attached minutes of CCT’s second annual meeting. Sr. Joyce offered to invite the bishop to the working group who is representing Roman Catholics to CCT.)
- ◆ Is the mission primarily to serve the needs of WAC’s traditional judicatory members, e.g., for congregational renewal? Other ecumenical partners around the state?

Emerging churches that don't fit into traditional classifications of institutional religious life, but do have much younger constituencies?

- ◆ To what extent should the Christian mission and identity primarily be formed by listening to the needs of the world and responding by public witness and action to the world? If this is an important part of our mission and identity, how can our uniquely Christian identity be maintained as we build partnerships with other faith traditions and secular peace and justice advocates? This question was raised because of the concern expressed that WAC had become too identified with labor unions in its public policy advocacy. This issue is not unique to our time, because the 170 year history of mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews efforts to influence the common good has involved partnerships across religious boundaries and included secular advocates. (See page 7 of the “Path Forward” for a summary of this history.)
- ◆ Is there a space for religious traditions that are not Christian in the mission and identity? If so, how is it expressed?
- ◆ The vocabulary we typically use to express unity among Christians—*ecumenical*—doesn't communicate with many folks, particularly younger people who are more attuned to a world defined by multiple faiths, i.e., “interfaith,” and “none of the above.” What will be a vocabulary that communicates more effectively to multiple constituencies?
- ◆ How does this discussion of mission and identity help us confront the aging of the ecumenical constituency and the absence of strategies to recruit a younger generation to this vision?
- ◆ Is the name *Washington Association of Churches* descriptive of the mission and identity? If not, how does the mission and identity get expressed most appropriately in a new “brand?”
- ◆ Who are the contributors that will provide the financial support to sustain the different possibilities of mission and identity and the programs that flow from these possibilities?

Program

- ◆ Mission and identity inform the program.
- ◆ Balance prophetic witness, ministries of compassion, theological dialogue and unity.
- ◆ Serve the needs of the churches, i.e., denominations, congregations, ecumenical partners. (1) Churches can be more effective helping each other instead of working alone. (2) Training of laity and clergy. Example: Prevention, identification and healing of sexual abuse. (3.) Pragmatic programs that touch congregational life are the most effective way to enlist support from people in the pew and communities they serve. (4) How do we figure out what needs the churches have?
- ◆ Prophetic Witness: (1) History as statewide public policy advocate. (2) Public policy advocate is a “turnoff” for some, because WAC has been perceived as “liberal” and “progressive.” (3) Educate people in the pew and communities that justice and peacemaking are as important to Christian ministry as are ministries of compassion, worship and dialogue. (4) Member denominations along with the Catholics need to collaborate with each other and secular allies to be effective politically, because of the low percentage of these religious adherents in the general population. Religious Coalition for the Common Good has been one strategy to work across different faith traditions that share a commitment to the common good.

- ◆ Ministries of Compassion: (1) Work in the world is stronger when we work together. (2) How do we assess the needs for compassionate ministry in a state as large as Washington when there are so many religious and secular groups with programs directed to many different needs?
- ◆ Theological Dialogue among the Different Parts of the Body of Christ: Richness of these different parts was evident even in the time of sharing today.

Ecumenical Partners

- ◆ There is overlap in programming, constituencies and fundraising among and between the ecumenical partners? How does this get sorted out in this strategic plan?
- ◆ What is the role of School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University in a transformed statewide ecumenical ministry? Many of the functions that WAC has historically been asked to undertake have become part of STM's core functions in the past ten years. Given the proposed future directions of STM it seems likely that it will undertake even more of WAC's historic functions.

Operations and Funding

- ◆ Economic viability must inform the mission/identity, programs, membership and governance.
- ◆ Staffing should be scaled to programs, constituencies, geographic scope and available resources.
- ◆ Staff compensation should be in line with denominational staff and pastoral compensation to avoid the resentment because the compensation of the former executive minister was considerable higher than compensation typical for staff and clergy of supporting denominations and congregations.
- ◆ Consider contracting some or all of the administrative services such as accounting to other agencies to reduce the overhead cost.
- ◆ How should WAC or its successor ministry handle any continuing liabilities?

Membership

- ◆ Who should be the members? Denominations? Other ecumenical ministries? Parachurch ministries? Congregations? Individuals? Combination of the above?

Evaluation of the Meeting

- ◆ Positive, forward looking focus. Not rehearsing the problems of the past.
- ◆ Ecumenical unity modeled in the relationships and tone of the meeting.
- ◆ Letting go of pre-conceived ideas about the structure of the ministry.
- ◆ Good questions surfaced.
- ◆ Clear sense of the need to move quickly to make recommendations to meet the deadlines.
- ◆ Clear reminder of the Working Group's assignment and to whom it is directing its recommendations.
- ◆ Background materials and thoroughness of the agenda were helpful.
- ◆ Good facilitation.
- ◆ Order decaf coffee for next meetings. Bring our own lunches to reduce costs.