

# OUTLINE OF THE CONCEPT AND STRATEGIES FOR THE PATH FORWARD

Updated February 27

(Note: There does seem to be considerable sentiment for a name change from WAC to something more descriptive of the successor ecumenical ministry. But since we don't have that name, I am using WAC as the proxy for its successor's name.)

This is the framework for our discussion:

## *THE CONTEXT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS*

- A. Biblical and Theological Vision for Ecumenical Ministry.**
- B. Four Generic Elements of Ecumenical Ministry and the Appropriate Organizational Home(s) For These Elements.**
- C. What We Know About the Denominational and Ecumenical Landscape That Should Inform Our Recommendations.**

## *WAC'S ROLE IN THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF ECUMENICAL MINISTRY*

- D. Building up the Body of Christ: Partner with Judicatories in Renewing Their Ministries and Engaging Youth around the Ecumenical Vision.**
- E. Christian and Interfaith Theological Conversation and Dialogue.**
- F. Public Church: Spiritual Formation of Congregations to Do Justice, Shape the Media's Portrayal of Faith Communities and Organizer of the Religious Coalition for the Common Good.**
- G. Ministries of Compassion and Justice: Disaster Relief and Returning Veterans and Families.**

## *FINANCIAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE MINISTRY*

- H. 2008**
- I. 2009**

## *THE CONTEXT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS*

### **A. Biblical and Theological Vision for Ecumenical Ministry**

#### Mission (Proposed)

As a diverse community of Christian communities and individuals in Washington State we come together in the Washington Association of Churches to give expression to our unity in Jesus Christ, to deepen our relationships with one another and to work for the common good marked by justice, compassion, hope, reconciliation, peace and equality.

#### Mission in Action

- Worship, prayer and theological reflection on our common calling.
- Advocacy for justice for the disinherited, care for the fragile creation and reconciliation for those separated by hostility and indifference.
- Dialogue with those from other faith traditions.
- Partnerships with peace, justice and environmental organizations seeking the common good.

### **B. Four Generic Elements of Ecumenical Ministry and the Appropriate Organizational "Home(s)" For These Elements.**

- Building up the body of Christ by providing venues to bring Christians together for worship, prayer, mutual support and fellowship.
- Engaging in Christian and interfaith theological reflection and dialogue.
- Public church's witness to those historic Jewish and Christian values that promote "human flourishing" in our common life and advocacy to express these values in public policies.
- Operating ministries of compassion and justice.

What is the appropriate organizational home for these elements? We have inherited a tradition that assumes the *primary* expressions for these four elements are best lodged in *one*

organizational home. The corollary is that WAC should continue as the *primary* statewide organizational home for all four elements.

I suggest it may no longer be feasible to assume WAC should be the *primary* statewide “home” for all four of these functions because of significant changes in the ecologies of the denominational and ecumenical landscapes and limitations on the resources required to undertake these four functions at *robust levels*.

### **C. What We Know About the Denominational and Ecumenical Landscape That Should Inform Our Recommendations.**

- Declines in membership, revenues and staff capacity for the mainline Protestant denominations have focused the attention of denominational executives, clergy and laity on internal institutional survival.
- Proliferation of Ecumenical, Interfaith and Secular Peace and Justice Organizations Seeking Money and Volunteers from Congregations and Denominations: 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.
- Pastors Limited “Bandwidth”: Many pastors face declining and aging congregational memberships, reductions in staff and financial contributions and volunteer time their members can commit to church programs.
- Aging of Denominational and Ecumenical Constituencies with Few Strategies to Engage a Younger Generation: The aging of traditional ecumenical and mainline denominational constituencies is diminishing the support bases for ecumenical councils and denominations.
- Congregations and denominations of color have little connection to traditional ecumenical institutions across the state including WAC.
- Rapidly Growing Immigrant Populations: These immigrants typically have not affiliated with either the mainline denominations or their ecumenical organizations.
- A significant part of the work of denominational executives is directed toward national and even international 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. Time and travel devoted to these assignments enlarge the distance between themselves and congregations.
  2. Collegiality and collaboration among leaders has become very tenuous.
  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 for the common good.
- Second and third tier administrative staffs of the larger denominations typically have more frequent and direct connections with congregations than do their leaders. 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. It is likely these staffs do not consider the WAC and ecumenical collaboration a potential resource for themselves and their congregations.
- Smaller judicatories with limited central staff rely more on commissions and committees to do the work of 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.
- Micro ecumenical expressions across the state operate outside the traditional ecumenical institutions like WAC, CCGS, etc. These are clusters of local ecumenical activity often focused on human services such as food banks, soup kitchens, etc. They are not organically connected to traditional institutional ecumenical ministries.
- A culture of congregational distrust of overarching institutions—denominations and ecumenical ministries—has weakened interest and willingness to support these institutions.

### Relationship of WAC and the Roman Catholic Dioceses

After several years of tension, the three Catholic dioceses withdrew from WAC in 2001. Their decision was based on several factors, but the most important reason was conflict over *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 this core question, “If the WAC is in fact an association of churches, what is the source of its authority to speak on behalf of the churches?”

### Emergence of the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University as a Strong Ecumenical Institution

Building on a strong tradition of theological education in the lay Roman Catholic community, ten years ago STM added partnerships with ten other denominations. That ecumenical vision continues to be its guiding vision. STM continues to enjoy the institutional support of its founding judicatories.

Two of the four generic elements of ecumenical ministry are central to STM’s mission as an ecumenical graduate school of theology:

- Building up the body of Christ by providing venues to bring Christians together for worship, prayer, mutual support and fellowship.
- Engaging in Christian and interfaith theological reflection and dialogue.

It would be overstating the scope of STM’s work to suggest it engages in all aspects of these two generic elements. Indeed, there are vital dimensions of these two elements that STM does not undertake and probably never will for reasons of institutional mission and capacity.

STM’s current geographic scope does not extend across the entire state. However, it does operate classes outside of the state and with the introduction of communication technologies STM may be broadening its scope across the state.

But STM is a significant actor that we need to consider as we strategize about the future of ecumenical ministry:

- STM’s association with a major university provides the “staying power” and programming capacity that is not possible for increasingly fragile ecumenical ministries to achieve.
- It has supplanted WAC as the primary *institutional* venue in which Catholics and mainline Protestants come together as *institutions*.
- STM has produced about 1,500 graduates over the past decade. A central part of the STM curriculum has been ecumenical engagement. Probably most of the graduates are carrying out their ministries in Washington State.

The strategic question for us to consider is: Given STM’s presence and capacity and 1,500 graduates as well as its institutional limitations, what are the appropriate forms of collaboration that will multiply our mutual ministries and avoid WAC engaging in elements of ecumenical ministry it will never have the resources and capacity to undertake? (Note: There has been some research on whether and how the 1,500 graduates have expressed their ecumenical training in the practice of ministry. Mining this research for clues about ecumenical work that is off our institutional radar screens would be a valuable resource as we plan the future.)

### Weyerhaeuser Center for Christian Faith and Learning at Whitworth University

The Center offers a number of valuable classes and workshops on theology, bible and ministry to clergy and laity. While its primary denominational focus is Presbyterian, it is ecumenical in its scope. Its strong presence on the East Side of the state is an asset that could be multiplied through partnering with WAC and its member denominations. Its director, Dale Soden, is a historian of ecumenism in Washington State.

### Emergence of the “Emerging Church”

This movement is focused on Gen X and Gen Y young people. There are 15 congregations in the Seattle Metro. Their pastors and congregations are passionate about planting new churches and are attracting “church planters” from all over the country for this purpose. This is itself an ecumenical movement. The pastors collaborate and worship together through the Northwest Hothouse. Check out their website [www.hothousenw.org](http://www.hothousenw.org). They are expanding their ecumenical fellowship from the 15 congregations in this area to include 10 more in Oregon, Idaho and British Columbia. They are connected to a graduate school of theology, Mars Hill Graduate School, that supports their ministries,. (Do not confuse this with the Mars Hill Church in Ballard.) Check out the website [www.mhgs.edu](http://www.mhgs.edu).

Several emerging church pastors and congregations have connections with mainline denominations such as Church of the Apostles jointly sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia and ELCA NW Synod. But their center of gravity is not with the mainline denominations and traditional ecumenical institutions. In their view the culture of the mainline denominations and ecumenical bodies are not relevant to their ministries and the young people they are passionate about reaching.

### The “None Zone” Has Been Oversold! How Do We Connect with 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.” “Religion and Public Life the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone”, 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...it’s 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.

There is great potential for us to reach out to nearly a third of the state’s adult population that identify with a religious tradition, but are not engaged in the institutional forms of those traditions. What do we know about this group? What strategies might be effective in connecting with them?

### **WAC’S ROLE IN THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF ECUMENICAL MINISTRY**

#### **D. Building up the Body of Christ: Partner with Judicatories in Renewing Their Ministries and Engaging Youth around the Ecumenical Vision**

##### *Goals*

1. Partner with judicatories in renewing their ministries, particularly with congregations.
2. Evangelize young people across denominational boundaries with the vision and practice of ecumenical life and the value of interfaith relations.

##### *Role of WAC*

Add value to the work of renewal and youth ministry because its ecumenical role places it in a unique position to convene clergy and laity across judicatory boundaries to:

- Identify common challenges.
- Coordinate strategies.
- Marshal resources to support those strategies by focusing on the “best practices” that are already available across the state and the Northwest.

*Examples of Congregational Renewal:*

- Urban and rural congregations with declining and aging memberships are struggling to support buildings with growing maintenance costs. This is both a pastoral and stewardship challenge. Pastoral because of the strong attachments members feel to sacred buildings that have been so important in their lives and the loss they will experience if they are separated from those buildings. Stewardship because of the resources diverted from mission to maintain those buildings and, in some locations, the tremendous appreciation in value that is locked in the real estate that, if sold, could be freed up for mission. The collaboration of University District Churches to develop an ecumenical campus and the relocation of First United Methodist in Seattle are case studies that would be valuable learnings on both the pastoral and stewardship challenges.
- Major agricultural shifts in rural areas like the Palouse are undercutting the economic base of communities, households and congregations. Collaboration could bring together congregations and denominational leaders for two initiatives: 1. Sharing pastors, church programs and facilities to a greater extent than is currently the case. 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.

*Examples of Ecumenical and Interfaith Ministry with Youth:*

- Each denomination sponsors a variety of youth programs, but they rarely operate across denominational boundaries. Organizing young people across these boundaries for worship, projects and advocacy would introduce them to the value of ecumenical engagement.
- The interfaith camp at Camp Brotherhood for middle-school youngsters in Pierce and Thurston counties provides a safe environment in which young people can build relationships across religious boundaries. One Muslim teen said, “The camp is a place to go where I can talk about my faith and feel safe while I do it.” This is a model that could be expanded across the state.
- There are a number of Catholic and Protestant campus ministries serving public and private universities and colleges across the state. Organizing students in these ministries across state for worship, projects and advocacy would introduce them to ecumenical engagement.

## **E. Christian and Interfaith Theological Conversation and Dialogue**

### *Goal*

Partner with STM and the Weyerhaeuser Center in promoting theological conversations that are relevant to congregations and youth.

### *Role of WAC*

Identify subjects that interest congregations and youth and help STM and Weyerhaeuser design workshops and conferences across the state that feature faculty and other resource persons.

Promote and organize the conferences and workshops.

## **F. Public Church: Spiritual Formation of Congregations to Do Justice and Shape the Media’s Portrayal of Faith Communities.**

### *Goals*

1. Encourage the spiritual formation of clergy and laity so they act on our historic calling to advocate for the common good.
2. Organize faith communities across the state to help the media become receptive to the life and witness of the faith community, i.e., move the media beyond their fixation on conflicts and controversies.
3. Expand the Religious Coalition for the Common Good.

### *Background on Goal 1: Spiritual Formation of Congregation to be the Public Church.*

Church people tend not to understand and act on the importance of two essential elements of effective public church advocacy:

- Numbers count with elected officials. Religious leaders as symbols of moral authority may 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?”
- 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. The ELCA has the most members and they are only 1.9% of the population. Add the Catholics at 11% plus other religious groups at 3% with similar views on most public policy, Jews, Quakers, Mennonites, historically African American churches, Unitarian-Universalist. 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 Dale Soden’s chapter 2 in the “None Zone,” *Contesting the Soul of an Unlikely Land: Mainline Protestants, Catholics and Reform and Conservative Jews in the Pacific NW.*)

Three significant weaknesses have emerged from recent evaluations of WAC and RCCG public church advocacy:

- Few congregations appear to be living our common call to be a public church. Examples: Only 165 persons representing 36 congregations attended the recent Faith Advocacy Day in Olympia although there was significant promotion of this event throughout the denominations. There are approximately 700 mainline congregations in the state. In monthly reviews of congregational newsletters sent to WAC over the last year it is rare to find any advocacy activity.
- Young people are not engaged in the advocacy promoted by traditional ecumenical ministries. The irony of this is heightened by recent pervasive evidence of their high levels of interest in justice, peacemaking and environmental care and their surge of interest in the presidential campaigns. See the February 11 feature story in “Time” and Jim Wallis’ blogs about responses to his recent book “The Great Awakening.”
- Communication technology and methods are outmoded and ineffective. The primary communications techniques of webpage content, email alerts and briefing papers are primarily characterized by detailed lists of policy proposals. They are abstract and lengthy and lead to glazed eyes. The computer technology is not interactive.

*Background on Goal 2: Shaping the Media’s Portrayal of Faith Communities.*

The media are among the most powerful instruments that shape our cultural values. Since a central mission of the public church is to lift up those historic Jewish and Christian values that promote “human flourishing” in our common life, the public church must engage the media if we expect to see these values expressed in our culture.

Our challenge is that most journalists, especially in the None Zone, have a very limited understanding of religious matters and are largely blind to what really happens in faith communities. Journalists tend to focus on intramural controversies within denominations and conflicts between liberals and evangelicals.

Two initiatives can help transform this situation: Mary Stamp and the Fig Tree in Spokane have been monitoring religion stories in area media. Based on their data, they have been coaching journalists on how to report on religion from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective. Mark Markuly, the new dean at STM and a former journalist, will be launching something similar to help journalists report from a perspective more reflective of actual religious life. Mark also wants to train church people in how they can work more effectively with journalists.

Public Church Advocacy Strategies for '08 and '09 in Collaboration with RCCG Partners and Catholic Conference

- Conduct focus groups with congregations, pastors and second and third tier denominational staff on the barriers to clergy and laity participation in the public church.
- Develop spiritual formation practices and worship experiences for congregations that connect works of mercy with advocacy for justice, i.e., How do you give a cup of cold water when the waterworks has broken down?
- Cultivate personal relationships among WAC staff and board with congregational leaders committed to being the public church.
- Identify best practices in communication strategies that focus on music, stories and art that lift up the biblical call for justice and the common good.
- Adapt social networking and viral marketing techniques with young people to support and expand their interest in justice, peace and environmental work.

Public Church Media Strategies for '08 and '09

- Coordinate the Fig Tree and STM initiatives with congregations and other ecumenical partners to influence media coverage of religion in all regions of the state.

**G. Ministries of Compassion and Justice: Disaster Relief and Returning Veterans and Their Families.**

*Goals*

1. Re-establish WAC as the statewide coordinator of disaster relief for the faith community.
2. Healing the Wounds of War: Ministry to Veterans and Their Families

*Background on Ministries of Compassion and Justice*

Between 1975 and 1989 WAC cultivated vital relations with congregations around the state through its ministries of compassion and justice: refugee resettlement, the wheat campaign for Bangladesh and bulk buying for food banks. These legacies offer three important learnings for WAC's path forward:

- They engaged congregations, bringing the grass roots into direct relationships with WAC.
- They were statewide in their reach.
- They brought together Christians who had differences on some public policy issues but could cooperate in ministries of compassion.

Disaster Relief Coordination Strategy for '08 and '09

WAC had some responsibility for disaster relief coordination in past years. Given WAC's fragile condition when I became interim executive director and knowing we would not have the capacity nor relationships to function effectively as relief coordinator, the board authorized me to transfer the responsibility to Associated Ministries of Pierce County.

Re-negotiate the return of this responsibility to WAC subject to adequate funding being available to carry out the assignment.

*Background on Goal 2: Healing the Wounds of War*

The prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in a heavy reliance on the National Guard and Reserves. Approximately 6,500 men and women in the Guard and Reserves 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 have already and will continue to 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 their 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 organize an interfaith initiative to train clergy and laity in outreach and ministry to these veterans and their families.

*Healing the Wounds of War Strategy for '08 and '09*

- Reach out to the entire spectrum of Christian and interfaith groups and denominations to organize trainings around the state for clergy and congregations in ministry to returning veterans and their families.
- Coordinate with the Governor's Department of Veterans Affairs, Guard, Reserves and regular military services in developing the trainings and the identification of the resources that are available through their agencies.
- Coordinate with the pastoral counseling program at STM and other clinical pastoral care training programs at hospitals and universities around the state in developing the training.
- Coordinate with the trade unions that have created "From Helmets to Hard Hats" training program for jobs in the construction trades.
- WAC would promote and organize the workshops around the state relying on the resources identified in the planning to conduct the substance of the trainings.

***FINANCIAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE MINISTRY***

The following conservative financial projections indicate that adequate resources can be generated to support the phasing in of a renewed ministry for 2008 through 2009.

2008: January through June

Cash Revenues: 93,000 rounded

Cash Available @ June 30: 67,000

- Eight of the ten WAC member denominations fulfill their commitments of 35,740 for the first six months. YTD actual is 10,848. Two have yet to make commitments.
- Individuals, congregations and community agencies contribute 7,000. YTD actual is 6,031.
- The anonymous contributor provides 50,000 in May upon receiving the strategic plan.
- Interim executive director works half-time and office manager 35 hours a month. RCCG staff will be terminated at the end of the legislative session. All executive director travel across the state to meet with stakeholders has been canceled. All other routine expenses are at a minimum.
- Acceptance of the offer from the of the Seattle Baptist Union to restructure their note of 24,710 with no interest payable in five years rather than pay off the entire note with the cash available before June 30, 2008. Monthly payments over five years would be 412.
- LPPO and CCGS follow through on their commitment to raise 3,343 to pay the law firm that did the pro bono work on the Snoqualmie Falls case in 2006. (The agreement to retain the law

firm was done on a “handshake,” i.e., moral commitment by LPPO, CCGS and WAC to find the money. WAC through a former staffer has paid 2,145 toward the total bill.)

- No surprises from unexpected expenses.

#### 2008: July to December

There will be sufficient funds to hire a permanent executive director, provide working capital to begin implementing the strategic plan and operate the office at a modest scale.

Cash Available: 110,000

Sources: 33,000 member denominations commitments for last half of '08  
5,000 congregations  
5,000 individuals and community groups  
67,000 carryover @ June 30

Note: This is a very conservative estimate. It does not include a fundraising campaign/event in the fall based on the new transformed ministry.

Expenses: 40,000 for permanent executive director  
25,000 for program development  
15,000 for office functions, bookkeeping, repayment of Baptist Union loan, etc.

Fund Balance : 30,000 year end

#### 2009

A sustainable operating model would be a two-person staff:

*Executive Director:* relations with members, ecumenical partners and strategic peace and justice partners, fundraising, public spokesperson, program development.

*Congregational Organizer:* congregational projects and public policy partnerships.

*Office Functions:* contracted out as would website and data base management.

Projects: Programs that emerge such as best practices of congregational renewal or advocacy organizing among youth would be conducted as projects. The projects would be conceived through consultation with WAC members and 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.

2009 Revenues: 250,000  
70,000 from nine Protestant judicatory members  
25,000 from individual donors.  
12,000 from congregations  
12,000 from unions and other community groups  
50,000 from the anonymous donor  
169,000 subtotal before a fundraising campaign  
81,000 from a targeted fundraising campaign.

81,000 is a reasonable sum to raise statewide for a transformed ecumenical ministry that has survived a crisis that many thought would be the end of its ministry.

Expenses: 80,000 executive director  
60,000 congregational organizer  
60,000 program activity including state of art communications  
25,000 office functions, data base mgt, repayment of Baptist Union loan, etc.

Fund Balance: 25,000 year-end