

**THE PATH FORWARD: STRATEGIC PLAN FOR A NEW STATEWIDE ECUMENICAL MINISTRY**

RECOMMENDATION	ANALYSIS
<p><b><u>NAME AND MISSION</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Name</u></b> A new name should be crafted to reflect the transformation. The new board will be responsible for selecting the new name in consultation with members of the new ministry.</p> <p><b><u>Mission</u></b> As a diverse community of Christian communities in Washington State, we come together in the <i>new name</i> to give expression to our unity in Jesus Christ, to deepen our ecumenical relationships with one another and to work for the common good marked by justice, compassion, hope, reconciliation, peace and equality.</p>	<p><i>Two reasons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Baggage” associated with the current name because of past practices and struggles.</i></li> <li>• <i>The term “churches” has a narrower connotation than the strategic plan goal of expanding membership to Christian ministries that do not fit the traditional definition of churches.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The WAC name has value as a “brand” in the public policy arena that will be forfeited with a name change.</i></p> <p><i>Several representative mission statements for ecumenical ministries were studied for guidance.</i></p> <p><i>These themes emerged as high priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Christian Identity: Express our Christian identity while encouraging interfaith dialogue and collaboration for the common good.</i></li> <li>• <i>Diverse Community: Honor the many Christian traditions that come together in one community.</i></li> <li>• <i>Communities: Recognize there are many different forms of Christian organizations ranging across denominations, ecumenical associations, clergy associations, religious orders, congregations, parachurch ministries, universities, seminaries, etc.</i></li> <li>• <i>Visible Unity in Jesus Christ: Lift up and proclaim our unity in Christ to overcome the disunity among Christian which has compromised our credibility and witness to the world. Our disunity has been magnified by the media’s focus on intramural conflicts among Christians and the moral failings of Christian leaders.</i></li> </ul>

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<p><b><u>EXPRESSION OF OUR MISSION IN THE WORLD</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building up the body of Christ by providing venues to bring Christians together for worship, prayer, ecumenical formation, mutual support and fellowship.</li> <li>• Witnessing by the public church to those cherished gospel values that promote “human flourishing” in our common and personal lives and advocating for the expression of these values in social and economic institutions and public policies.</li> <li>• Engaging in Christian and interfaith theological reflection, dialogue and learning.</li> <li>• Operating ministries of compassion and justice.</li> </ul>	<p><i>These are the “four legs” of the ecumenical table that on November 1, 2007 denominational leaders asked to be the foundation for the new ecumenical ministry.</i></p>
<p><b><u>MEMBERSHIP</u></b></p> <p><u>Members</u> Denominations, ecumenical ministries, congregations, clergy associations, parachurch ministries, religious orders, colleges, universities and seminaries.</p>	<p><i>See the commentary on “communities” under Mission Statement. Congregations are included for several reasons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regional leaders of some denominations are not located in Washington or, even if located in Washington, may choose not to participate in the new ecumenical ministry. However, some of their congregations may choose to participate.</i></li> <li>• <i>The institutional model on which WAC was founded in 1975 —the members were denominations and congregations expected their interests would percolate up to the WAC through their denominational representatives—has proven to be ineffective for involving congregations.</i></li> <li>• <i>Some congregations are very engaged in ecumenical work and could benefit by direct participation in the new ecumenical ministry.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>We discussed the inclusion of congregations with David Leslie, Executive Director, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). EMO experienced similar dynamics with the denominations and decided to include congregations as members along with denominations for the same reasons identified above. In his view congregations have been a source of vitality without diminishing denominational participation where their leaders are committed to ecumenicity.</i></p>

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<p><b><u>MEMBERSHIP (cont'd)</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Building Relationships with the Entire Christian Community</u></b>                      We sense a movement of the Holy Spirit awakening diverse members of the body of Christ to gather and discern our common mission. This means reaching beyond Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics to Evangelical, Historic African-American, Latino, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Emerging Churches. Also important is enlisting younger generations to the ecumenical vision and connecting with the proliferating local “micro” ecumenical ministries around the state.</p> <p><b><u>Membership Commitments</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the mission and program of the ministry.</li> <li>• Contribute financial support.</li> </ul>	<p><i>A growing number of Christians from disparate theological and ecclesial perspectives are awakening to the biblical call to bring good news to the poor and care for the creation. Our common calling can knit us together to discern through worship, prayer, service and advocacy how we can support each other as we follow the Gospel call.</i></p> <p><i>Young people are demonstrating high levels of interest in justice, peacemaking and environmental care. Very little of their interest is expressed through traditional ecumenical structures. The new ecumenical ministry can build up the intergenerational body of Christ by knitting together ecumenical elders who have fought these same struggles for decades with young people freshly inspired to take up these challenges.</i></p> <p><i>The Holy Spirit has been calling forth an amazing plethora of local and regional ministries all over the state. Yet they are not connected by an ecumenical network that could be a source of mutual support and birth new relationships.</i></p> <p><i>WAC’s traditional membership model requires denominational members to subscribe to the mission and provide financial support. There were two other classes of membership: associate and cooperating partners, e.g., congregations, religious orders, ecumenical ministries, etc. These subscribed to the purposes and participated in the programs of the WAC but were not required to provide financial support. This model was created in an era when the member denominations provided most of the budget for WAC. That is no longer realistic given the denominations’ own declining revenues that are mirrored in their reduced contributions to WAC.</i></p> <p><i>All members of the new ministry, as part of their covenantal relationship with each other, would be expected to contribute to the financial support of the ministry and participate in its mission and programs.</i></p>

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<p><b><u>PUBLIC CHURCH: THE PRIMARY FOCUS</u></b></p> <p>We are called to witness by our visible unity as Christ’s body and through our common public voice that gospel values can be the foundation for the joyful renewal of our common and personal lives. The public church has many expressions— reconciliation of those separated by hostility and indifference, lifting up the forsaken and forgotten to public awareness, care for the fragile creation, and advocacy for justice in our economic, social and public institutions.</p>	<p><i>The public church focuses on the “four legs of the ecumenical table:”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Building up the unity of the body of Christ around our common calling to live out gospel values by public worship, prayer and mutual support.</i></li> <li>• <i>Engaging in Christian and interfaith theological reflection and dialogue as a witness that people long separated by religion, culture, race and income can be reconciled with one another.</i></li> <li>• <i>Operating ministries of compassion.</i></li> <li>• <i>Advocating for the common good and for compassion and justice on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are forgotten and forsaken.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The public church was selected as the primary focus for two reasons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The compelling call to lift up our voices publicly on behalf of gospel values.</i></li> <li>• <i>There will not be sufficient resources to operate separate programs for each” leg of the table” that are unconnected by a common strategy. The working group is keenly aware of past critiques of WAC that it had attempted too many disparate programs with too few resources.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The public church is an evangelistic opportunity to connect with a third of Washington adults who identify with religious institutions but don’t belong to any. As noted in “Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone,” 31% of the adult population identify but do not affiliate with any religious institutions. “This is the wild card in any assessment of the role of religion in the public life of the region.”( p 28)</i></p>

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<p><b><u>PROGRAM THEMES</u></b></p> <p><u>Washington Christian Leadership Forum</u> A periodic gathering of recognized leaders of Christian communities across the state for worship, prayer, study, and public witness bringing gospel values to bear on issues affecting the body of Christ and the common good. The Forum would identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to share the burdens that some Christian communities are bearing such as the devastatingly high rates of criminal conviction and incarceration in African American and Hispanic communities; and</li> <li>• Concerns for the common good that have broad appeal throughout the Christian community such as poverty and care for the environment.</li> </ul> <p><u>Connecting Ecumenical Ministries</u> The Holy Spirit has been calling forth an amazing plethora of local and regional ministries all over the state. They have yet to be connected by an ecumenical network that could be a source of mutual support and birth new relationships.</p>	<p><i>We recognize that the new board will have the responsibility for developing specific programs that express these themes. The selection of programs and timing of their implementation will depend on available resources and interest by the members. The programs identified below are suggestive and not directive.</i></p> <p><i>The Fig Tree: A Web Based Ecumenical Journal <a href="http://www.thefigtree.org/">http://www.thefigtree.org/</a> The Fig Tree regularly reports stories and pictures of faith-based ministries in Eastern Washington. Reporters, photographers and videographers are recruited from faith communities and trained to produce stories and paid a modest stipend for their work. The new statewide ecumenical ministry and Fig Tree would partner in the expansion of the Fig Tree into Western Washington. It can be tailored to report on the activities of the local ministries and link them to other ministries by regions within the state and across the entire state.</i></p> <p><i>There could be significant cost savings for local ecumenical ministries such as the Church Council of Greater Seattle and Associated Ministries of Tacoma/Pierce County that are struggling with the high cost of producing their newspapers.</i></p>

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<p><b><u>PROGRAM THEMES (cont'd)</u></b></p> <p><u>Shaping the Media’s Portrayal of Faith Communities</u> Leaders across the state could be trained to coach journalists on how to report on religion from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective. This training can be developed through a partnership with Mary Stamp editor/publisher of the Fig Tree in Spokane because she has this kind of coaching experience and a partnership with Mark Markuly, the new dean at STM and a former journalist, who has a similar interest.</p> <p><u>The Public Church as an Advocate for the Common Good</u> Our advocacy needs to be grounded in gospel values and the social teachings of our various traditions. The focus of advocacy would not be limited to public policy; gospel values should be lifted up to other social and economic institutions that affect the common good.</p> <p>Advocacy strategies would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor federal and state policy proposals and practices of economic and social institutions.</li> <li>• Mobilize Christian communities to advocate for public policies and economic decisions that benefit the common good.</li> <li>• Partner with other groups both religious and secular that share a common advocacy agenda.</li> </ul>	<p><i>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 gospel values that promote “human flourishing,” the public church must engage the media if we expect to see these values expressed in our culture.</i></p> <p><i>Journalists tend to focus on intramural controversies among Christians and the moral failings of Christian leaders. Most journalists have a very limited understanding of religious matters and are largely blind to what really happens in faith communities. For instance, recent media attention on a few sound bites from Rev. Jeremiah Wright illustrates their ignorance and distortion of the black church’s preaching and prophetic traditions.</i></p> <p><i>Congregational engagement in public policy advocacy has been diminishing as evidenced by declining participation in Faith Advocacy Day in Olympia and other activities. Young people are not engaged in the advocacy promoted by traditional ecumenical ministries. This is ironic because 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.”)</i></p> <p><i>Some of the decline may be the result of ineffective communication strategies that try to mobilize advocates by relying on detailed lists of policy proposals that are abstract and lengthy, resulting in glazed eyes. The computer technology is not interactive.</i></p> <p><i>The new ministry would recognize these weaknesses and transform its advocacy by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identifying and disseminating best practices in communication strategies that focus on music, stories and art that lift up the gospel call for justice and the common good.</i></li> <li>• <i>Adapting social networking and viral marketing techniques with young people to support and expand their interest in justice, peace and environmental work and ground their passion in gospel values.</i></li> </ul>

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<p><b><u>ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE</u></b></p> <p><u>One Organization with Two Program Divisions</u> There would be one organizational structure but two program divisions, each with a particular program focus: (1) Developing the Ecumenical Community and (2) Advocacy for the Common Good.</p> <p><u>Developing the Ecumenical Community</u> This program division would convene the Washington Christian Leadership Forum, network among ecumenical ministries across the state and operate public church programs.</p> <p><u>Advocacy for the Common Good</u> This program division would engage in advocacy for the common good by focusing gospel values on public policy and other social and economic institutions. This division would partner from time-to-time with ministries like the Catholic Conference, Lutheran Public Policy Office and other groups both religious and secular that share a common advocacy agenda.</p> <p>Some members would choose to participate in the advocacy part of the new ministry. Others that have their own public policy organizations might choose not to participate directly in the advocacy part of the new ministry while fully participating in developing the ecumenical community.</p> <p>Members that participate in the advocacy division would be free to pursue advocacy on their own with respect to matters that are not held in common with other members.</p> <p><u>Overall Board and Two Advisory Councils</u> One board for the entire ministry would have responsibility for governance and fiscal oversight. Each program division would have an advisory council.</p> <p><u>Financial Support and Staffing</u> Members would be encouraged to support both program divisions, but could designate their contributions to one or both of the program divisions. Staff would be allocated on the basis of funding that is available both from members and other contributors.</p>	<p><i>The recommendation of one organization with two program divisions emerged from our consideration of these factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Desire for one statewide ecumenical ministry with a broadly inclusive membership and the capacity to do programs together.</i></li> <li>• <i>Some denominations and ecumenical ministries do not have the capacity for public policy advocacy. They have traditionally relied on WAC for this purpose. In the future they will continue to require a partnership with a statewide ecumenical public policy ministry.</i></li> <li>• <i>Other prospective members such as Roman Catholic dioceses and Lutheran synods have their own public policy organizations and would not need the advocacy arm of the new ministry.</i></li> <li>• <i>Still other prospective members such as educational institutions view public policy advocacy as outside their institutional mission.</i></li> <li>• <i>There are not resources available to sustain two separate statewide ministries—one for developing the ecumenical community and the other for advocacy for the common good.</i></li> </ul>

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<p><b><u>TIME LINE TO TRANSITION TO THE NEW MINISTRY</u></b></p> <p>Formation of nominating committee for new board.  <b>May 2 completion</b></p> <p>Declaration of WAC member denominations’ intentions to participate in the new ministry accompanied by nominees for the new board and their plan for making their financial contributions for the remainder of 2008.  <b>May 15 completion</b></p> <p>Declaration of non-member denominations and ecumenical partners’ intentions to participate in the new ministry accompanied by nominees for the new board and their plan for making their financial contributions for the remainder of 2008.  <b>May 15 completion</b></p> <p>The new board is seated and a transitional meeting with the current board is held. Current WAC board resigns.  <b>May 31 completion</b></p> <p>New board retains a transitional staff director to assist in the recruitment of the remaining board members, organize the search for the permanent executive director, administer the office, organize the fall fundraiser, and invite participation and membership by newly eligible members. The current interim executive director will resign no later than June 30.  <b>June 30 completion</b></p>	<p><i>Technical Note on Board Appointments under Current WAC By-laws:  Member denominations have authority to name their board representatives. Denominations and ecumenical partners that currently are not WAC members but desire to have board representation would give those names to the nominating committee who would present those to the current board for ratification. The board has authority to make these types of appointments.</i></p>

**STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKING GROUP**

**In December, 2007 leaders of the ten Protestant denominations that are WAC members, the three Roman Catholic dioceses and eight ecumenical partners were invited to appoint representatives to a working group to recommend a strategic plan for a transformed statewide ecumenical ministry.**

**The following denominations and ecumenical ministries appointed individuals who actually participated in the working group deliberations**

**WAC Member Protestant Denominations**

**Disciples of Christ**

**Evangelical Lutheran Church, NW Synod**

**Episcopal Diocese of Olympia**

**Evergreen Baptist Association**

**United Church of Christ**

**United Methodist Church**

**Roman Catholic**

**Archdiocese of Seattle**

**Ecumenical Partners**

**Associated Ministries of Tacoma/Pierce County**

**Church Council of Greater Seattle**

**Church World Service**

**Earth Ministry**

**Lutheran Public Policy Office**

**School of Theology and Ministry, Seattle University**

**The working group met four times from January 12 through March 29 averaging four hours each session. In addition the members communicated numerous times by email and telephone; and a drafting committee invested substantial time in writing recommendations at the end of the process.**