



The Labyrinth

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT
ECUMENICAL CAMPUS Coalition

May 2009

Building Bridges Between the Denominations

Interview with Lutheran Bishop Chris Boerger

By Judy Lightfoot

The Ecumenical Campus idea appeals to the Bishop for many reasons, including its potential as a useful model for new churches. “Developers aren’t including church structures in their community plans, and finding property is difficult. Congregations need to be creative in building their church homes.”

As Bishop of the NW Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Bishop Boerger welcomes ELCA’s embrace of Biblical and justice themes that “put us in touch with an ever-widening spectrum of Christianity.” He sees the Ecumenical Campus as an exciting way of “crossing denominational boundaries while remaining true to the most cherished ways of the Lutheran church.”

The Bishop is proud that as a “bridge denomination” Lutherans bring people together to talk, work, serve, and



worship. “Early on, the ELCA established the ideal of full communion relationships. Today the ELCA is in full communion with the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Moravian, United Church of Christ, and Reformed Church denominations, with the United Methodist Church likely to be added shortly.”

Dialogues with other church bodies, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), have been progressing for several years. The ELCA is a member of the National Council of Churches of Christ as well as the World Council of Churches.

ELCA’s bridge denomination role means that “if two church bodies that are not in communion with each other want to meet, the relationship they share with us makes them comfortable with letting ELCA hold the meeting. Worship can be part of it. As conveners we’re in a position to say ‘Y’all come!’ We don’t have to argue about who should be at the table.”

Bishop Boerger reflected that “Anything on the Ecumenical Campus scale will run into hurdles. What it needs is an intentional plan for institutional flexibility so that stepping on each other’s toes becomes a reason for talk about further decision-making, not for divorce proceedings. But the creativity that brought the project this far can bring it on home.”

The Challenges of a Stumbling Economy

The economic downturn imposes challenges for the proposed Ecumenical Campus project, but also creates some new opportunities. UDECC’s board will evaluate project feasibility in light of the economy at the time the feasibility study is being completed, later this year. By then we anticipate clearer visibility as to the direction the economy is headed.

The commercial real estate market, in dire straits right now, is likely to worsen before it improves. Market conditions will impact both sides of our transactions, but it is difficult at this time to gauge exactly what the net impact will be.

Credit markets are stressed at present, but the Ecumenical Campus concept does not rely on long-term financing. The project will be primarily capitalized by the liquidation of existing real estate assets, which bodes well for favorable terms on construction financing.

One benefit of the downturn is lower construction costs, including those for material, transportation, and labor. Increased competition for fewer new projects is improving the bidding climate, and inflation is low.

UDECC trustees have professional experience pertinent to the economic

situation. Darel Grothaus, former Director of Community Development for the City of Seattle, is an expert in urban finance with decades of experience in banking and urban development. Michael Shaw, Business Manager at North Seattle Community College, and a CPA, was Assistant Auditor with the State Auditor’s Office.

The economic crisis manifests itself in many ways. Churches and service agencies in the U District are providing critical support to a growing number of homeless adults and at-risk youth, and will be able to do far more with resources made available by the Ecumenical Campus project.

Church for the 21st Century

Where there's a way, there's a will

America's social services are diminishing, foundation budgets shrink, and philanthropists write fewer checks. News media—not always unintentionally—stoke public anxieties with stories of human needs and statistics so dire that solutions seem impossible to imagine. Proverbial wisdom says *Where there's a will, there's a way*, but what if the daunting nature of today's problems saps public will to seek the way?



Maybe a 21st-Century Church's version of the proverb would reverse the syntax. Maybe finding a way to hold a passel of problems steady in our collective gaze, until they can be shifted and sorted into a coherent practical vision, can awaken the *will* to solve them.

America's faith communities are often in the forefront of marshaling the will to meet urgent needs. U District congregations have worked for decades in shared ministries actively seeking social justice and peace. Together their churches, now known as the U District Ecumenical Parish (UDEP), initiated various area programs including youth shelters, case management, a food bank, feeding programs, drop-in centers, GED programs, job skills training, and emergency services. A recent working list of services (some not involving UDEP churches) identifies a mind-boggling total of 22 different programs in the U District!

Planning an Ecumenical Campus to host service providers opens a way toward imaginative and geographical reconfigurations that can inspire the public's *will* to act. UDECC's goal is to assemble a selection of diverse so-

cial service agencies, now sited in dispersed, often substandard locations, in suitable spaces whose proximity to each other will enable synergies presently impossible to exploit. The sum will be greater than its formerly scattered parts, and will pack a bigger problem-solving wallop.

Social service staff will benefit from increased funding and teams of nearby church volunteers, while working in larger, better spaces, at lower-than-market rent, located centrally

near a transit hub. Vulnerable populations will have easier access to more comprehensive, better-coordinated services. University of Washington students, faculty, and staff will develop stronger connections with the U District through volunteer opportunities, many sponsored by the University.

UDECC is using a strategic approach—looking for gaps in service and assessing the viability and compatibility of existing programs—in order to assemble service providers that complement and energize each other. For example, seniors and at-risk youth, especially those aged out of foster care, will benefit from give-and-take rooted in nearness. Seniors can be a positive influence in the lives of young people who distrust adults of their parents' generation. Tech-savvy youth can help seniors explore cyberspace, while in turn retired professionals tutor young people in a variety of subjects and arts. In a world of so many vices, a virtuous cycle!

Shaped in full light of today's challenges, a Church for the 21st Century is a way of rousing the *will* to meet them.

Ecumenical Programming

Planning for expanded ecumenical programming is beginning. If you're interested in participating, please contact your clergy to learn more!

WORSHIP

In addition to the regular worship schedules of the UDECC churches, a full church year of ecumenical worship opportunities now in place can be expanded beyond current joint Palm Sunday, Advent, Lent, Thanksgiving and Easter (sunrise) services.

EDUCATION

The notion of conducting ecumenical Sunday school and youth programs has captured the imaginations of many. More people and more vital activities ensure more viable programs. Diverse and numerous adult forums and Bible classes can become available to all.

FELLOWSHIP

In a larger community of believers, with greater diversity and a critical mass of participants, social groups and activities can extend coffee hours and potluck dinners to organized activities like bowling and softball leagues.

THEOLOGICAL STUDY

"Questions of Faith Institute," the provisional name for a lay school of theology now in exploratory stages, would take advantage of the community of clergy and theologians affiliated with UDECC. This "seminary for the rest of us" would provide a wealth of learning opportunities to all.

Are we there yet?

Work continues on UDECC's feasibility study, including further refinement of the draft Ownership & Governance Plan introduced last October, which outlined a legal framework for the joint ownership and operation of the Ecumenical Campus. In response to comments and questions from member congregations and campus ministries, and in consultation with its team of attorneys at Perkins Coie, UDECC is more fully addressing a number of issues, including joint ministry opportunities, early "commitment phase" procedures, and protections for the rights and autonomy of each member organization.

Sharing SHARE/WHEEL

By Joan Burton

University Lutheran Church, following in the footsteps of Christ Episcopal Church and University Friends Meeting, has opened a homeless shelter in its fellowship hall.

Pastor Ron Moe-Lobeda is excited that “U Lu” now hosts a SHARE/WHEEL women’s shelter in its fellowship hall. In 2001 ULC opened Elizabeth Gregory Home nearby to provide transitional housing for women, as well as a drop-in day center in the church where homeless women can shower, do their laundry, and find safe harbor. The overnight shelter completes what Moe-Lobeda describes as “a full continuum of care to homeless women—our goal at University Lutheran all along.”

The purpose of SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort) and its partner WHEEL (Women’s Equality and Enhancement League), beyond giving the homeless a place to sleep, is to allow working people the chance to save funds for housing—most participants have jobs or are seeking one.

SHARE/WHEEL shelters provide case management, food service,

hygiene facilities, and counseling, and are self-governing in strict accordance with regulations that have yielded a 20-year history of success.

Among other things, SHARE rules consider the neighborhood. When a shelter closes in the morning, residents are required to leave the area and are given bus passes to take them elsewhere. At night, when shelters are in operation, patrols of shelter residents coached in security skills keep the neighborhood safe—some neighbors say, safer than before the shelter opened. Community meetings at ULC to inform neighbors about the proposed women’s shelter elicited no open opposition.

Christ Episcopal has provided space for 25-30 homeless men and women nightly throughout the year for five years. Participants must arrive as a group at the designated time—no loitering on the grounds while awaiting entry—and must depart by

8 AM. No one is admitted directly from the street. People asking about the shelter are referred to the SHARE office downtown, where all prospective residents are carefully pre-screened. Anyone engaged in alcohol or drug activity is barred. All residents must do cleaning chores and restock supplies. Every effort is made to avoid any “nuisance” impact on neighbors.

University Friends Meetinghouse hosts 20 men and women in a similar shelter. The program is UFM’S improved version of its past ministry, which allowed homeless people to camp on the grounds. Now SHARE/WHEEL provides effective, experienced oversight and direct governance of UFM’s indoor shelter.

SHARE/WHEEL’s success story can be credited in part to its being peer-run by homeless and formerly homeless people. They’ve been there and know what needs to be done.

Spotlight: Lorig Associates

UDECC’s development consultants have built a reputation for the creative management of complex community projects.

Since the earliest stages of the feasibility study process, UDECC has been advised by development consultants Lorig Associates. Lorig is a Seattle real estate development company with more than 30 years of experience in creating complex projects that enhance communities. In addition to its own projects, the firm provides management services for clients who require assistance with property development and who wish to maintain ownership of their real estate.

Some of the many institutional projects for which Lorig has provided consulting services include St. Mark’s Cathedral, Bailey Boushay House, the Paramount, ACT, and Village Theaters, housing projects for the University of Washington, and the new Student Center at Seattle University as well as

other projects on that campus.



Partner-in-Charge Bruce Lorig (left), with Senior Project Manager Steve Bolliger

The people at Lorig are known for their extensive work with nonprofit and public agencies and for their thorough understanding of the unique requirements of such organizations. They understand not only the business of development but also the complex, often unique ways in which different institutions build consensus and arrive at well-informed decisions.

Lorig’s consulting capabilities span the development cycle to include feasibility studies and master planning, property acquisition, market research, financing, budget management and regulatory approvals. Founder Bruce Lorig is personally in charge of the work his firm is doing with UDECC, and Senior Project Manager Steve Bolliger adds further breadth and depth of experience to this effort.

Interview with David Bloom

By Joan Burton

David Bloom is an American Baptist minister with a social conscience. He has been a member of University Baptist Church since he was hired there as Associate Pastor in 1975, serving for three years.

In 2007, UBC members made the decision to sell their building and seek a new future elsewhere. The congregation has worked since then to identify a buyer for their property.

Among UBC's ministries have been a feeding kitchen for hungry neighbors and childcare services for working parents. Regardless of its future location, UBC is committed to serving its community in a variety of ways.

Bloom remains a UBC member and for many years was Associate Director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle. In his retirement he has been volunteering with homeless advocacy organizations and teaching at Antioch University in Seattle.

Bloom has been active in local social justice issues for 30 years—leading urban programs for the Church Council, founding the Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness and co-founding the Downtown Emergency



Center and Common Ground.

Profoundly convinced of the value of ecumenical ministry, Bloom has mixed feelings about the large capital investment needed for UDECC to succeed as currently envisioned, especially during the present economic downturn. He wonders if it might be necessary to scale back the

vision, while keeping the collaborative model.

However, he believes churches should be able to share staff and volunteers for social ministry, as was done with the development of ROOTS and, in other communities, with low-income housing, health clinics, and multi-service centers. The spirit of cooperative ministry among U District congregations and their staffs is a great starting point. Bloom would like to see an ecumenical center for social ministry, including campus ministry, established in the U District, whether or not congregations leave their present worship spaces and collocate.

Bloom's ministry attests to the value of finding ecumenical responses to the human needs around us. As UDECC works toward this goal, he believes it will benefit both the University District and the city.

Snapshot: University Churches Emergency Fund

By Judy Lightfoot

UCEF was created in 1986 to provide information, referral, and financial assistance to people in need residing in NE Seattle, and to the homeless. According to Executive Director Jo Gustafson, "We're busier than we've ever been."

In response to the rising costs of rent, move-ins, and utilities UCEF has narrowed its scope of giving to focus on offering two critical services: protecting people with housing from being evicted, and helping to cover move-in expenses for those in transition to new housing. Tighter restrictions have

improved its stewardship of available funds and permitted stopgap gifts to increase from \$50-\$75 to \$100 per year per individual or family. But even with generous donations from individuals, foundations, and 21 churches, levels of giving have diminished, and income isn't keeping pace with outgo.

UCEF assistance with rent payments or utility costs is based on individual need, and is verified by current bills or copies of lease agreements. Funds are paid directly to the landlord or service provider. Also provided on an as-needed basis are emergency food,

bus tickets, and some toiletries. Funds are never given directly to clients. Staff and volunteers talk individually with clients to determine their needs, help solve their problems, and refer them to other services if necessary. At UCEF assistance is personal and respectful.

UCEF, at 4515 16th Ave NE, is open 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM Tuesday through Friday. For further information, visit ucefseattle.com on the Web, call 206-524-7885, or email director@ucefseattle.com. Donations are needed, and will be most welcome!

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