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2007-2011
Strategic Plan
National Council of the Churches of Christ
in the United States of America

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Introduction

8 Praise and thanksgiving be to God, who created the world and declared it good (Genesis 1:
9 31), who was incarnate in Jesus Christ, healing our estrangement and calling us to be
10 ambassadors of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5: 18-20), who is ever present through the
11 Holy Spirit, gathering us into one body from the diversity of the human family and sending
12 us forth in mission (Acts 1-2)! It is God in whom we trust, God's will we seek to discern,
13 and God's promise that is our common hope!

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15 This joyous confession is the foundation of the ecumenical movement which our churches
16 have acknowledged is vital to their calling. Our forebears in the movement put the matter
17 plainly some eight decades ago: "The world is too strong for a divided church." In a world
18 fragmented by fearfulness, Christians proclaim a divine love that casts out fear (I John 4: 18)
19 and binds even those the world calls enemies (Matthew 5: 44). In a society still divided by
20 race and increasingly divided into haves and have nots, Christians affirm a vision of
21 community in which every neighbor is valued as a child of God (Genesis 1: 27) and all
22 neighbors have enough (Luke 6). In a world fractured by suspicion of those who are
23 "other," Christians have heard a command to welcome strangers (Genesis 18, Hebrews 13:
24 2), even as Christ has welcomed us (Romans 15: 7).

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26 The followers of Jesus Christ, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, are called not only to witness
27 to this Good News in word and deed, but to embody it in the way we live with one another.
28 Ambassadors of reconciliation should be reconciled. But the way we actually live as
29 churches – with relationships of cordial neglect, still divided by the very things we are called
30 to expose – drastically undercuts the power of our proclamation. When we look around us
31 we see, yet again, that the world is too strong for a divided church.

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33 This is the vision, and the problem, that brought the National Council of the Churches of
34 Christ (NCC)* into existence and has sustained it over the past half century. Any strategic
35 plan for the Council's future must begin by reaffirming the theological vision on which all
36 ecumenical work is founded.

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38 There is much to celebrate in the life of the NCC during the past quadrennium, including
39 leadership in peacemaking efforts in Iraq and throughout the Middle East; significant policy
40 statements on such matters as justice for children and biotechnology; leadership, through
41 "Let Justice Roll," in efforts to reduce poverty in America; a string of balanced budgets; new
42 sources of financial support, especially from foundations; major Faith and Order Studies on
43 church-dividing issues; a new e-network, "Faithful America;" strengthened relations with
44 interfaith partners; the work of an excellent, dedicated staff; and a renewed sense of energy

45 and public visibility. None of this, however, allows for self-congratulation or a diminished
46 sense of urgency. Where the ecumenical vision of communion with God and one another is
47 advanced, we can only give thanks to the Source of all unity. Where the efforts of our
48 churches are inadequate, we can only confess our weakness and ask God to strengthen our
49 resolve.*

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53 The Strategic Plan that follows must be seen within a wider context that includes several
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- Ethical issues (especially with regard to sexuality), which pose the question of how social change relates to the gospel, have created new lines of division, both within and between the churches — thus expanding and complicating the ecumenical agenda.
- The U.S. as a whole seems particularly polarized over such issues as same sex marriage, abortion, and stem cell research.
- Threats to the human future — including the wide-spread use of violence to resolve conflicts, the growing disparity between rich and poor (an effect, at least in part, of global capitalism), and the HIV/AIDS pandemic — cry out for effective, collaborative church response.
- Within this country, such things as the erosion of civil liberties as part of the “war on terror,” growing levels of poverty, diminished governmental concern for environmental stewardship, the effects of racism, as well as the war in Iraq call for ecumenical action grounded in our shared faith.
- Some Orthodox churches are examining their role in society and the ecumenical movement in the aftermath of the Cold War, while the Roman Catholic Church, a key partner (though not a member) of the NCC, is in a time of leadership transition at the beginning of a new pontificate.
- “Mainline” denominations, which have been crucial supporters of ecumenical organizations (including the NCC), seem less sure of their future direction, more focused on matters of sustainability — while some churches outside the conciliar ecumenical movement are growing in strength and public influence.
- Some churches not historically involved in the ecumenical movement are reclaiming a biblical agenda to work against poverty and protect the environment – thus opening new possibilities for collaboration among Christians.

* The initials NCC are widely used when referring to the National Council of the Churches of Christ. This is not to diminish the centrality of Christ in the life of the Council which is boldly declared in the Preamble to the Constitution.

- 88 • Other ecumenical initiatives — including various bilateral relationships, Churches
89 Uniting in Christ, and Christian Churches Together in the USA — challenge the
90 NCC to clarify its own distinctive role.
- 91
- 92 • The growing presence of interfaith neighbors in communities across the country
93 raises the question of interfaith dialogue as a priority for the Council.
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- 95 • The presence at ecumenical tables of those who were previously marginalized or
96 excluded makes the link between unity and justice inescapable.
- 97
- 98 • More and more Christians lack a basic knowledge of the Bible or their community’s
99 theological heritage – which makes it difficult for the NCC, or leaders in any church,
100 to show how efforts to achieve peace and justice are based on scripture and
101 theological principles.
- 102
- 103 • Technological advances have created new possibilities for building networks, but
104 also raise questions about the historic methodology of the ecumenical movement
105 which puts high value on personal interaction.
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107 In the midst of these developments, the NCC faces significant challenges to its identity and
108 mission. The following seem particularly pressing:

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110 1. There is an inadequate level of “ownership” of the Council by the member
111 communions. Several members barely participate, even in the General Assembly (GA), and
112 provide no financial support for the work of the NCC. Even leaders in participating
113 communions, however, complain that the NCC seems at times like an agency alongside
114 the churches rather than a council of the churches in life together. Taking the “Marks of
115 Our Commitment” document seriously could help the member communions grow, through
116 common participation in the Council, in their knowledge of and commitment to one
117 another. The report of the NCC’s Ecclesiology Study (1997) names the problem this way:
118 “The essence of a council of churches is not the relationship of the churches to the structure
119 of the council, but their relationship to one another. The point is that a council has a
120 structure, not that it is a structure alongside, or over against, the churches. Without a
121 recognition of this point, churches tend to avoid the accountability that ought to go with
122 conciliar membership.”

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124 2. Closely related, a decreasing percentage of revenue for the NCC budget is coming
125 from the member communions, either through the Ecumenical Commitment Fund (ECF)
126 or cognate funding. This means that the Council’s programming could be shaped by the
127 priorities of various foundations (now a major source of revenue), not the churches. Since
128 such money is “soft,” it also means that the Council’s financial picture, while much better
129 than five years ago, remains vulnerable.

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131 3. Some member communions, and some individual leaders, think that the NCC is in
132 danger of losing its basic vision. Instead of serving as an embodied witness to God’s
133 reconciling love, as a place where churches come together even in the midst of theological
134 and political disagreement, the Council, as they see it, is acting increasingly like a political
135 action coalition. Public actions and statements in the name of the NCC have alienated some

136 member communions. While there is always a tension between “justice” and “unity,” there
137 is a wide-spread conviction that this tension is not adequately engaged in the agenda of the
138 NCC.
139

140 4. The relationship between the NCC and Church World Service (CWS), reconceived
141 in 1999 and expressed in the GA, still needs clarification in order for the two organizations
142 to interact in a collaborative and coordinated manner. Among the issues to be addressed:
143 the role of the GA, the role of the GA president, the possibility of joint committees between
144 NCC and CWS, and coordination between the two bodies with regard to international
145 affairs.
146

147 5. NCC General Secretaries, while taking needed initiatives, have at times done so
148 without the full backing or authorization of the churches through the Council’s governing
149 bodies. This is not simply a matter of individual temperament but a question of systemic
150 accountability.
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152 6. While the current structure seems to have promise, problems remain. There is at
153 least some lack of clarity about the accountability of long-standing working groups and
154 committees to the commissions and of the commissions to the Governing Board (GB). The
155 specific purposes of the GB could be clearer, and representatives from the churches to the
156 GB have often been inadequately prepared to carry out their policy oversight or governance
157 responsibilities.
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159 7. Through the NCC Ecumenical Networks staff and office (formerly, the
160 Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism), the NCC served a distinct role as
161 coordinator of relationships among state, regional, and local councils of churches, as
162 facilitator of professional and volunteer ecumenical education and development, and as a
163 mechanism for ecumenical education and organizational trouble shooting. These
164 relationships strengthened the whole ecumenical movement in the US and often served as a
165 means for “reception” of shared agendas beyond NCC member denominations. When that
166 staff and office were eliminated, these essential elements were lost, to the detriment of the
167 whole conciliar ecumenical movement in the US.
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169 8. The staff should be commended for their generally excellent work over the past
170 four years. It is clear, however, that staff are increasingly squeezed between high
171 expectations and diminished resources.
172

173 This Strategic Plan responds to these concerns with a number of recommendations intended
174 to:

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- 176 • strengthen the relationship of member churches to one another,
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- 178 • strengthen institutional accountability,
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- 180 • strengthen and clarify the relationship between the NCC and CWS,
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- 182 • emphasize ecumenical formation,
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- reach out to new partners,
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- relate more fully to other parts of the ecumenical movement,
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- improve the Council’s financial situation.
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190 The members of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) are also aware, however, that for a
191 strategic plan to be bold and compelling it must have an overarching goal that helps integrate
192 and drive the work of the NCC in the next quadrennium and beyond.

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194 With this in mind, the SPC offers the following integrating goal for consideration by the
195 churches and the governing bodies of the NCC: That the churches, as an expression of their
196 commitment to seek visible unity through the NCC, will aggressively promote in the next
197 quadrennium a vision of authentic common life as an alternative to that prevalent in
198 contemporary American culture. The Council’s vision of common life, set forth over the
199 years in various documents and programs, includes

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- a recognition that all persons – of whatever race, class, or culture – are related to one another as children of the Creator (a recognition that reinforces the imperative of peacemaking);
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- a recognition that Christ calls us to interdependent community in which the well-being of one is inseparable from the well-being of all (a recognition that reinforces the imperative to overcome poverty);
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- a recognition that human beings are an integral part of the whole Spirit-sustained creation (a recognition that reinforces the imperative to protect the environment).
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- a recognition that the churches are called and empowered by the Spirit to be a sign of genuine community in the way they live with one another. (a recognition that reinforces the imperative to realize visible unity while living in constructive dialogue with people of other faiths).
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218 This vision reinforces the NCC’s recent focus on “peace, poverty, and planet earth,” but
219 gathers these concerns under the umbrella of common life and grounds them in the
220 theological language of the church. It also helps integrate the Council’s historic concerns for
221 both church unity and the renewal of the wider human community. Far from business as
222 usual, this overarching strategic goal would commit the member communions of the Council
223 to a process of careful listening to and active dialogue with one another, to a process of
224 building alliances with other faith communities toward a common end, and to an emphasis
225 not just on programs and resolutions but on a theologically – grounded vision for our shared
226 life and witness to this society.

227

228 We affirm that the NCC is a forum in which churches that may disagree about many things
229 meet in conversation and fellowship; but it has also proved to be a community able to
230 declare God’s concern for society’s most vulnerable members, God’s will for peacemaking,
231 God’s call to be responsible stewards of creation. The NCC member communions have a

232 body of shared convictions that is woven through their life together as a result of their
233 shared obedience to Christ. If this Strategic Plan is adopted, these convictions will be tested
234 and developed through official church-to-church visits, the commissions will be challenged
235 to reflect on what they can contribute to this integrating goal, and general assemblies will be
236 used to clarify the goal and measure progress toward it.

237

238 The Strategic Plan that follows is the product of wide consultation with leadership of the
239 NCC and its member communions. The SPC assumes that implementation of the plan,
240 which is the responsibility of the GB, will begin as soon as possible following approval by
241 the GA, except where otherwise noted. Through this plan may God's name be glorified,
242 God's will for wholeness and reconciliation be realized, and Christ's one church be built up
243 in love.

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I. Vision

276 **Goal 1: To reaffirm the historic identity and mission of the NCC.**

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278 Strategies:

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280 ▶ If this Strategic Plan is approved by the churches at the GA in 2006, then the
281 assembly will reaffirm the mission of the NCC as set forth in the Preamble to the
282 Constitution.

283 “The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA is a Community of
284 Christian Communion, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the
285 Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord.
286 These communions covenant with one another to manifest ever more fully the
287 unity of the Church. Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit,
288 the communions come together as the Council in common mission, serving in all
289 creation to the glory of God” (Constitution).

290 ▶ The GA will also identify and affirm key values in the churches’ life together.
291 The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) offers the following list for
292 consideration:

293

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Key Values:

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- 296 • to promote and integrate unity, prayer, dialogue, mission, and social witness
- 297 in the work of the Council;
- 298 • “to act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of
- 299 conviction compel us to act separately” (the Lund Principle);
- 300 • to carry out our work with a commitment to full participation;
- 301 • to act in a spirit of collegiality, promote ecumenical education, and support
- 302 our common work through responsible stewardship;
- 303 • to focus on the US without neglecting our responsibility to the whole human
- 304 family and God’s creation;
- 305 • to engage in dialogue and collaborative action with people of other faiths;
- 306 • to embody in all we do our basic confession of the triune God and of Jesus
- 307 Christ as Savior and Lord;
- 308 • to be an anti-racist body in our life and witness.
- 309

310 **Goal 2: To adopt an overarching goal that will serve as a point of integration for the**
311 **Council’s work in this period.**

312

313 Strategies:

314 ▶ The GB, at its first meeting of the quadrennium, will consider adopting the
315 following statement as the Council’s overarching goal for the coming years:

316 “That the churches, as an expansion of their commitment to seek visible unity
317 through the NCC, will aggressively promote in the next quadrennium a vision of
318 authentic common life as an alternative to that prevalent in contemporary
319 American culture.”
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II. Relationships

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354 **Goal 1: To strengthen the commitment of NCC member communions to one another**
355 **and, thus, to enhance their common participation in the Council.**

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357 Strategies:

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359 ► Building on the previously-affirmed “Marks of Our Commitment”, the GB will
360 specify “expectations” and “responsibilities” for membership in the NCC. The
361 SPC recommends the following:

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Expectations:

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- Affirm the theological foundation as set forth in the Preamble to the Constitution.
- Affirm the “key values” as set forth in this Strategic Plan.
- Support the work of the NCC through annual financial contribution.
- Be present through official representation at the GB.
- Be present through official delegation at each GA.
- Be prepared to give public witness of ecumenical commitment at each GA (e.g., of how one’s communion has promoted prayer for the other members of the Council).

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Responsibilities:

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► The Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee will seek to stimulate the full, regular participation of member communions. This will include visits to communions whose participation has been weak. The committee will need to consider the consequences of persistent failure to fulfill the expectations of membership.

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► Leadership in the NCC will stress that all participating members are equally valued, regardless of size or material resources, and will seek to celebrate

398 publicly the distinctive gifts of each member communion as well as the unity we
399 share through our common commitment to Christ. Every effort, including the
400 establishment of a common travel pool, will be made to ensure that all members
401 are invited to participate in the decision-making processes of the Council.
402

403 ► The GB, at its first meeting of the new quadrennium, will set in motion a process
404 of official visits to all member communions coordinated by the Membership and
405 Ecclesial Relations Committee. The visits will be made by representatives from
406 other member communions, members of the EC, and staff. Representatives
407 should have some relationship to the Council and be approved to participate in
408 these visits by their communions.
409

410 ► The leadership of the NCC will acknowledge and celebrate the participation in
411 the life of the Council of persons from non-member communions.
412

413 **Goal 2: To foster relationships with churches that are not members of the NCC and**
414 **to encourage membership for those that can meet the stated expectations.**
415

416 Strategies:

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418 ► The Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee will carry out a study on the
419 implications of membership in the NCC and on the qualifications needed for
420 possible membership.
421

422 ► The Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee, in conjunction with staff
423 leadership and the EC, will aggressively seek to expand the Council's
424 "community of communions" by inviting apparently-qualified churches to
425 consider participating in facets of the Council's life and work and applying for
426 membership in the NCC.
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III. Structure and Sustainability

A. RELATIONSHIP WITH CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Goal 1: To clarify and strengthen the relationship between the NCC and CWS.

Strategies:

- ▶ The NCC Executive Committee will continue to work with CWS counterparts to develop and carry out a process for clarifying the relationship and for monitoring the continuing engagement of these bodies. The Strategic Planning Committee strongly affirms that service is an integral part of the one ecumenical movement and, thus, that CWS and the NCC should seek to relate constructively. The committee recognizes that conversations between representatives of the NCC and CWS, in the spring of 2006, have already affirmed the following:
 - That the name of the assembly will be The General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service, Inc.
 - That there will be a distinct Constitution for the GA.
 - That the NCC and CWS will have separate and distinct By-laws and Standing Rules.
 - That the frequency of the GA will be discussed at the 2006 GA with a decision to be made at the GA in 2007.
 - That the NCC and CWS will equally share the operating costs of the GA.
 - That the GA will have the following joint committees: Membership and Ecclesial Relations, Inclusiveness and Justice, General Assembly Planning, and Nominations.

These proposals, which the SPC endorses, will need to be approved by the governing bodies of both the NCC and CWS.

- ▶ NCC representatives will continue to work with CWS colleagues to foster greater cooperation and coordination in the international arena. This will involve careful review, and possible revision or rewriting, of the current memorandum of understanding between the NCC and CWS.

488 **B. GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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490 The SPC recognizes that, at present, changes to or clarifications of the GA cannot be made
491 unilaterally. The committee, therefore, offers the following goals and strategies as but one
492 part of an ongoing conversation with colleagues in CWS.

493 **Goal 1: To work with CWS to organize and carry out assemblies in a way that invites**
494 **full participation of member communions and clarifies the purpose of the GA.**

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496 Strategies:

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498 ► Organization of each GA will reflect seven purposes for such assemblies:

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500 • Celebration and worship. Each assembly should provide opportunity to name
501 signs of the Holy Spirit in our midst, drawing the churches together and
502 challenging them to more faithful common witness.

503

504 • Policy decision making. The GA should approve long term policy direction
505 and elect leadership. Regular governance is the province of the GB.

506

507 • Ecumenical education. Each GA should include opportunities for learning
508 about the vision and programs of the global ecumenical movement. Programs
509 for youth and seminarians are strongly encouraged.

510

511 • Public witness. Assemblies should be organized with opportunity for public
512 witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ that is appropriate to the venue and
513 historical moment. In order to facilitate this objective, GAs should be located
514 in places where member communions have a substantial presence and are able
515 and willing to assist in building local involvement.

516

517 • Community building. The GA should enable member churches to deepen their
518 understanding of, and relationships with, one another.

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520 • Clarification and promotion of the overarching goal.

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522 • Demonstration of the relationship between the NCC and CWS.

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524 ► Member communions will be challenged to prepare their GA delegates for full
525 participation, including policy decision-making. Orientation for new delegates will
526 be a priority.

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529 **Goal 2: To make the GA a significant event for the whole ecumenical movement in**
530 **the U.S.**

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532 Strategies:

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534 The following strategies will be referred to the joint NCC-CWS assembly planning
535 committees for upcoming assemblies:

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- 537 ▶ The planning committees will be encouraged to emphasize “ecclesial conversation”
538 rather than reports of work accomplished.
 - 539
 - 540 ▶ The governing bodies of the NCC and CWS will be encouraged to invite other
541 ecumenical organizations and non-member communions to be present at each
542 assembly.
 - 543
 - 544 ▶ The planning committees will be encouraged to lift up an ecumenical anniversary
545 as a centerpiece of each assembly in order to promote ecumenical formation and
546 thematic coherence.

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548 The SPC recommends the following:

- 549
- 550 • 2006 – the 35th anniversary of the inauguration of the WCC’s office of
551 interfaith dialogue and the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II’s interfaith
552 prayer gathering in Assisi (Interfaith Relations Commission).
 - 553
 - 554 • 2007 – the 50th anniversary of Faith and Order in the U.S. (Faith and Order
555 Commission).
 - 556
 - 557 • 2008 – the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Federal Council of
558 Churches and articulation of the Social Creed (Justice and Advocacy
559 Commission).
 - 560
 - 561 • 2009 – the 20th anniversary of the end of the Cold War (challenges and new
562 possibilities for ecumenism and for Orthodox involvement).
 - 563
 - 564 • 2010 – the 100th anniversary of the Edinburgh World Mission Conference
565 (beginning of the modern ecumenical movement).
 - 566
 - 567 • 2011 – the 40th anniversary of the integration of the World Council for Christian
568 Education with the WCC (Education and Leadership Ministries Commission).

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570 **Goal 3: To clarify the leadership of the GA.**

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572 Strategies:

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- 574 ▶ The working group between CWS and NCC will continue to explore what
575 configuration of leadership is most appropriate for the GA and will bring a
576 recommendation to the GB of the NCC and the Board of Directors of CWS.

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578 **C. GOVERNING BOARD**

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580 **Goal 1: To improve the capacity of the GB to give meaningful oversight to the work**
581 **of the NCC.**

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Strategies:

- ▶ The number of GB meetings will be reduced to two full meetings a year, plus a shorter meeting in connection with the GA, in order to allow better preparation for each meeting and encourage maximum participation.
- ▶ The General Secretary (GS) will organize a meeting of the Heads of Communion in conjunction with one GB meeting annually. Heads of Communion will also be invited to provide significant leadership at meetings of the GB.
- ▶ The EC will explore and recommend ways to improve the design and effectiveness of GB meetings, drawing on the best practices of governing boards in other conciliar and church bodies.
- ▶ The EC will bring issues arising from the work of the commissions for substantive dialogue and appropriate decision making at meetings of the GB.

Goal 2: To improve the ability of individual representatives on the GB to carry out their governance responsibility.

Strategies:

- ▶ The quadrennium will begin with a retreat for persons named to the GB. This will include a complete orientation to the history, vision, structure, and basic agenda of the NCC, and to the Council's place in the wider ecumenical movement. The retreat should also result in a general plan of work (a "fleshing out" of the Strategic Plan) for the coming years, with special attention to furthering the overarching or integrating goal.
- ▶ Each meeting of the GB will include a component of "ecumenical formation." This may include such things as discussion of recent ecumenical proposals/achievements, discussion of key ecumenical themes, or presentation on some event in the history of the ecumenical movement. The representatives to the GB must have the necessary knowledge and skill to engage in dialogue about public issues facing the churches, matters that threaten current church relationships, and possibilities for deeper unity.
- ▶ At least once in the course of the quadrennium, the GB will be led in a substantive, critical exploration of racism in American culture and of the churches' shared role in promoting racial justice. Similar explorations of sexism, and other threats to the wholeness of the human family, will be considered by the EC as it plans the agenda for meetings of the GB.

Goal 3: To strengthen the role of the Executive Committee in the governance of the NCC, including its role in planning the agenda of the GB, its capacity to act for the

630 **GB ad interim, and its ability to provide advice and counsel to the General Secretary**
631 **(GS) and, through the GS, to the staff.**

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633 Strategies:

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635 ▶ The EC will meet quarterly and hold monthly conference calls.

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637 ▶ The EC will continue to include the chairpersons of the Council's commissions
638 and, thus, serve as a point of integration for NCC programming.

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640 ▶ The EC will be responsible, along with the GS, for ensuring that this Strategic
641 Plan is carried out and that strategic planning is a regular, ongoing part of the
642 NCC's life. This may entail the establishment of a standing committee made up of
643 members of the GB.

644

645 ▶ The EC will continue its annual review of the GS. During the coming period,
646 the EC will pay particular attention to whether the GS is consulting with
647 appropriate governing bodies prior to initiating activities.

648

649 ▶ The EC will stress to the member communions that the GS, and all the
650 Council's staff, are charged with holding the churches accountable to the
651 commitments they have made to each other by virtue of membership in the
652 NCC. The GS must be supported when he/she reminds the churches of their
653 ecumenical obligations, even when doing so creates tension.

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655 ▶ The Nominations Committee will review membership on the EC in order to
656 ensure appropriate turnover and continuity in the leadership of the Council.

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659 **D. OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

660

661 **Goal 1: To encourage creativity and initiative on the part of the General Secretary in**
662 **furthering the work and vision of the churches through the NCC, while also ensuring**
663 **that he/she is fully accountable to the GB and that his/her work is consistent with**
664 **policies and priorities established by the EC, GB, and/or GA.**

665

666 Strategies:

667

668 ▶ In the next quadrennium, the GS will put particular emphasis on, and be directly
669 involved in, building relationships among the member communions and between
670 the member communions and the structure of the NCC, and on promoting the
671 overarching goal set forth in this Strategic Plan.

672

673 ▶ The GS will not engage in new program initiatives, or make statements in the name
674 of the NCC on major issues of the day, without careful attention to the will of the
675 member communions (which may involve consultation with the EC, Heads of
676 Communion, Ecumenical Officers, or members of the GB). The GS will be

677 encouraged to act and speak boldly on the basis of established policy and within
678 the framework of approved programs.

679

680 **Goal 2: To reorganize the Office of the General Secretary (OGS) in order to improve**
681 **coordination, planning, and evaluation of programs and commissions and to ensure**
682 **administrative oversight.**

683

684

685

686 Strategies:

687

688 ▶ A restructured position of Deputy General Secretary for Administration and
689 Finance will be responsible for financial management and planning, human
690 resources, development, and technology.

691

692 ▶ A new position of Deputy General Secretary for Program will be responsible for
693 the programmatic life of the Council. The person in this position will oversee,
694 and coordinate all NCC programs and the work of the commissions.

695

696 ▶ The position of Deputy General Secretary for Research and Planning will be
697 responsible, along with other responsibilities, for the regular, ongoing work of
698 strategic planning.

699

700 ▶ Full job descriptions for the reconfigured OGS will be developed by the Human
701 Resources Committee in consultation with the EC and appropriate staff.

702

703 ▶ The Deputy General Secretaries, while reporting directly to the GS, will work
704 collaboratively in order to ensure that the best interests of the whole Council are
705 paramount.

706

707 ▶ The Associate General Secretaries will be accountable as appropriate to the
708 Deputy General Secretaries who, in turn, are accountable to the GS.

709

710 ▶ The staff will hold a planning retreat, led by the GS, at least annually, in order to
711 review initiatives coming from the GA and GB, as well as the Strategic Plan, and to
712 determine how best to organize its work in response.

713

714 ▶ The structural changes indicated in this goal will be implemented as soon as
715 possible after approval of the Strategic Plan by the GA.

716

717

718 **Goal 3: To strengthen the relationship of the NCC with state and local councils of**
719 **churches, and other local ecumenical organizations, through the OGS.**

720

721 Strategies:

722

723 ▶ The NCC will create a position, accountable to the Deputy General
724 Secretary for Program, to build relationships among U.S. ecumenical and interfaith

725 organizations. The person in this position will seek to foster professional
726 ecumenical development and to facilitate collaboration among councils and other
727 ecumenical organizations by enhancing communication and the sharing of
728 information.

729
730 ► NCC commissions will be encouraged to include representatives of state and
731 local councils.

732
733 ► NCC staff will make every effort to contact state and local councils, and to
734 collaborate with them, when holding significant events in their areas.

735

736

737 E. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

738

739 **Goal 1: To provide a constant and sustainable financial base, of adequate reserves**
740 **and current cash flow, to enable the ministry of the Council to be stable and ongoing.**
741 **Several streams of support are envisioned: Ecumenical Commitment Fund (ECF)**
742 **support from the member churches, designated giving from member churches and**
743 **others, foundation grants, and major gifts from other sources interested in the work**
744 **of the Council.**

745

746 Strategies:

747

748 ► An ECF formula for giving as a requirement of membership will be developed by
749 the member churches through the Administration and Finance Committee (AFC)
750 and approved by the GB. This formula will give the member churches a guide to
751 their giving, although their contributions are expected to exceed the base amount.
752 In cases where this base amount is found to be a difficulty, possibilities for other
753 types of support will be explored.

754

755 ► The percentage of member communions contributing annually to the ECF and in
756 designated giving will be increased from 64% (2005) to 90% by the end of 2008,
757 and to 100% by the end of 2011. Regular visits to member churches by leaders of
758 the Council will help develop strategies toward this end.

759

760 ► The percentage of overall support to the NCC by member communions will be
761 increased from 26% (2005) toward a long-term goal of 50%, with specific,
762 incremental steps toward this goal by the end of the quadrennium. The question
763 of what is credited as support from member communions (e.g., gifts by individual
764 church members) will be reviewed by the AFC.

765

766 ► Participating non-member churches will be recognized for their gifts of time and
767 talent and will be invited to contribute financially (which some already do).

768

769 **Goal 2: To increase total long-term reserves to at least \$15 million by the end of the**
770 **quadrennium.**

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772 Strategies:

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The NCC, through its development staff, will:

- ▶ increase the number of individual donors, doubling the current number by the end of the quadrennium;
- ▶ encourage friends of the Council to include the NCC in their estate plans;
- ▶ continue to work cooperatively with foundations and grant making institutions on programs of mutual concern.

Goal 3: To strengthen the Council's financial sustainability by vigorous insistence on fiduciary responsibility.

Strategies:

- ▶ The AFC and the GB will insist that policies — including the travel reimbursement policy, grant approval policy, and ethics policies — be vigorously enforced and regularly reviewed.
- ▶ The AFC and the GB will insist that financial reporting be transparent and timely.
- ▶ The AFC and the GB will insist that budgets be balanced based on reasonable income expectation.

IV. Program

A. COMMISSIONS IN THE WORK AND STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

Goal 1: To ensure that the commissions are accountable to the member communions through the GB and to the integrating goal set forth in this Strategic Plan.

Strategies:

- ▶ The programmatic work of the NCC, including that of its various working groups and committees, will, unless otherwise indicated by the GB, be subject to the oversight of one or more of the commissions.
- ▶ The GB will ensure that the agendas of the commissions are not greater than the staff and organizational resources of the NCC.
- ▶ While each commission sets priorities for its own work, taking account of its particular history and constituency, the commissions can be mandated by the GB to undertake particular projects for the good of the Council.
- ▶ The EC will ask the commissions to make the overarching goal of this Strategic Plan a priority concern of their work for the quadrennium.
- ▶ While recognizing that the commissions have different histories and missions, each commission will be asked by the EC to review its standing rules in order to ensure that they are consistent with the Constitution and Bylaws of the NCC.

Goal 2: To increase collaboration between and among the commissions.

Strategies:

- ▶ Chairpersons of the commissions will continue to serve on the EC, which is an obvious venue for collaborative planning, and will gather (with staff, when appropriate) during meetings of the GB to discuss possibilities for shared projects.
- ▶ Commission chairpersons and staff will look for opportunities for various commissions to meet jointly.
- ▶ Leaders of the commissions will work with the NCC Development Office to raise funds, which includes identifying new possible sources of funding.

Goal 3: To consider expanding the current structure of five commissions.

Strategies:

- ▶ The GB will determine a process and criteria for establishing new commissions.

- 855 ▶ After the process and criteria for establishing new commissions are determined,
 856 GB will consider whether or not to establish a new Commission on Mission and
 857 Evangelism, a stream of the ecumenical movement now missing in the NCC.
 858
- 859 ▶ After the process and criteria for establishing new commissions are determined,
 860 the GB will consider whether or not to establish a new Commission on
 861 International Affairs in order to strengthen the Council’s international ecumenical
 862 relationships, to articulate the international concerns of U.S. churches, to work
 863 cooperatively with CWS and WCC to ensure an effective, coherent witness, and to
 864 strengthen the churches’ capacity to affect U. S. foreign policy.
 865

866 **B. COMMUNICATION COMMISSION**

867

868 **Goal 1: To ensure that the Good News is present in the public media used by the**
 869 **Council so that it engages in the cultural dialogue that determines society’s values.**

870

871 Strategies:

- 872
- 873 ▶ The Commission will encourage and facilitate the production by the communions,
 874 of electronic programming and news and feature products for general circulation,
 875 while assisting in the marketing and distribution of such materials through both
 876 secular and faith-based media. [examples of tactics: Interfaith Broadcasting
 877 Commission, FaithfulAmerica Radio]
- 878
- 879 ▶ The Commission will build relationships between secular media and the
 880 communions in order to enhance credibility, accuracy and integrity in the coverage
 881 of the work and witness of all faith groups. [examples of tactics: Worldwide
 882 Faith News, Religion Newswriters Assn., Public Relations Society of America]
- 883
- 884 ▶ The Commission will address moral and ethical issues in the communication field
 885 with advocacy efforts that emphasize fairness in programming and news coverage
 886 of all public issues, both secular and religious, and public policies that guarantee
 887 equal access in receiving and producing for the mass media. [examples of tactics:
 888 Media Advocacy committee, collaborative advocacy efforts, policy statements]

889

890 **Goal 2: To provide support and educational opportunities to communions and**
 891 **commission members.**

892

893 Strategies:

- 894
- 895 ▶ The Commission will foster professional development and ecumenical
 896 understanding among the communions’ communicators and with other
 897 communication groups, by providing them with fellowship, learning, and public
 898 service opportunities. [examples of tactics: semi-annual Commission meetings,
 899 special events, joint ventures]

900 ▶ The Commission will offer a channel of collaboration and coordination by which
901 communities doing parallel tasks in communication may engage in effective joint
902 ventures of public outreach and service, interpretation, and ecumenical and
903 interfaith witness. [examples of tactics: media advocacy, workshops, conferences]

904

905 **Goal 3: To develop and support media education projects that equip individuals,**
906 **families, congregations and communities to evaluate and navigate the complex array**
907 **of options in today's media-saturated culture** [examples of tactics: movie review index,
908 reviews of video games, congregational education kits, policy statements in communication].

909

910 **C. EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP MINISTRIES COMMISSION**

911 **Goal 1: To provide support for and educational opportunities to communities and**
912 **congregations in Christian education, discipleship resources, faith formation, and**
913 **leader development.**

914

915 Strategies:

916 ▶ The Commission will host meetings (face-to-face and electronic) for gathering the
917 best thinking of all participating communities and partners and through this
918 discern the best use of this information in planning future programs and resources
919 focused on strengthening the ministry of the communities and congregations.

920 ▶ The Commission will host one or more forums within the next quadrennium for
921 community Christian education decision makers where they can build
922 relationships for collegiality and support, experience Sabbath, and enrich one
923 another's ministry.

924 ▶ The Commission will host one or more leadership events using various avenues
925 (face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, conference calls, etc.) that foster
926 ecumenical education and life-long learning.

927

928 ▶ The Commission will identify a cadre of emerging leaders and will devise and
929 follow a plan for nurturing their formation as leaders.

930

931 **Goal 2: To be proactive in identifying and responding to emerging trends in faith**
932 **formation, development, and nurture.**

933

934 Strategies:

935 ▶ The Commission, as a regular part of its ongoing Commission and program
936 ministry committee meetings, will provide forums to gather and disseminate the
937 best practices, best thinking, and significant research related to faith formation,
938 development, and nurture.

939 ▶ The Commission will initiate research and provide avenues for consultations on
940 the changing role and support of the Christian educator in post-denominational,
941 postmodern congregations.

942

- 943 ▶ The Commission will develop and/or identify and promulgate through its
- 944 website and other venues educational resources that address the emerging trends
- 945 in faith formation.
- 946
- 947 ▶ The Commission will collaborate with institutions of higher education in
- 948 providing information, resources, and programming for forming faith that
- 949 addresses the issues of our contemporary world and for training professionals in
- 950 Christian education.
- 951
- 952 ▶ The Commission will collaborate with all other NCC commissions to promote a
- 953 vision for our shared life and witness so that communions are presented with
- 954 information and resources to take seriously Christ's call for all Christians to live
- 955 into the reign of God.
- 956

957 **D. FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION**

958

959 **Goal 1: To explore church-dividing and church-uniting issues in a manner**

960 **consistent with the principles and practices of the world-wide Faith and Order/Faith**

961 **and Witness movement.**

962 Strategies:

- 963
- 964 ▶ During the quadrennium 2007-11, a study on “unity in mission” will be conducted
- 965 and completed.
- 966 ▶ During the quadrennium 2007-11, a study in response to the WCC text, The Nature
- 967 and Mission of the Church, will be conducted and completed.
- 968 ▶ During the quadrennium 2007-11, a further study on
- 969 Justification/Sanctification/Theosis and Justice/Ethics will be conducted and
- 970 completed.

971

972 **Goal 2: To use the period approaching the fiftieth anniversary of Faith and Order**

973 **(FO) in the US (2007) to amplify the importance of FO for both the church and the**

974 **academy.**

975 Strategies:

- 976
- 977 ▶ Ecclesial and academic attention will be drawn to the Commission's publishing
- 978 programs.
- 979 ▶ Through collaborations with consortia of theological schools, the attention of
- 980 theological educators and students will be drawn to the work of FO in the NCC,
- 981 and the development of younger ecumenical scholars will be encouraged.
- 982 ▶ A theological conference, focusing on the history and future of FO, will be held in
- 983 2007.

984

985 **Goal 3: To undertake additional theological activity in support of the churches' unity**
986 **efforts.**

987 Strategies:

988
989 ▶ The Commission will conduct a series of consultations dealing with statements
990 and texts from the WCC's 2006 assembly in Porto Alegre, especially those
991 released by the WCC's Faith and Order Commission. Results of these
992 consultations will be published.

993

994 **E. INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMISSION**

995

996 **Goal 1: To strengthen churches through their engagement in Interfaith Relations.**

997 Strategies:

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The IRC will:

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▶ help churches to understand how interfaith relations deepen
Christian commitment;

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▶ develop the website and links to interfaith resources;

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▶ create new interfaith materials;

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▶ serve as a resource for the development of interfaith-sensitive Sunday School
curricula;

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▶ expand communication from the Commission and the NCC regarding interfaith
relations.

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Goal 2: To expand and deepen interfaith conversation.

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Strategies:

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The IRC will:

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▶ maintain the national Jewish-Christian dialogue table and encourage similar local
dialogues;

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▶ create a new Muslim-Christian dialogue table and encourage similar local dialogues;

1024

1025

▶ create or engage in a dialogue of top religious, political, corporate and media
leaders;

1026

1027

1028

▶ expand relationships and dialogue to religions beyond the Jewish and Muslim
traditions;

1029

1030

- 1031 ▶ engage with other religious leaders in seeking peace, fighting poverty, and being
1032 environmentally responsible.

1033

1034

1035 **Goal 3: To strengthen and engage in the interfaith formation of Christian leadership.**

1036

1037 Strategies:

1038

1039 The IRC will:

- 1040 ▶ encourage more member churches to have representation on the Commission;

- 1041 ▶ continue to work with the American Academy of Religion to showcase
1042 conversations about a Christian theology of interfaith relations;

- 1043 ▶ expand leadership training events, e.g., “God is One;”

1044

- 1045 ▶ take interfaith dialogue training program to local communities and train leaders to
1046 use it;

1047

- 1048 ▶ provide interfaith educational tours and experiences;

- 1049 ▶ serve as a resource for seminaries.

1050

1051 **F. JUSTICE AND ADVOCACY COMMISSION**

1052

1053 **Goal 1: To focus the NCC’s multifaceted justice agenda in order to ensure that**
1054 **certain issues receive priority attention.**

1055 Strategies:

1056

- 1057 ▶ The JAC Executive Committee and staff will develop a process through which the
1058 Commission will identify a small number of priority issues for the next
1059 quadrennium.

- 1060 ▶ The JAC will work with other parts of the Council to accomplish the overarching
1061 goal – promoting a vision of common life – set forth in this Strategic Plan.

1062

- 1063 ▶ The JAC will revitalize the NCC’s historic commitment to combat racism by
1064 promoting the work of the Commission’s newly-created Committee for Racial
1065 Justice.

1066

1067

1068

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1070 **Goal 2: To deepen the NCC’s justice agenda in order to ensure that it has adequate**
1071 **theological foundation.**

1072 Strategies:
1073 ▶ The JAC Executive will systematically review policy statements related to the
1074 Council's justice ministries and rewrite or update them as needed.
1075

1076 **Goal 3: To extend the justice work of the NCC in order to ensure that it is claimed**
1077 **by and in the churches.**

1078
1079 Strategies:

- 1080
- 1081 ▶ The JAC will invite NCC member churches to identify their particular justice
1082 priorities.

 - 1083
 - 1084 ▶ The JAC will develop and implement a process for contacting directly all member
1085 churches in order to engage them more fully in the work of the Commission.
1086

 - 1087 ▶ The JAC will regard it as a priority to involve seminaries and seminarians more
1088 fully in the work of the Commission.
1089

 - 1090 ▶ The JAC will use Ecumenical Advocacy Days, and other such events, to promote
1091 the participation of pastors and laypersons in the work of the Commission and,
1092 generally, to nurture grassroots activism.
1093
 - 1094 ▶ The JAC Executive Committee and staff, working with NCC development staff,
1095 will seek funding, through the churches and other sources, for the Commission
1096 per se, including funding to facilitate the participation of churches with fewer
1097 financial resources.
1098

1099 **Goal 4: To restructure the JAC in order to provide better support for the work of the**
1100 **Office of International Affairs and Peace and/or to assist in the formation of a new**
1101 **International Affairs Commission, if the establishment of such a body is approved.**

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1103 * * *

1104

1105 The Message from the WCC's First Assembly (Amsterdam, 1948) acknowledges that it is not
1106 within our power to overcome oppression in the world or to create unity in the church.

1107 "But it is within the power of God. God has given us at Easter the certainty that his
1108 purpose will be accomplished. And, by our acts of obedience and faith, we can on earth set
1109 up signs which point to the coming victory."

1110

1111 This Strategic Plan should be received in that same spirit. It is not within our power to
1112 deepen the bonds of communion among our churches, to make the United States a more
1113 just and peaceful nation, or to change this culture's vision of common life. But it is within
1114 the power of God. And, by their acts of obedience and faith, the member churches of this

1115 Council can point toward God's holy purposes. The letter to the Ephesians (3: 20-21) says it
1116 far better:

1117

1118 Now to the One who by the power at work within us
1119 is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we
1120 can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in
1121 Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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