



30 Years of Solutions-Oriented Journalism / Responsible Media Creating a Culture of Peace and Justice

The Fig Tree stretches people to a broader world view than most media offer. Fig Tree media seek to create a culture of peace, justice, stewardship and respect to empower congregations, nonprofits, businesses and communities of the region to seek creative, nonviolent solutions that engender hope. The goal is to spread The Fig Tree's model of communication media by example. It is bearing fruit. As The Fig Tree celebrates its 30th anniversary during 2014, the editor reported that as she attended the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in fall 2013 in Busan, South Korea, how unique its media approach is. Local to national journalists and ecumenical leaders respect the credibility of Fig Tree coverage. The editor has been invited to lead workshops on just peace journalism.

Its monthly ecumenical and inter-faith newspaper in print, its daily updates on Facebook, Twitter and the website, and its annual Directory of Community Resources connect people in faith, nonprofit and wider communities in the Inland Northwest. These media provide a forum for exploring new understandings of what "news" is and for exemplifying media responsibility.

Because media fill people's lives, each person must be vigilant to use the freedom and power of media responsibly. Part of The Fig Tree's role is its editorial content, and part is to model and teach individuals and groups on media literacy and just peace journalism. Many media still dwell on sensational coverage of sex, conflict, violence and what's broken, to foster addictive consumption of entertaining news. They believe that's

how to hold readers', viewers' or listeners' attention and manipulate them to come back hungry, hoping for substantive information. What a different society there would be if media taught people to believe they can make a difference by being involved in improving their relationships, communities, society, nation and world! Solutions-oriented journalism covers multiple perspectives in depth, rather than reducing issues to just two polarized perspectives.

To enhance values of the nation, society and faiths, it's essential to have models of media that help people and leaders overcome divisions and isolation; help build respect of diverse opinions and people; treat people as thinkers not consumers; urge readers to identify and resolve social problems and injustices, and help overcome gender, racial and economic bias and violence.

Access to news is no longer limited to mass media. New media are sources of information, providing inspiration so people can become involved in making society and the world more just, peaceful and healthy. It is possible to address sensitive issues of religion and justice to move people from indifference, polarization and hostility to respect, caring and action.

Fig Tree media reinforce human rights, dignity, diversity and respect through building understanding the context of people's lives and their perspectives beneath surface differences, beliefs and opinions. The Fig Tree breaks through either/or thinking and fears that lead to intolerance, exploitation, and hopelessness. It helps fill the communications gap when media downplay crucial parts of people's lives.

The Fig Tree began in 1984 as the communication ministry of the Spokane Council of Ecumenical Ministries to cover religion news in the region. Most ecumenical publications focus on public relations, so The Fig Tree is unique. In 2001, it became an independent nonprofit organization, providing regional religion and nonprofit news. Articles about people acting on their faith inspires more people in churches to walk their faith.

Editor Mary Stamp brings expertise as a professional journalist and sensitivity from local-to-global ecumenical ties. She coordinates a team of people who work on contract and as volunteers. She offers regular training for writers, service learning students, interns and the community to define our editorial approach. Training interns and writers is now a vital part of this ministry.

"Responsible Media" will be lived out 1) by modeling news coverage in print, online and other media; 2) by partnering with the Northwest Alliance for Responsible Media and World Association of Christian Communicators for resources, 3) by publishing the Annual Resource Directory to network people, 4) by training writers for Fig Tree media and university journalism students as interns; 5) by addressing the intersection of issues affecting people's lives and faith, 6) by strengthening The Fig Tree's online media, and 8) by partnering with the Faith Action Network of Washington to do education events on how issues shape our lives, communities, congregations and world.

This project expands The Fig Tree's capacity to reach more people and provide more coverage while training a new generation of journalists.

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Empowering People: The Fig Tree shares stories of hope, action and justice

The Fig Tree is motivated by God's call to use gifts to fulfill unmet needs in the community. Its stories of people of all walks of life, who are attempting to further God's kingdom, make Spokane a better place. The Fig Tree's belief that individuals and institutions can make a difference in the lives of people have been an inspiration to me and countless others.



The Pacific Northwest is known for its secular character as the least church-ed region of the United States. The religious voice is overlooked and diminished, but The Fig Tree offers a prophetic word in this secular culture. It sheds light on causes, issues and people who are motivated by their religious convictions to make a difference in the world.

The Fig Tree recently uplifted the Rev. C. W. Andrews and his wife, Doris, who have served in Spokane for 40 years on behalf of their congregation, Calvary Baptist. They have stood by countless individuals, black and white, as they have struggled to find food, shelter and clothing and as they encounter the unfair justice system. This newspaper gives people a voice in the community.

Dale Soden
Whitworth history professor

What The Fig Tree does fits with what United Way is doing:

- United Way talks with people about their aspirations. We hear that people want to live in a safe place where people care, support and create opportunities for each other. The Fig Tree does that and fosters a sense of community.

- The Fig Tree is a connector. Connections the Fig Tree makes with us in our reading and meeting gives us a sense of belonging. It sustains us as we reach out to others. If we want to change things in our community, we have to do it by working together.



- The Fig Tree is a platform for caring.
- The Fig Tree represents a commitment to do better to help people improve their lives, embracing the past but having foresight to say we have to do more, we have to change and we have to be relevant.

Janice Marich
United Way of Spokane County

Mary Stamp is a person with courage and vision, a person in the work for the long haul. Her sensitivity, deep faith and great hope have served the region's ecumenical community well.

Vatican II Council's Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World says the joys and hopes, griefs and anguish of people in our times, especially the poor and vulnerable, are the joys and hopes, griefs and anguish of every Christian. The Fig Tree expresses our interconnectedness

with humanity. Stories of people in every church are connected with humanity and with people around the country.

As I have traveled around the country, I have not seen any other ecumenical newspaper like The Fig Tree.



The theme, "Empowering People," and subthemes are important: hope, action and justice. Hope is vision for the future and a dream of what can be. The Fig Tree expresses hope in ecumenical and interreligious endeavors, as we come together and get to know one another.

Justice is the right ordering of relationships. Imagine how the culture and world would change if we could affect the right ordering of relationships. We have work to do for that vision to be.

We look to the promise yet to be, we need to act and we need to know each other better. That deepens our relationships and our appreciation of one another in our different faith communities.

Bishop Emeritus William Skylstad
of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane

Often people ask teens, "What's wrong with you?" At Crosswalk, we ask a different



question, "What's right with you?" Crosswalk helps kids see their own strengths and capabilities. This question is the starting point for teens' lives.

This is how The Fig Tree and VOA are alike. The Fig Tree shines light on what is right in our neighborhoods, communities, our country and the world, emphasizing hope and illustrating the good.

Like Crosswalk, The Fig Tree helps people understand each other, breaks through divisions, connects people, stirs compassion and opens a dialogue that benefits everyone. It not only backs up the work of local nonprofits like ours, but also it amplifies our efforts to transform Spokane and the people who live and work here.

Bridget Cannon VOA's
Crosswalk teen shelter

Most of the 14 years I've taught media literacy at Whitworth, I've been on the board for the Northwest Alliance for Responsible Media, which has recognized Mary Stamp and The Fig Tree for promoting media literacy and media responsibility.

The Fig Tree is a consistent partner in promoting both media literacy and alternative voices in the region. It does so without the acrimony of most media, without trying to sell you something or using fear to do it.



Given media influence on our culture, the NWARD believes this power requires the responsibility of stewardship.

As users of media, we also have a responsibility for stewardship, for maintaining and protecting alternative and positive media that don't scare us and that show us we can make a difference.

Jim McPherson,
Whitworth journalism professor

When I began as bishop, someone in an open forum asked what my detailed strategy and mission were. I said that at the heart of what we do is communication.

We need each other and need to be connected with each other and our interfaith communities. What we do as community is about connection, collaboration, cooperation and communication.

The Fig Tree is a great resource as a professional publication. It is about public participation in the community to make things happen. It links us to stories and to each other. It provides critical leadership and makes a difference. It informs and inspires us. It builds our community.

When I traveled on weekends in my early years, I distributed Fig Trees to churches. I'm a believer and a supporter. Join me in giving thanks for this unique, essential ministry, and give generously to serve the faith communities and the whole community. This ministry changes communities for the better.

Bishop Jim Waggoner
Episcopal Diocese of Spokane

Over my seven years in Spokane, I have seen the tremendous impact of The Fig Tree in our community. Even before my ministry as an associate dean at Whitworth and my election as the first woman president of the Spokane Ministers' Fellowship were featured in The Fig Tree, I still looked forward to getting it. There was always someone I knew featured. There are always uplifting stories about ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things.

I've lived in other places around the country, but I have never seen another community newspaper devoted to the faith community that is the quality of The Fig Tree, highlighting stories of people sharing their values, promoting justice and making a difference in the lives of others through their acts of service.

Stories are powerful. The Fig Tree does a great job of gathering human-interest stories that exemplify faith in action, stories that empower, inspire and keep us informed of the great things our brothers and sisters are doing to make Spokane a better place to live.

Roberta Wilburn, president
Spokane Ministers' Fellowship

