

Date: July 12, 2006  
To: NAEIS Membership  
From: Ron Quay, 2006 Conference Chair  
Subject: Review of the Tulsa Weekend July 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>

I wanted to write to each of you about the planning and the decision to cancel the 2006 NAEIS summer conference and what were some of the outcomes from the open Board meeting that was held in its stead. This memo is not a complete record of the weekend but I would rather frame it as one person's view of NAEIS and what direction seemed to develop out of the time that 19 people spent together.

First concerning the conference I would like to thank all of those who worked on the planning and those who had agreed to take a leadership role in the conference itself. I am disappointed that this work was not able to go to fruition for the presenters, the topics, and the special guests seemed to offer a wonderful opportunity to ask some serious questions about the divides in our society and the faith communities role in both expanding those divides as well as our role in finding the various bridges. Thanks to all who participated in the planning.

One opportunity that the planning committee followed almost from the time the 2005 conference ended was an offer made at the Indianapolis conference by a member of the Islamic community in Tulsa to underwrite a significant portion of the conference's expenses. We had hoped that this offered donation could be used to greatly reduce the cost to participants but as the time for printing the brochure grew near this donation was still not completed. As we moved towards the conference we continued to attempt to complete this arrangement but schedules of the individual making the offer simply made contact almost impossible. With the number of registrants remaining low and the committee unable to offer any great reduction in price, we had to decide if a conference for what was shaping up to be about 20-25 people was productive and cost effective. Finally we had to make the difficult decision to cancel and communicated to the Board. It was decided to recommend to the Board that an open meeting be held instead of the conference in the same location and over part of the same dates to use some of the guaranteed costs we had incurred. I might add that the donation that was hoped for from the very beginning was again made by this one Tulsa resident while we were gathered in Tulsa only now with the cancellation the offer was to underwrite the open Board meeting. I am told that this donation has finally been received.

The open Board meeting was called to look at the future of NAEIS as a professional organization. The numbers in many of the last few conferences had been shrinking and the organization had evolved into being primarily this conference. We also had to face the reality that many of the organizations from which our members have traditionally come are facing increasing financial difficulties. So what is the future and/or is there a future for such an organization?

The ecumenical and interfaith movement, as seen by those of us gathered in Tulsa does not seem to be ending but it clearly seems to be evolving in new directions. Old

established organizations on the state, local and regional level are struggling but the call for diverse groups of people of faith seems to be increasing. We thought of Jim Wallis's "Call to Renewal" or Rabbi Michael Learner and the "Spiritual Progressive Network" as examples. We also made note of those on the state and/or regional level as well that had grown up within the last five years or so. In other words, people are still doing ecumenical and interreligious work but in some places in new organizations. One outcome was the feeling that the role of NAEIS was still a need. That role, as articulated in some of NAEIS' documents is to be, "a professional association of persons engaged in ecumenical and interreligious service at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels. The association serves as a resource for professional development and personal enrichment of its members, empowering them to do their work faithfully and effectively." The question became, are we meeting our own goal. The answer was no, we are not!

To keep this memo from turning into a book let me move to the outcomes of the open Board meeting but invite your thoughts, comments, and direction. We will be sending a more formal questionnaire to everyone in the organization that should give us some more direction but for now I invite your responses back. Feel free to connect directly with me as the writer at [rquay@churchesunited.net](mailto:rquay@churchesunited.net) or to our office in Tacoma who is sending this message out.

## **Outcomes & Initial Direction**

Make Board more Inclusive: It is the plan of those attending this meeting to encourage the nominating committee to seek a more diverse Board. Besides gender, for which the Board has some diversity, it was felt that people of other faith groups besides Christian needed to be included and younger people.

Regional Conferences or Gatherings: One issue that came up was the lack of connections for this professional organization to offer its members. One vehicle that was explored was to encourage those who were at the open Board meeting to take the leadership in calling together people in interfaith and ecumenical work of a most diverse kind to a gathering in the region. We know that this will be those already some how connected to NAEIS in the beginning but it was a goal to reach out to a wider audience but on a more regional basis. Some of the regional groups present included the Great Lakes and Midwest, the Northeast, the Southeast, the Pacific Northwest, and the Great Plains and Southwest.

E-Newsletters and improved Web site Usage: Modern technology has made communication much less expensive and easier but we have not been using it to anywhere near its potential for connecting people. We identified people who could coordinate in the short-term an e-newsletter and invited those with more web knowledge to assist in creating a blog or two and the creation of a listserv.

National Conference within 24 months: We felt that the national conferences have had value and could continue to offer value but we were not sure how soon to try again. We

also wondered about the format and the cost structure. We decided on a commitment to hold another conference within the next 24 months but we will be seeking your input on the structure, the theme, and the amenities vs. costs that you perceive reasonable. The planned 2007 summer conference at Ghost Ranch was voted by the Board present to be cancelled and the planning committee should work on something possibly in a totally different time of the year.

Campus & Seminary Initiatives: The group present in Tulsa also felt we need to offer more involvement with college and seminary students, possibly through the Chaplain's office on the college campus, for those curious about careers in this field. We talked about a speaker's bureau to visit or to be made available to colleges. This was of particular interest of some younger participants who have begun exploring connections college.

Professional Recognition: The group also discussed the idea of NAEIS formulating a criteria and educational experiences to support a professional certification that could become one of the standards in the field. Those who have been in NAEIS longer mentioned that much of this work was explored in years back and documents describing the criteria and direction existed. We encouraged those having the documents to share them with others in order to further this idea.

As I said earlier, this memo is not offered as a complete record of the meeting but more as one person's remembrances and an invitation to dialogue about these results and the future of NAEIS. It is our hope that those of you reading this will see the potential value and offer your insights to improving this, your professional organization.

Peace,

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