

National Association of Ecumenical & Interreligious Staff
Professional Development and Standards Committee

Guidelines for Ecumenical Leadership

PURPOSE

These Guidelines have been prepared to assist Search Committees in choosing effective ecumenical leadership. The assumptions behind the Guidelines are that ecumenical leadership is unique and requires training and skills that differ in important ways from those needed for denominational leadership or for the leadership of a parish, social service agency, or community organization. These assumptions are based upon the experience of the Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism in working with ecumenical leadership across the United States.

It is understood that each local situation is unique and requires that the Guidelines be adapted accordingly. They are offered in the belief that they may assist ecumenical and interfaith bodies in selecting and providing effective leadership, lessening the potential for staff morale problems, and maintaining communities of faith which want the very best ecumenical work and witness.

While prepared mainly as a tool for Search Committees, the Guidelines could be used by Personnel Committees for evaluation purposes.

PHILOSOPHY

Effective ecumenical leadership is based upon:

- commitment to the unity of the church and the unity of humankind, and an ability to articulate how these principles might be made manifest through an ecumenical structure;
- commitment to diversity, with a genuine appreciation for the different gifts people bring to the ecumenical table and a deep concern to make the churches' spoken commitments to unity in diversity visible and real;
- commitment to global ecumenism which understands the interrelatedness of world, national, regional and local ecumenical life, work and witness;
- commitment to take seriously the entire mission and purpose of the church, including ministry to the alienated, suffering and economically deprived.

These commitments emerge from a fundamental comprehension of the wholeness of the Church of Jesus Christ, a deeply held religious faith which informs decisions and actions, and dedication to the pursuit of a just, sustainable and participatory society.

GROUNDING IN A FAITH GROUP

Personal commitment within a specific faith group, and active relationship with its life at the congregational and larger fellowship levels are essential. "Good standing" in a faith group is a specific expectation.

EDUCATION/EXPERIENCE

The effective ecumenical leader should:

- have had significant ecumenical experience (as staff, volunteer or board/committee member) and have had some administrative experience;
- have experiences in interracial, intercultural meetings;
- have a proven commitment to continuing education, through participation in conferences,

- additional formal schooling, short term courses, etc.;
- have at least a college degree and/or equivalent by virtue of experience.

SKILLS

An effective ecumenical leader should:

- be theologically knowledgeable and articulate, and have the ability to learn quickly the history and traditions of different denominations;
- be a good communicator with skills in writing and in public speaking;
- have proven skills in fund development, budget building and management;
- be a good negotiator with proven abilities to listen and have skills in conflict resolution;
- have ability to offer a variety of ways to address issues, personnel matters, finances and diverse publics;
- be able to inspire others to commit themselves to the ecumenical task;
- be comfortable with persons of different faith groups, races, cultures, and both sexes, and possess the ability to be a “bridge-builder;”
- be a self-starter with the ability to sustain him/her self during periods when the work load is heavy and the rewards few;
- have knowledge of social issues at local, national and regional levels, and a proven ability to organize people for positive change;
- be able to create an ecumenical partnership with bishops and denominational executives, pastors and lay persons, secular community leadership.

STYLE

Ecumenical leadership calls for tenacity, sensitivity, creativity, flexibility and a willingness to take risks. The person should have a solid understanding of him/her self, and be able to bring that strength into a partnership style of leadership. Since there is virtually no authority vested in the ecumenical leader, the ecumenical leader must be able to build partnerships with diverse people and communities in order to model the shared leadership required for the ecumenical task. “Ecclesial loneliness” is often a fact of life to be dealt with.

INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP

With the increasing frequency of interfaith coalitions and agencies, CORLE offers these observations on the special leadership needs of such groups. Effective interfaith leadership would suggest:

- an ability to critique one’s own faith traditions;
- theological understanding of and experience with the other faith communities involved;
- a dialogical style, able to appreciate and appropriate the gifts of all faiths.

–Prepared by the Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1984