



Rural-Urban Connections Project

To strengthen connections and inform people in rural, suburban and urban churches of how issues they face intersect, The Fig Tree media continue to expand coverage and reach more people. Regional church leaders care about the issues facing small and rural churches related to leadership, trust, survival, individualism, racism and mission. They want to empower churches to address such issues as hunger, poverty, land use, water rights, health care, trade, farm life, population shifts, agricultural policy, racial diversity, and economic justice. Improving communications among rural, suburban and urban people of faith can help churches minister more effectively.

In implementing this project, it is increasingly integral to our news decisions. Many we interview in urban settings have nearby rural roots that influence their action in the urban setting. Many in rural communities have urban roots.

The Fig Tree, as ecumenical and interfaith media circulating in the Inland Northwest and developing our website to reach the Northwest, provides a forum for exploring the issues and building connections. Interest generated by our coverage makes clear the need to increase our outreach in rural areas and to build rural ties to urban and suburban areas. Those networks enhance solidar-

ity among rural communities and solidarity of urban/suburban people with farmers, farm workers and people concerned about sustainable farming, small towns and small churches.

By facilitating communication among faith and nonprofit groups, we increase understanding and involve people in their communities. Awareness engenders personal contacts, resource sharing and mutual encouragement. It takes only one or two people to pick up an idea and gather a few more to multiply the influence of an article. Empowerment is hard to measure, but we see growth and fruit from seeds *The Fig Tree* plants.

The Fig Tree began in 1984 as the communication ministry of the Spokane Council of Ecumenical Ministries to cover religion in the region. Most ecumenical publications are public relations tools, 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 encourage more people in churches to walk their faith.

Ecumenism in this region is diffuse, so there is much to cover and *more* need for communication among the ministries and nonprofits in urban, suburban and rural life. The editor brings both expertise as a professional journalist and sensitivity from

local, regional, national and global ecumenical experience. She coordinates the work of a contract and volunteer team which will be expanded to carry out this project.

We have an effective tool to inspire and connect people in rural, suburban and urban churches. We mail one-to-10 copies to each area congregation and nonprofit, deliver bulk quantities to more than 200 area churches and nonprofits, and mail copies to individuals who ask to be on the mailing list. We reach more people who access the stories on the website, allowing us to expand coverage. Many say *Fig Tree* coverage rings true to their experiences and needs.

By reaching more people through distributing more copies and through our website, we can expand our effectiveness. Through these media, we seek to reach more people each year. Like public broadcasting, *The Fig Tree* is available free with an invitation to sponsor. In the long term, we expect to broaden our base of support, so the expansion is self-supporting. Grants keep the expansion efforts going.

By connecting with people in rural, suburban and urban communities, we build cooperation and common action that strengthens churches and communities in the region.