

## An Alternative for Media Literacy: The Fig Tree

### **What is “news”? What is sensation?**

When mass media dwell on sensational coverage of sex, conflict, violence, and what’s broken, they foster addictive consumption of news to keep readers, viewers or listeners coming back for more. They set up an insatiable hunger for information. That abuses the communications tools we have today. Imagine what a different society we might have if media educate people to believe they can make a difference by being involved in improving their culture, community, and government. The consumer mindset that appeals to the lowest-common denominator diminishes many values of our nation, society and faiths.

### **Future generations have to be carefully taught.**

What media do you support with your reading, listening and viewing dollars? Supporting the alternative press can be a way to challenge mass media. When *The Fig Tree* started publishing monthly in 1984 in the Inland Northwest, the daily newspaper’s coverage of religion news was spotty or nil. Seeing—we hope in part from reading *The Fig Tree*—that there is solid news on religion and diversity, they have improved coverage of those beats.

**New technologies make alternative media possible.** Our access to news is no longer limited to what mass media will print or to styles that play up conflicts, violence, gender bias, and the sexual borders to entice readers and viewers. Small publications—weeklies and monthlies—and news websites are cropping up to inform, inspire and involve people to make society better. New media draw readers

with values, who gladly pass up the "sales pitch" of violence and sex, in order to focus on sensitive subjects like religion and justice. There are new media ready to move people from indifference and hostility to respect, caring and action.

**Violence stimulates more violence.** When media play on use of violence or sex because “it sells,” they abuse their power and sidestep their role to challenge society to be better. Imagine if the repetition used in advertising were used to reinforce understandings of human rights, dignity, diversity and respect! Imagine if mass media consistently moved from filling space with surface issues and polarities, with rehashing ongoing stories and with offering soundbites to exploring issues and events in depth. Understanding comes by through understanding the context of people's lives and their full perspectives beneath the surface differences, beliefs and opinions. *The Fig Tree* articles break through polarization, either/or thinking and fears that lead to intolerance, exploitation, and hopelessness.

**Small publications can stimulate discussion** and give other media ideas. *The Fig Tree* builds awareness and hope that fosters caring and cooperative action. It helps fill the communications gap left when mass media downplay crucial parts of life—religion, values, and common action for the common good. Through such alternative media, people can gain information necessary to respond to the needs of people the region, society and world.



***The Fig Tree***  
1323 S. Perry St.  
Spokane, WA 99202  
(509) 535-1813  
thefigtree@thefigtree.org  
www.thefigtree.org

*The Fig Tree – a monthly newspaper covering faith in action in the Inland Northwest,  
an interactive website connecting non-profit communities in the Northwest,  
and a cable TV show*