

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EMO awards Tom O'Connor, PhD, "Ecumenist of the Year"

Tom O'Connor, PhD, will be named "Ecumenist of the Year" on May 6, 2008, at the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) Annual Community Awards & Celebration Dinner. The award is presented in recognition of O'Connor's leadership and commitment to fostering the love of Christ through ecumenical dialogue, witness and ministry.

As the administrator of Religious Services for the Oregon Department of Corrections, O'Connor and a team of 30 chaplains, program staff and over 1,400 volunteers work with the 13,300 men and women who are incarcerated in 14 state prisons throughout Oregon. The staff and volunteer members of this team, who come from a very diverse group of religious traditions, work side by side to help those who wish to awaken, deepen and practice their particular faith as they serve their time in prison, while also increasing public safety in Oregon.

O'Connor says that he loves the fact that his job gives him "a chance to work intimately with people from a wide variety of traditions," including Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Wiccan, Catholic, Latter Day Saints, Seventh Day Adventist, Messianic Jews, Jehovah Witness, Buddhist, Thelema, Hindu and Native American, as well as people who are "no preference"—agnostic or atheistic. He adds, "I find it very rewarding to be part of a state agency and a community that supports people as they grow in each of these traditions and in their individual spiritualities or understandings of life."

O'Connor and a team of chaplains, led by the Rev. Tim Cayton, D.Min., are creating the innovative "Home for Good in Oregon" (HGO) program. HGO is a statewide partnership or structure of working relationships between the Department of Corrections, county-based community correctional agencies and faith-based community members and organizations. HGO's network of relationships across the state allows people releasing from the prison and jail system (over 8,000 every year) to do so with community and faith-based support. These inmates are then better able to integrate their spirituality into the task of building a pro-social support system and set of attitudes, values and beliefs that will sustain and nourish them in a non-criminal lifestyle. The point is also to reduce further victimizations.

Born in Dublin, O'Connor qualified as an attorney in the Irish legal system. He then joined a Catholic religious order called the Carmelites and lived as a friar (wandering monk) for nine years in Ireland, Scotland, France and the United States. The Carmelites are known for their contemplative tradition of prayer and writing on prayer. Since 1987, O'Connor has worked—first in the Washington, DC area and for the last eight years in Oregon—on religious, treatment, training, and evaluation issues in the social service and criminal justice systems.

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MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church ■ American Baptist Churches ■ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Christian Methodist Episcopal Church ■ Church of the Brethren
Community of Christ ■ Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

O'Connor has degrees in law, philosophy, theology and counseling, and a Ph.D. from The Catholic University, Washington, DC on the interplay between religion and culture in the U.S. penal system. He completed his Clinical Pastoral Education training at a hospital in Maryland and was certified as a chaplain by the National Catholic Chaplains Association. He has published several articles on the relationship and role of religion in regard to effective correctional programming. His edited book (with Nathaniel Pallone, Ph.D.), *Religion, the Community and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders*, was published in 2003 by Haworth Press.

The EMO Annual Community Awards & Celebration Dinner will be held at The Governor Hotel, 614 SW Eleventh Ave., Portland. A reception and silent auction to benefit EMO's ministries will be held from 5:30 to 7 p.m. and the dinner and award presentations will begin at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$60 per person and table sponsorships are available for \$600. For more information, call Carla Starrett-Bigg at (503) 221-1054 or csbigg@emoregon.org.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations—including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies—congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.