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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Ecumenical Group Meets with Prison Chaplains and Inmates at the Oregon State Penitentiary** Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) held its board meeting inside the walls of the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) in Salem

OSP hosted 18 EMO board and staff members. Tom O'Connor, Ph.D., Administrator of Religious Services, gave a presentation on the current state of U.S. and Oregon prisons, and EMO visitors engaged in one-on-one conversations with inmates.

The focus of O'Connor's presentation was the "Home for Good in Oregon" program. This program brings together state, faith and community-based organizations to build a seamless system of support, guidance, training and resources in order to promote the successful re-entry of offenders back into their families and communities. "You don't have to be a trained counselor or social worker to engage in the program" said Dr. O'Connor. The personal involvement of people in the community and the commitment of inmates to work together are the major reasons for the program's success.

O'Connor noted that since 1980, the number of U.S. jail and prison inmates has quadrupled to two million, while the recidivism rate rose to from 18 to 36.4 percent. Currently, Oregon's recidivism rate is 30 percent. Each inmate costs Oregon taxpayers \$28,000 a year. "There must be a better way to address crime in our society," said O'Connor, "and we believe that the emphasis on preparing communities to receive and support returning offenders will help to reduce recidivism rates and hopefully the overall statistics."

EMO board members attending the day long meeting included clergy and lay people from the United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, United Methodist, Episcopalian, Evangelical Lutheran, American Baptist, Presbyterian and Greek Orthodox communions.

EMO Executive Director David Leslie noted the importance of the meeting. "Meeting at the Oregon State Penitentiary allowed us to see up-close the efforts to help people who are incarcerated enhance the educational, professional and spiritual skills and assets needed to return to their communities and live more productive and healthy lives. We also were able to learn first hand about the needs of our fellow citizens, community and family members who are often forgotten or dehumanized by those outside the prison system."

#### MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ American Baptist Churches of Oregon ■ 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)—Presbytery of the Cascades  
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches