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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon receives Robert Wood Johnson grant to combat childhood obesity

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has launched a 4.8 million dollar initiative to engage faith communities in combating the childhood obesity epidemic. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is one of 21 faith-based coalitions across the country to receive a two-year grant.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon will focus efforts in Multnomah and Benton Counties, working with a network of citizens and religious institutions, and with Community Health Partnership and the Oregon Food Bank. The EMO coalition will conduct wellness surveys within congregations, develop a model wellness policy to guide religious communities in making healthy changes, and support partners in advocating for wellness on a broader scale in the community. The project will place special emphasis on reaching child populations at greater risk of obesity and its complications, primarily Hispanic/Latino and low-income individuals in north, northeast and outer southeast Portland and in Benton County.

Project director, Jenny Holmes, is “thrilled that EMO will have a chance to impact this growing health crisis locally. Our present work on community food security—specifically improving access to high quality foods that promote wellness through projects such as farm-to-congregation partnerships, cooking classes and fresh produce buying clubs—links well with this new effort.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Human Services, the number of overweight eleventh-graders in Oregon has increased by 63 percent since 2001. In 2007, 27 percent of eighth-graders were overweight, with more than 42 percent of those children living below the poverty line. Latinos are disproportionately impacted by obesity and the burden of related chronic disease. In Oregon, Latinos have the highest incidence of obesity and overweight, at 30.9 percent and 38.6 percent respectively, and they are five times more likely to die prematurely, often of obesity-related disease.

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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

Portland project coordinator, Laura Raymond, continues, “Overweight children are also much more likely to become obese adults, giving them a greater chance of developing chronic health problems like diabetes and heart disease. We are beginning to see signs of these health impacts in children as young as three. Clearly, early intervention is key to reversing this epidemic.”

For more information about the project or to get involved, contact Laura Raymond at lraymond@emoregon.org or (503) 939-7507.

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. The Congregational Wellness Project is part of EMO’s Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns / Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership, which supports small farmers through innovative market relationships that bring healthy, sustainable, local food within reach of those who need it most. For more information, visit www.emoregon.org/food_farms.php.

About the Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Foundation: As the nation’s largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and healthcare of all Americans, the RWJ Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years, the Foundation has brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.