“From Despair to Hope”: Interfaith community responds to poverty crisis with conference and Collins Lecture featuring E.J. Dionne, Jr.

On Thursday, Oct. 18, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) will present an all day interfaith conference focused on poverty.

“From Despair to Hope: An Interreligious Response to the Crisis of Poverty,” is designed to educate and mobilize the interfaith community to better address the complex problems associated with poverty. Panels, forums and workshops will highlight various aspects of poverty and faith’s response to the problem. The lunchtime keynote address will be given by two New Orleans community activists, followed by a discussion about the Katrina disaster as a paradigm for the convergence of despair and hope.

The culmination of the event will be the annual Collins Lecture titled “The Politics of Hope” at 7 p.m., delivered by E.J. Dionne, Jr., syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*.

Both the conference and the Collins Lecture will be hosted by First United Methodist Church, located at 1838 SW Jefferson St. in Portland. The lecture is made possible by a grant from the Collins Foundation.

Ticket prices are as follows: $30 for the conference on poverty, “From Despair to Hope,” which includes continental breakfast and lunch; $10 for the Collins Lecture with E.J. Dionne, Jr.; or $40 for both events. Students with ID are half price. For more information or to register, call EMO at (503) 221-1054 or go to www.emoregon.org.

Conference, “From Despair to Hope: The Interreligious Response to the Crisis of Poverty”

Morning panels will include:

- “Interfaith Perspectives on Wealth, Poverty and the Beloved Community”—Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders will explore what our religious traditions teach about material and spiritual poverty. Panelists include Laila Hajoo, Islamic Social Services of Oregon State; Dr. Brad Harper, Multnomah Bible College; Rabbi Annette Koch, Beit Haverim South Metro Jewish Congregation; and Fr. Paul Schroeder, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church.

- “Socioeconomic Dimensions of Poverty,” led by socioeconomic experts working with those living in poverty, including Charles Hudson, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission; Victor Merced, Oregon Housing and Community Services; Judge Laura Pryor, Gilliam County; and Erik Sten, Commissioner, City of Portland.
Afternoon workshops include success stories, training for individuals and congregations, and an examination of underserved populations living in poverty. Leaders include Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Faith Roundtable Against Hunger, Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, Oregon Farmworkers Ministry, Jobs with Justice, Oregonians for Health Security, Central City Concern, Samaritan Counseling Centers, St. Vincent de Paul Downtown Chapel, Oregon Jubilee, Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, Interfaith Council on Mental Health and EMO.

At lunch, New Orleans residents and community leaders Tanya Harris of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and Hulen Brown, a counselor and active member of the United Church of Christ (UCC), will share their personal stories of loss and hope as they work to rebuild their communities after Hurricane Katrina. A longtime activist, Harris was featured in Spike Lee’s film, “When the Levees Broke,” and was the first on her block to rebuild her home in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans. Brown and her husband, a UCC minister, fled their New Orleans home two days before Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast. She has used her training as a professional facilitator to help evacuees work through their grief and assist communities in rebuilding. Issues will include poverty, race, class and the challenges of rebuilding community.


Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne, Jr. is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University. He spent 14 years with the New York Times, reporting on state and local government and national politics, as well as assignments in Paris, Rome and Beirut. The Los Angeles Times praised his coverage of the Vatican as the best in two decades.

In 1990, Dionne joined the Washington Post as a reporter, covering national politics. He began his op-ed column for the Washington Post in 1993, which is now syndicated to more than 100 other newspapers, including the Oregonian. His best-selling book, Why Americans Hate Politics (Simon & Schuster), was published in 1991. The book, which Newsday called “a classic in American political history,” won the Los Angeles Times book prize and was a National Book Award nominee.

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.

“Social justice requires economic support from government, a concern for family life and serious efforts to restore public order. Religious progressives may find their vocation in insisting that our society needs to grapple with each of these issues. At the heart of their arguments should be two principles: Compassion is good, but justice is better. And while government certainly cannot solve all problems, what government does—and fails to do—still matters enormously.” — E.J. Dionne, Jr.