

We're All in This Together: A Call to Communities of Faith across Oregon to Practice Solidarity

By Jan Mugrove Elfers

Elfers, president of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, is writing on behalf of the Common Table of Oregon, a group of 38 faith leaders. For a full list of co-signers and for more information on the Common Table of Oregon, go to commontableoregon.org/our-story.

As the new realities of life with coronavirus continue to unfold, there seems to be no shortage of things to fear. Beyond the sickness itself and economic recession, there is the social isolation, the shortage of basic goods and services, and the scapegoating that comes when people are afraid and seek someone to blame. But we can do better. If we acknowledge our fear, then the things that we're most afraid of can serve to transform us.

The virus is a reminder of our interconnectedness, and for communities of faith from many different traditions, this reality mirrors some of our most sacred teachings. We are reminded that whatever happens to one of us impacts all of us, and thus how we treat others is how we ourselves will be treated. I write these words on behalf of the "Common Table of Oregon," a diverse gathering of faith leaders from many different religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds who regularly gather together to build bridges across the cultural differences that so often divide us. We do not always agree, but today we stand side by side, realizing and affirming that our health is inextricably linked to the understanding that we are all parts of a larger body.

So this is a call to all people of faith and of goodwill throughout Oregon to practice solidarity in the face of that which threatens us. For now we know this means physical distancing, and coming together to address both our safety and our economic needs. But we know that it means much more than this, and we want to hear from you throughout this time of spiritual and social transformation.

First—where and how are your communities working side by side and finding innovative solutions that serve all your neighbors during this crisis? How are you reaching past the things that used to divide us to serve those who are most vulnerable, regardless of their ethnic identity, spiritual beliefs, or political persuasion? Second—we'd like to hear from the wisdom of all your traditions. Where do you find applicable examples from your own spiritual and cultural histories of facing and transforming fear, isolation, and scapegoating?

Please send your stories (either written, or by video) to mellick@emoregon.org. We'd like to share them far and wide as an inspiration during this difficult passage. Because regardless of our differences on this or that issue, today every person on planet Earth is reminded that what unites us far outweighs what divides us, and regardless of who we are and what we believe, *we are all in this together*.

Others members of the Common Table are:

Sabar Bassyouni, Muslim Educational Trust; Patrick Bell, Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon; T. Allen Bethel, Maranatha Church; Steve Bils, American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast (ABCCPC); Dave Brauer-Rieke, Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); Michael Z. Cahana, Congregation Beth Israel; Tyler Connoley, Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ; Todd Cooper, Office of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon; Michael Ellick, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon; Grant Goins, BeOne Umpqua; Michael Hanley, Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon; J.W. Matt Hennessee, Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church; Brian Heron, Presbyterian Church USA (Presbytery of the Cascades); Terry McCray Hill, African Methodist Episcopal Church; Linda Jaramillo, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon; David Kosak, Congregation Neveh Shalom; Sean Langdon, Community of Christ; Juan-Carlos La Puente, Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); Laurie Larson Caesar, Oregon Synod (ELCA); Margaret Marcuson, Marcuson Leadership Circle (& ABCCPC); Erin Martin, Columbia District of the United Methodist Church; Rick McKinley, Imago Dei; Tim Overton-Harris, Cascadia District of the United Methodist Church; Allen Oyler, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Wayne Patterson, Young Life; Abdullah Polovina, Islamic Bosniaks Educational and Cultural Organization; Murray Richmond, First Presbyterian Church, Medford; Wajdi Said, Muslim Educational Trust; Ben Sand, The Contingent; Gurpreet Singh, Sikh Center of Oregon; Joe Snyder, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Yuki Sugahara, Oregon Buddhist Temple; Ron Werner, Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice; Tara Wilkins, Bridgeport United Church of Christ; Edith Woodley, Eloheb Indigenous Center; Randy Woodley, Eloheb Indigenous Center