

VOICE



My Refugee Story, page 4

The VOICE is published by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO brings together diverse communities of faith to learn, serve and advocate for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

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ON THE COVER

Photo "Oregon Welcomes Refugees"
by Hannah Spaulding

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the new *VOICE*. After nearly 20 years in its previous newsprint format, we decided it was time for a bit of a refresh. Everything you find here will also be available on our website and social media channels.

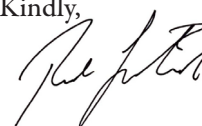
Our hope for this new format is to highlight the ideas and movements that represent and inspire our community of partners and supporters. As the largest ecumenical organization in the country, we've got an incredible array of voices to highlight. The word "ecumenical" communicates the idea of togetherness in light of our differences. It's important to say *in light of* and not *in spite of*, as the saying typically goes. The point of ecumenicism is not to ignore our differences, rather it is to acknowledge and celebrate them as we work together toward shared goals and mutual understanding.

In this first issue we explore gun violence, the war in Ukraine, Evangelicalism, Unitarianism, refugee resettlement, religion and democracy, and more. Ultimately, we want the new *VOICE* to go beyond Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. We want it to tell the stories of people of faith and goodwill across Oregon and beyond.

It's an interesting time to be a person of faith in the United States. We're often known for what we're against rather than what we're for. In a culture that regularly uses Christianity as a weapon, we want to stand for something different: grace, justice and equity.

We hope you'll embrace this new format and that it will stimulate discussion around your dinner tables and online. If you would like to contribute a future article or have a suggestion, please email us at voice@emoregon.org. We'd love to hear from you.

Kindly,



Paul LeFeber
Director of Development & Communications

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Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is made possible through the generous contributions of our supporters. Thanks to a gift from the Collins Foundation, every new and increased gift will be matched up to \$70,000. That's an incredible opportunity for you to double your gift!

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My Refugee Story

BY FRANCIS KHAMPI

“If the United States did not welcome refugees, I wouldn’t be here today.”



Francis Khampi is a community health worker for Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO). He also serves on the Catholic Charities board of directors.

If the United States did not welcome refugees, I wouldn’t be here today.

I am a Zomi from Myanmar [formally Burma]. Zomi is one of the minority groups in Myanmar. I fled my country in 2006 due to political oppression and persecution of the Christian minority. My brother was arrested in 1998 without any reason while he was in college. This began a nightmare for my family that would last many years.

My brother was released after six years of false imprisonment. Upon his release, he fled the country. The authorities tried to hunt him down; if found, he faced life in prison. As his siblings, we had no choice but to follow in his footsteps. We fled the country as soon as we were able.

After arriving in Malaysia, we stayed in a jungle refugee camp for two years. Unfortunately, in 2008, I

was arrested for not having the proper legal documentation. I was deported to Thailand and had to pay a human trafficker \$1,300 to return to the refugee camp in Malaysia.

In 2015, I was resettled in Portland, Oregon. I was welcomed with open arms, and now I am able to help others in my community. Even though refugees face culture shock, language barriers, and much more, we are committed to being part of our communities and integrating into the larger society. We have a desire to give for all that we have received.

Today, I am a father of three children. I am a community health worker and the leader for the Zomi Catholic Community in Portland. I volunteer at my children’s school and in my neighborhood; I also help to organize a Zomi refugee program. I was a client of Catholic Charities of Oregon and now serve on their board of directors. »

Many hardworking refugees were once called strangers, but they are now your neighbors, friends and coworkers. Most refugees believed in a brighter future and sought that future in the United States. We are grateful for the opportunity to be here. We want you to guide us, teach us, and share your experiences with us, so that we can do the same for others.

When I came to the United States as a refugee, I received resettlement support and public assistance that helped me establish a new life. The financial assistance was wisely and meaningfully spent—it gave me hope, faith and the ability to live.

I hope this kind of support will continue for new refugee arrivals. It reminds me of Matthew 25:35: “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.” ■

SOAR RESETTLEMENT

EMO’s Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR Resettlement) has resettled over 27,000 refugees during the past 40 years.

In 2021, SOAR Resettlement welcomed 107 refugee and asylees to Oregon. Countries of origin include Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Cuba, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, former Soviet Union and Venezuela.

SOAR Resettlement also participated in the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program, providing temporary housing and culturally specific food to an additional 54 Afghan evacuees.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee is a person who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country.

WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE THEIR COUNTRIES?

There are many reasons why it might be too difficult or dangerous for people to stay in their own countries. For example: violence; war; hunger; extreme poverty; or discrimination based on race, sexual orientation or gender. Some are fleeing from the consequences of climate change or other natural disasters, while others are running from religious persecution. Often refugees face a combination of these difficult circumstances.

1 IN 78
people on earth has been forced to migrate

800 AFGHAN
refugees & evacuees resettled in Oregon since last fall

10.4 MILLION
people are refugees across the world today

ALMOST 50%
of all refugees are children

ECUMENICAL

Understanding Unitarians

BY DR. MARILYN SEWELL

We need not think alike to love alike.

—Francis David, martyr to the Unitarian faith, 1579

How many times have I heard people remark, “You can believe anything and be a Unitarian Universalist.” Or someone might say, with no trace of irony, “I go to the Unitarian Universalist church because I don’t believe in organized religion.”

Contrary to popular belief, Unitarian Universalism is a religion, and one with a long and noble history. We are a free religious faith, and so have no creed. And as freedom is wont to do, our faith invites a certain degree of wackiness and abuse. But if that is the price of freedom, then I still choose freedom.

Our faith, of course, does have requirements. To become a Unitarian Universalist, you make no doctrinal promises, but you are required to do much more. You are required to choose your own beliefs—you promise, that is, to use your reason and your experience and the dictates of your conscience to decide upon your own theology, and then you are asked to actually live by that theology. In a very real sense, all theology is autobiography, is it not?

The universalism in Universalist refers to universal salvation—a very radical theological concept that emerged in an age in which revival preachers were riding through the countryside telling people that they were going to burn in hell unless they repented of their sins.

The term “Unitarian” indicates our belief that God is One, in contrast to the idea of a triune God. The concept that God is One goes beyond the controversies about the trinity, however. If God is One, then the God of the Jews and the God of the Muslims and the God of the Christians is One.

I remember a tragic incident that

occurred during my ministry. One evening I was called to the hospital to be with the mother of a two-year-old child who was brain-dead after choking on a piece of chewing gum. The mother, a Unitarian Universalist, was estranged from the child’s father, who was of another faith. Leaving the hospital, I found myself in the elevator with the father’s minister, and I said to him, “Well, we can do the memorial service together.” And he responded, “No, we can’t. We don’t worship the same God.” His comment punctuated my sadness and the family estrangement. What other God could he have been thinking of?

The following are core theological convictions for Unitarian Universalists:

- We believe that human beings should be free to choose their beliefs according to their conscience.
- We believe in original goodness, with the understanding that sin is sometimes chosen, often because of pain or ignorance.
- We believe that God is One.
- We believe that revelation is ever unfolding.
- We believe the Kingdom of God is to be created here on this earth.
- We believe that Jesus was a prophet of God, and that other prophets from God have risen in other faith traditions.
- We believe that love is more important than doctrine.
- We believe that God’s mercy will reconcile all unto itself in the end. ■

Understanding Evangelicals

BY HANNAH SOUTER

Defining the term evangelical is like trying to untangle last year’s Christmas lights that you promised yourself you would store properly next time. Evangelicals themselves have differing views on the primary convictions of their faith. Many would not be able to tell you what a distinctively evangelical belief even is.

That might have been me before writing this article. I did not want to touch the word evangelical with a ten-foot pole, but after learning a bit more of its historical grounding and essential beliefs, I find the term a lot less scary.

For research purposes, Barna Group (a Christian polling firm) defines evangelical in narrow terms—identifying seven qualifying criteria in addition to meeting the requirements of the faith affiliation category “Born Again.” With those narrow criteria, only six percent of U.S. adults would be considered evangelical.

How can six percent of U.S. adults have such a gripping influence on our nation’s cultural and political landscape? In the United States, the term evangelical has become synonymous with conservatism. Whatever the flavor—religious, political, fiscal or moral—conservatism has become more of an identity marker for evangelicalism than actual faith convictions.

Depending on these differing identity markers, it is more accurate to say that evangelicals make up between seven and 47 percent of the U.S. population. No wonder it feels like a big, tangled up ball of Christmas lights.

But when we start to sort through and untangle those individual strands, evangelicalism becomes much easier to

work with, and even some of its beauty is redeemed.

Jonathan Merritt writes for *The Atlantic* that “the most widely accepted definition of evangelical is probably the one put forward by historian David Bebbington in 1989.” It’s called the *Bebbington quadrilateral*, because it identifies evangelicals as Christians who share four main qualities:

- **Biblicism:** a high regard for the Bible
- **Crucicentrism:** a focus on Jesus’ crucifixion and its saving effects
- **Conversionism:** a belief that humans need to be converted
- **Activism:** the belief that faith should influence one’s public life

Without all the problematic trappings of conservatism and political affiliation, there is room to see how these four qualities could contribute to the broader family of Christianity emphasizing Jesus and his teaching to be “salt and light” in the world. A definition like this allows for more common ground and, hopefully, better understanding, collaboration, and partnership in our shared vision to participate in God’s redemptive, healing work in the world.

As previously noted, not all evangelicals agree. Some don’t have any theological convictions and prefer the sociopolitical definition. Regardless, my hope is to untangle evangelicalism from all it has become and celebrate its gifts to the larger whole.

In a world where it is so easy to make caricatures out of each other, may we learn to stay curious and truly see one another for who we really are. ■

In a world where it is so easy to make caricatures out of each other, may we learn to stay curious and truly see one another for who we really are.

Hannah Souter is pastor of Community & Spiritual Formation at New Hope Church in Portland, Ore. She also serves as the assistant director for Portland Seminary’s Institute for Pastoral and Congregational Thriving and their high school youth program, Theologia.

Dr. Marilyn Sewell is the minister emerita of the First Unitarian Church in Portland, Ore. She is the subject of an acclaimed documentary film, “Raw Faith,” and the author of 10 books, the latest of which is *In Time’s Shadow: Stories about Impermanence*.

GUN VIOLENCE



These Are the Stakes

BY THE REV. ANDREA CANO

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson ran a political ad that captivated the nation. Sometimes referred to as “Daisy Girl,” it featured a young girl plucking petals from a daisy while engulfed by a nuclear blast. The voice of Johnson then says ominously: *These are the stakes—to make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.*

The ad only ran once, and Johnson’s opponent was never mentioned by name, but everyone knew it was Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater, known for his comments about atomic warfare. Goldwater lost.

A powerful image. The consequence of nuclear weapons. The inevitability of death and destruction.

There was a choice then, and there is a choice now.

Today, our nation is captivated by other weapons of war and mass destruction. There are 392 million guns owned in the United States—more

than the population of this country—and over 20 million of those are AR-15 assault rifles (according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation).

The irony is we no longer need an ad agency to dream up powerful imagery and haunting messages. We just check our smartphones for the latest scenes of horror from churches, shopping centers, elementary schools.

Like Johnson, we don’t have to mention by name the politicians whose campaign coffers are routinely filled by the National Rifle Association. Once again, it is a failure *to make a world in which all of God’s children can live*. How long will this go on?

We are complicit when we are not proactive in supporting common sense gun control. Even amongst gun owners, there are those who are saying “enough.”

Everyday Americans have the courage and wisdom our politicians lack. While it’s true our views on guns in America are complex, there are many ideas we agree on. »

“These are the stakes—to make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.”

According to Pew Research Center, over 60 percent of Americans favor stronger restrictions on assault rifles and high-capacity magazines.

Recently, President Biden signed a bipartisan gun safety bill into law. Locally, Lift Every Voice Oregon (LEVO) successfully gathered petition signatures for a gun safety measure (IP 17) to be on the November ballot. LEVO, a faith-based organization, teamed with Ceasefire Oregon to help us put it to a vote. I encourage everyone to vote in support of this ballot measure.

The whole country will be watching. What will we do?

It doesn’t have to be this way. Will we have the courage to say “yes” to the ethical understandings, religious values, and legal protections that ensure the safety, security, and well-being of all our communities?

For truly, *these are the stakes—to make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.* ■

4 OR MORE
victims killed in order to be
labeled a mass shooting

279
mass shootings in the
United States since 2009

61%
of mass shootings occur
in private homes

65%
increase in gun related
murders from 2010 to 2020

Statistics above from Every Town Research & Policy, everytownresearch.org.

The Rev. Andrea Cano is interim president of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Ordained with the United Church of Christ, she is also a board-certified clinical chaplain.



CHURCH & STATE

RELIGION & THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT

BY THE REV. BRIAN HERON

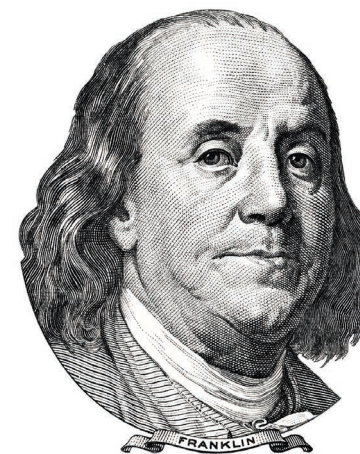
F*reedom and responsibility.* These two concepts were the core of what Benjamin Franklin believed would be needed for a successful democratic experiment.

At the time of the writing of the Constitution, religion was an assumed presence in the American colonies. Franklin believed that for the democratic experiment to be successful, government would need to protect the individual rights of citizens and religion would need to promote the common good. It is this balance and maintenance of this awkward tension that would ensure a healthy democracy in Franklin's view.

Many people today decry the loss of influence of the Christian Church and of the broader religious voice in our politics and our cultural norms. They point to the me-centered individualism of our society and the loss of morals that serve as the social glue that keeps us working together.

Those who decry the waning influence of the religious voice in our society are right to be concerned. But I also believe that their concern is misplaced. The problem is not the loss of religious institutions themselves but the loss of an inherently American belief that with freedom comes responsibility. At one time, the community largely looked to the religious sector to maintain its commitment to the common good.

But the answer to today's dilemma is not the simple return to a time when our religious leaders held the fabric of society together from their pulpits. Because, today, even many of our pulpits contribute to the me-centered individualism of our society, as religion is promoted as a means only for personal salvation and individual prosperity. This is not the religion that Franklin imagined when he was crafting the assumptions of the democratic experiment. His was a religion of the common good.



I think that Benjamin Franklin got it right for his time regarding the democratic experiment. We need government to protect individual rights and religion to promote the common good.

I think that Benjamin Franklin got it right for his time regarding the democratic experiment. We need government to protect individual rights and religion to promote the common good. Today, religion doesn't have the same traction it did over two centuries ago. I don't think we can turn the clock back. But I do think we need to find new ways and new institutions that have the universal respect to advocate for the common good.

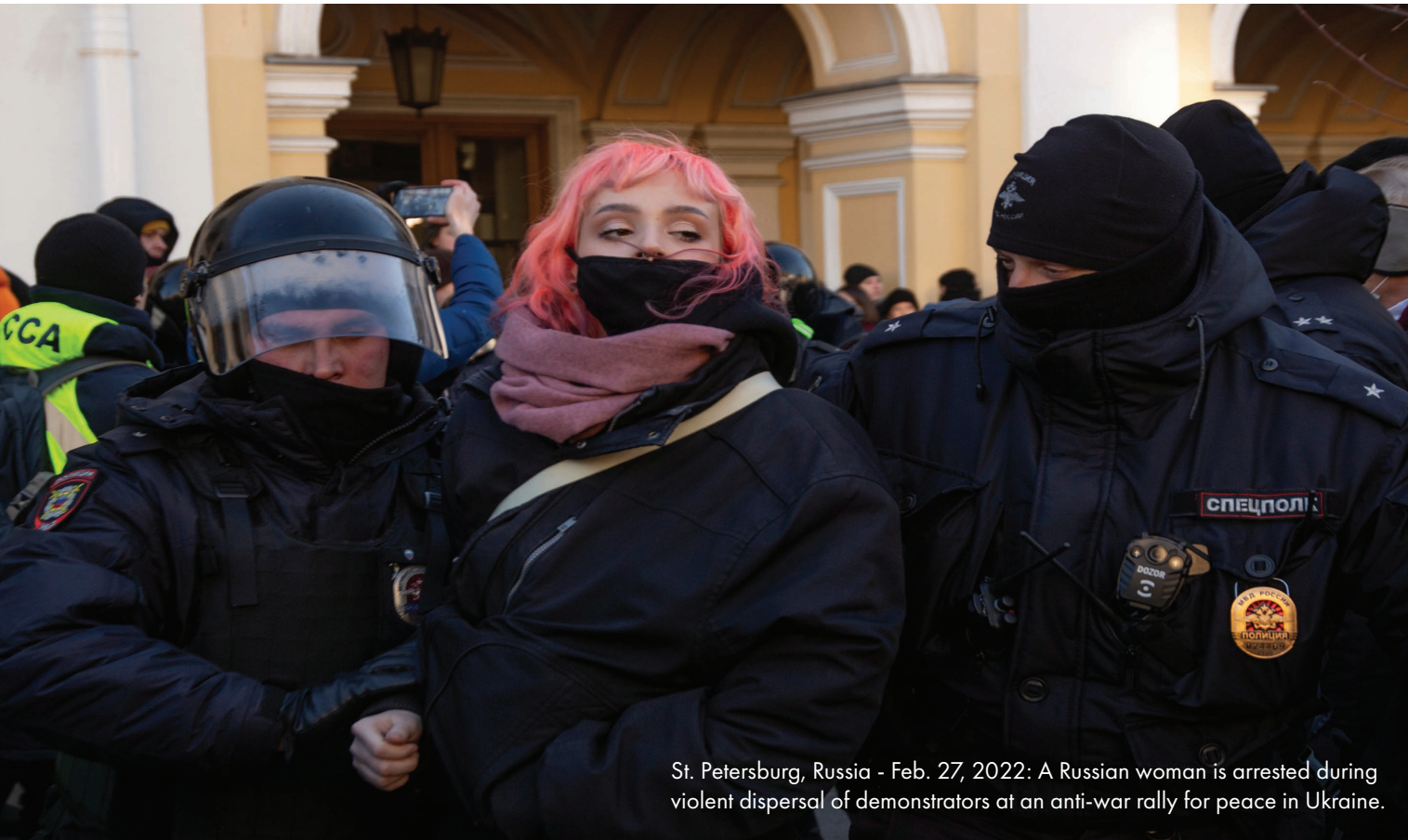
Without that, I believe Franklin is right. Democracy cannot survive unless we all agree that with freedom comes responsibility.

Get that message in your church, mosque or synagogue. Or get it somewhere else if religion is not your thing. The point is, just get it. Democracy depends on it. ■

The Rev. Brian Heron is presbyter for Vision and Mission of the Presbytery of the Cascades, a geographic region that includes 96 churches in western Oregon, southern Washington and the border of California.

FEMINISTS LAUNCH GLOBAL ANTI-WAR RESISTANCE

BY ALEXANDRA OBMANETS; EDITED BY BELLA BRONNIE



St. Petersburg, Russia - Feb. 27, 2022: A Russian woman is arrested during violent dispersal of demonstrators at an anti-war rally for peace in Ukraine.

“disinformation” about the actions of the Russian army. According to the new Russian regulations, Russian aggression cannot be called “war on Ukraine” but rather a “special military operation.” Any attempt to stand against war actions has become criminalized: a perpetrator may be jailed up to 15 years for online or offline anti-war activities.

In-person protests in Russia earlier this year resulted in thousands of arrests. Russian independent media followed the protests, highlighting the large number of young women taking part in rallies and marches and being arrested. On March 8 (International Women’s Day), Russian supporters of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance protested in 94 cities. They wore black as a sign of mourning, handed out flowers, organized public performances on the streets and read poetry.

Outside of Russia, the movement has spread to dozens of countries around the globe, including the United States. Immigrant and non-immigrant supporters of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance have organized their own protests or joined existing protests in support of Ukraine in New York, Michigan, North Carolina, California and Oregon. Protests outside Russia tend to be larger because they don’t pose risks to demonstrators.

The Feminist Anti-War Resistance remains one of the few organized anti-war movements in Russia.

In Russia—following toughening legislation, closure of independent media and open threats—many activists, feminists included, fled the country in March and April to join anti-war efforts abroad, particularly in Georgia, Armenia and Turkey.

The Feminist Anti-War Resistance remains one of the few organized anti-war movements in Russia, with members continuing to protest even after arrests and trials. The Resistance is openly supported by prominent professionals, politicians and women’s rights activists around the world—among them Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, Zillah R. Eisenstein and Nancy Fraser in the United States.

To view the manifesto and join the movement, go to feministsagainstawar.org. ■

There is no legal violation for writing on banknotes in Russia, making hand-written anti-war slogans like *нет войны* (“No War”) on rubles a safe way for citizens to protest the war in Ukraine.

RUSSIAN OREGON SOCIAL SERVICES

Russian Oregon Social Services (ROSS) was established by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon in 1994 to serve the needs of more than 100,000 refugees and immigrants from the former Soviet Union residing in the Portland metro area. Census figures show that no other place in the nation has experienced more of an influx of people from the former Soviet Union than the Pacific Northwest.

Our program primarily provides assistance to women experiencing domestic/sexual violence. We are committed to strengthening families through education, community partnerships, direct services and advocacy. We use culturally appropriate strategies to help those affected by domestic violence stop the cycle of violence and take steps toward living full and healthy lives.

Learn more at emo-ross.org.



Alexandra Obmanets is an outreach coordinator for EMO’s Russian Oregon Social Services; **Bella Bronnie** is a volunteer for the program.

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, feminist activists in Russia organized the Feminist Anti-War Resistance—a decentralized grassroots movement. Participants choose their own protest strategies, posting information via Telegram Messenger. In the first month, the Feminist Anti-War Resistance Telegram channel gained more than 25,000 followers.

Protest in Russia is often covert. Protesters write anti-war slogans on paper money, post stickers on bus stops, decorate clothing with pacifist and Ukrainian national symbols, and post fliers that resemble missing persons posters.

Why does this protest have to be clandestine? Since the beginning of the war, Russian legislation has created new measures to fight »

Q&A

As a regular feature in the new **VOICE** magazine, we're asking Oregon faith leaders to answer a few questions about their faith and the state of religion in the United States.

Our first installment is from **The Rev. Tim Overton-Harris**, Cascadia District Superintendent of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.



Why do you believe in God?

I believe in God because I have experienced the Divine in so many and varied ways in life. Others might be able to point to science, coincidence or some other explanation for what I experience, but those answers never seem to be enough for me.

I sense in relationships, in creation, in events, in crowds, and in solitude and contemplation something that is other, holy, MORE. I name this God.

What is one hope you have for Christians in the next decade?

I hope that Christians can get away from the mindset that we are gatekeepers who require a set orthodoxy for a person to be acceptable to us and God. We must reclaim the *Way of Christ*—working in the here and now to transform lives and the world.

Our faith isn't about some perfect eternal rest, it is about making the Kingdom real in this place and time.

No matter our differences, we should work for a society where every person can live up to their fullest potential ...

What makes you sad about the state of religion in the United States right now?

Religion is being used as a weapon. It is being used to justify petty differences and hate. It is being manipulated to support things that it never should support.

No matter our differences, we should work for a society where every person can live up to their fullest potential, and right now religion is being used for just the opposite.

Why do you think it's important for people of faith to be involved in justice work?

Because it's what Jesus did as a penultimate revelation of God. It is what characterizes the God I believe in and the God described in the Bible. It is what I am called to as a partner of God and Christ in this work of transforming lives and the world.

Justice brings about equity and peace. As Paul wrote: *We are one body; if one part suffers, we all suffer.* So too in our society and world, if some suffer and we do nothing to address the suffering and what causes it, we will suffer too.

This is clear, look at climate change and racism and economic disparity to name just a few—we all suffer because we are not working for justice for all.

ANNUAL REPORT

REVENUES:
\$4,736,329



EXPENSES:
\$5,099,552



66 grants received, totaling **\$3,326,648**

1,576 donors gave **\$1,828,794** in 2021

180 monthly donors | **571** new donors

View a list of our donors at emoregon.org/annual-reports

506,818 People served

2,569 Volunteers

83 Faith Partners

67 Staff

REFUGEES/IMMIGRANTS

182 refugees resettled in 2021 by Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR) including **74** Afghan arrivals

3,015 clients served last year at SOAR Immigration Legal Services

225 U.S. citizenship applications processed by our legal team

PUBLIC POLICY

139 individuals attended the 2021 Interfaith Advocacy Day and **56** attended a virtual Voters' Forum

\$18.2 million secured from the Oregon Legislature to help Afghan refugees settling in Oregon

BASIC NEEDS

15+ million pounds of food distributed last year to **501,227** people by the Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP)

1 million people served at NEFP since the pandemic began

19,277 meals provided in 2021 by the HIV Day Center and Daily Bread Express

CREATION JUSTICE

145 registrants participated in the 2021 Earth Summit on sacred waters

103 Green Circle members worked on faith-based climate justice in Oregon

HOUSING

40 Second Home volunteers provided **3,724** days of housing last year for **21** unaccompanied high school students

53 victims of domestic violence received housing relocation assistance in 2021 through Russian Oregon Social Services (ROSS)

EDUCATION/DIALOGUE

26 faith leaders recorded videos on why they got the COVID vaccine

965 YouTube views of the 2021 Collins Summit on the dangers of Christian Nationalism

Ecumenical
Ministries
of Oregon

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TOGETHER AGAIN

A FUNDRAISING GALA FOR EMO

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

Abernethy Center | 606 15th St., Oregon City
Reception at 6 p.m. | Dinner Buffet at 7 p.m.
\$50 per person | Sponsor a table for \$1,000

emoregon.org/gala

Join us for a special evening of stories, music and friends highlighting the work of EMO. This outside event (under a tent) is the first of its kind since 2019. You won't want to miss the opportunity to be TOGETHER AGAIN.