

VOICE

**2026 COLLINS LECTURER
JOHN FUGELSANG**

AUTHOR OF "SEPARATION
OF CHURCH AND HATE"

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

2026 Collins Lecturer John Fugelsang

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Dear Readers,

I recently attended an MLK Day celebration at Community AME Zion Church in Vancouver, Wash. The following prayer was given by The Rev. Michael Jones, who is on the leadership team of the Vancouver Branch of the NAACP and a frequent guest preacher at Highland Christian Center in Portland.

I was hungry, and you cut food stamps, calling it reform.

I was thirsty, and you poisoned the waters of Flint and Jackson, choosing profit over people.

I was a stranger, and you kidnapped me, locked me in a cage on the border of Texas, separating children from their mothers.

I was naked, and you mocked my poverty, selling fashion while denying dignity.

I was sick, and you said healthcare was a privilege, not a human right.

I was in prison, because you built jails based on reading scores and called it justice.

I was unhoused, and you passed ordinances to ban my presence from your streets.

I was weary, and you said, “If only they’d work harder.”

I cried out for mercy, and you offered policy, not compassion.

And still, you ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison?”

And the answer echoes through history: “Whatever you did to the least of these, you did also to me.”

These words speak to the harsh reality for our communities. I’m proud that Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon couples tangible action to care for our neighbor—especially the most vulnerable—with community dialogue. Our upcoming Collin’s Lecture featuring John Fugelsang, author of “Separation of Church and Hate” (*see page 4*), provides the opportunity to participate in an important conversation about the core teachings of Jesus. As Mr. Fugelsang reminds us, the true followers of Jesus push back against injustices, resist hate and preach nonviolence. I invite us to heed these words.

I believe wholeheartedly that our voices and actions will prevail for good. As The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Never lose infinite hope.”

With love and grace,



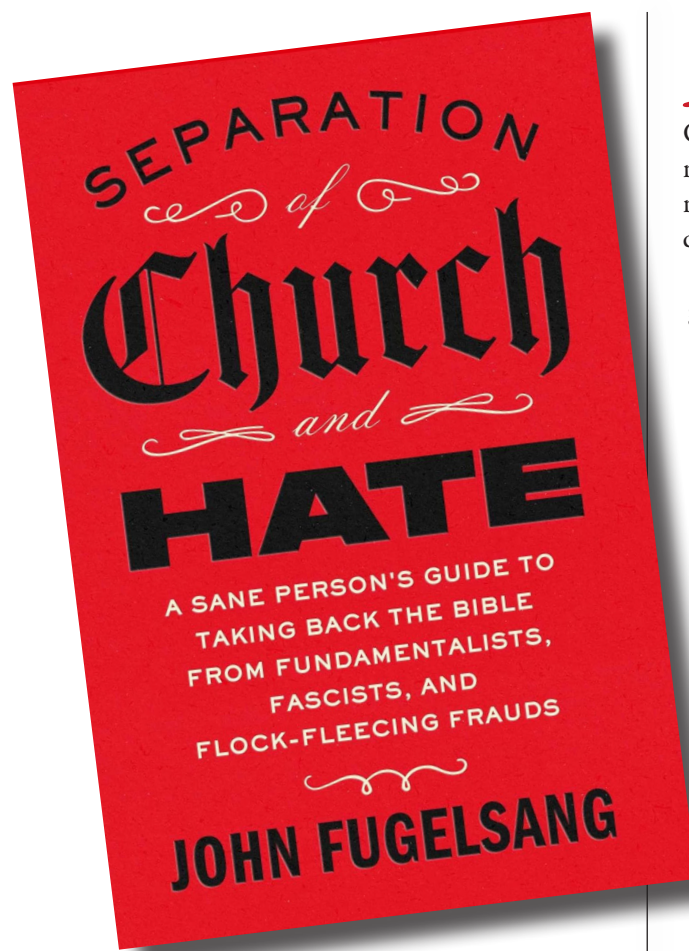
Frank So
Executive Director

COLLINS LECTURE

A RETURN TO THE CORE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Fugelsang delivers a biblically correct takedown of far-right Christian authoritarianism

BY FRANCES KING & MICHELLE BUSH



At first glance, John Fugelsang—actor, comedian and host of “Tell Me Everything” on SiriusXM Progress—may seem an odd choice as EMO’s 2026 Collins Lecturer. Since 1967, the Collins Lectures have brought renowned speakers to Oregon to explore issues related to religion and social ethics. What does a former VH1 host have to do with religion and social ethics?

The son of a former nun and a former priest, Fugelsang grew up in a home that was a shrine to Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Dorothy Day, who cofounded the Catholic Worker Movement. “They were the *other* Holy Trinity in my house,” jests Fugelsang. While quick to make jokes about his Catholic upbringing, he is frustrated with the far-right wrongly co-opting his parents’ faith as a cloaking device for meanness, bigotry and superiority—the opposite of Jesus’ message. “Jesus’ movement was about humility. It was about service to others,” Fugelsang says. “It was about uplifting the marginalized, not about total right-wing domination of the school board.”

Inspired, he started working on a book. Last fall, after a decade of pitching the idea to publishers, “Separation of Church and Hate: A Sane Person’s Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists and Flock-Fleeing Frauds” was released. It became an instant *New York Times* bestseller and almost immediately sold out its first printing. In the book, Fugelsang uses humor and biblical scholarship to challenge far-right Christian ideologies, such as Christian nationalism, and argues for a



“Jesus’ movement was about humility. It was about service to others. It was about uplifting the marginalized, not about total right-wing domination of the school board. – JOHN FUGELSANG”

return to the core teachings of Jesus.

During a recent interview on “The Daily Show,” Fugelsang gives the “marching orders” Jesus laid out for his followers in Matthew 25: “He gives four criteria for what Christians or Christian society will have to do. And it’s to individuals *and nations*. It’s take care of the poor, take care of the sick, welcome the stranger, and be kind to those in prison. Nothing about screaming at women outside clinics, nothing about being mean to trans kids, nothing about believing in a talking snake. Jesus gives his marching orders right there.”

Fugelsang maintains that Jesus’ actual teachings are as threatening to authoritarian power now as they were 2,000 years ago. He traces back a long history of non-violent Christian activism, from the Crusades through the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. “There is an amazing history of Christian activism, but it always manifests itself in resistance to Christian authoritarianism,” he says. “The whole history of Christianity is this authoritarian power, but it’s always

the Jesus followers who resist. ... You’ve got the Crusades—Saint Francis quits and preaches nonviolence. ... Slavery was propped up by Christianity, but it was Christ’s followers, like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman and the Quakers, who pushed back. Segregation, propped up by Christianity—Dr. King fights back.” Christianity as an institution has often been misused, but its heart—the story and the words of Jesus—provides the tools to resist.

So how can progressives and followers of Jesus’ teachings fight back against Christian nationalism and authoritarianism today? Fugelsang urges those on the left, believers and atheists alike, to engage with Christianity, even if only to combat the narrow version of the Bible that Christian nationalists are trying to impose. He reminds us that many of the people currently in power in the United States are not following Jesus, and the Bible is key to fighting back.

“[The Bible] is the book they are using to force a very narrow, Jesus-free

version of Christianity into our lives, our public schools, our government,” says Fugelsang. “They are not fighting for anything Jesus actually talked about.”

Using biblical scripture, “Separation of Church and Hate” provides readers with a toolbox for responding to Christian nationalism on the biggest issues that divide us today: immigration, LGBTQAI+ rights, poverty, healthcare, gun safety, feminism, the death penalty and more. “You don’t need to fight these people. They can fight Jesus and God. And this book will hopefully set you up to do it.” As he demonstrates repeatedly, the next time you hear a bigoted statement dressed up in Christianity, ask the speaker to explain where the biblical justification for it is. Chances are, they won’t be able to.

If you want to learn directly from John Fugelsang about his approach of using the Bible and Jesus’s teachings to resist Christian nationalism and authoritarianism, join us for the Collins Lecture on June 6! (See details below.) ■

2026 COLLINS LECTURE WITH JOHN FUGELSANG:

A CONVERSATION ON THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH & HATE

Join us on Saturday, June 6, at 7 p.m. Hosted at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in northwest Portland (virtual option also available).

Tickets are \$30 (scholarships available) at emoregon.org/events.

VOLUNTEERING

At Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO), our volunteers are among our most valuable assets. Last year, over 2,000 volunteers donated their time to EMO's programs. Our volunteers make it possible for us to serve over 40,000 people throughout Oregon each year. The following stories (pages 6-9) come from volunteers who shared their time and talents to help others in our community.

Are you interested in working with and supporting historically underserved communities? There are a lot of opportunities for volunteering with EMO—help feed the hungry, provide community outreach, share a special skill and much more. Many opportunities allow for ongoing work with clients and interaction with other volunteers. Learn more at emoregon.org/volunteer.



Tracey Rose volunteering at Northeast Emergency Food Program.

FINDING COMMUNITY THROUGH SERVICE

BY TRACEY ROSE

The first day I walked into EMO's Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP) last July, I was in a low spot. I had recently landed in Portland after unraveling a 20-year marriage. I had also left my job, unexpectedly lost my last living parent, and was living in a city where I had just two friends. I honestly felt overwhelmed at the thought of starting over in a new city while in my fifties. While sorting through the chaos, volunteering felt like a way to not only stay sane, but also to be of use to the wider world.

The hustle of my first Saturday morning food distribution crackled with positive energy, as the food pantry staff and volunteers got ready for the clients' arrival. Bread, muffins and bagels going from rack to table, the thunk of the cooler closing and opening and closing again, and so many shopping carts rolling up and down the cement ramp. I long ago worked in industrial kitchens, so the stainless-steel tables and stacks of produce on pallets nearby were familiar, almost comforting in a way. I stood along the wall with the other newbies until it was time to start, tugging on the Velcro tab of the bright safety vest that somehow

wouldn't stay fastened.

That day was mostly a blur as a "cart runner," assisting clients to transfer grocery carts full of food from the pantry to their vehicles. There were so many clients and so many trips to the parking lot. It was a sunny day, and people were smiling. So many unspoken communications back and forth with people from so many different countries. But what I remember most were the emotions—gratitude, happiness and love.

So, I came back to volunteer. Every Tuesday and Thursday, and then Fridays and sometimes Saturdays, I got my life-affirming dose of unity, harmony and fellowship.

And that's when the magic really happened—I got to know more of the volunteers. Hermès, a multi-lingual volunteer who loves showing off his new English vocabulary. Shelley, the friendliest, chattiest, bubbliest cart runner. Ellen, who let me cry on her shoulder one quiet Thursday morning. Daniel, who already connected me with a job opportunity. And Beth and Leo, and Doris and Asa, and so many others. If Sam isn't at the bread station on Thursday morning, I check with his buddies to make sure he's OK. And

I can't leave a Saturday shift without getting my hug from Angie.

This is truly the beginning of building my new community, and I am so grateful to have found it here in Portland. NEFP depends greatly on volunteers to keep the food pantry operating, and these dedicated folks embody every bit of EMO's mission of putting "love in action." Can they do it without me? Of course they can; they've been doing it for decades. But the real question is: Can I do it without them? ■

Update: Tracey Rose recently joined the NEFP staff team as a volunteer coordinator.

NORTHEAST EMERGENCY FOOD PROGRAM (NEFP) distributes nutritious groceries to our neighbors in need. As the most active food pantry in Oregon, NEFP welcomes 5,000 families a month for self-serve shopping!

Learn more about our various volunteer opportunities at emonefp.org/volunteer.

VOLUNTEERING

Opening Homes & Hearts

BY SILVIA SMART

Silvia Smart is the owner and head instructor for Naga Martial Arts & Self Defense. She holds a master's degree in education with a focus on special needs. She is certified by the National Women's Martial Arts Federation and serves as an empowerment self defense instructor.



Second Home student Ariella (center) with volunteer host home providers Silvia and Jeff (holding family dog Bellybutton).

Second Home, a program of EMO, connects volunteer host homes with unaccompanied high school students experiencing homelessness. As students have assurance of stable housing and ongoing support, they can focus on completing their secondary education and realize their full potential.

Students who enter our program desire safety and stability. They have found themselves in systems that were not designed to provide either, often leaving them feeling hopeless. At Second Home, we try our best to step in and rekindle that hope.

What does that hope look like? Hope means a bedroom with a door that closes. Hope means living with adults who model good communication, consistent expectations and healthy boundaries. Hope means believing that they are not a burden and that a community of people believes in them and in their potential.

Are you curious about becoming a volunteer host or joining a network of care for a young person in your community? Contact our team at SecondHome@emoregon.org or visit emo-secondhome.org.

We currently serve students in Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington and Lincoln Counties. We are excited to announce a new partnership with the City of Portland and Portland Public Schools beginning this spring.

HOW FAMILIES ARE OFFERING HOPE FOR HOUSELESS STUDENTS

On Aug. 1, 2025, my husband Jeff and I welcomed high school student Ariella into our home through Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Second Home program. This began an important new chapter for Ariella, marked by stability, independence and connection. Before this transition, Ariella had been experiencing homelessness, making the move not just as a change of address but a profound turning point in her life.

For Ariella, having a place to call her own has been transformative. One of her favorite parts of the transition has been having her own space—a comfortable bedroom and a cozy bed where she can wake up at her own pace instead of rushing out each morning.

The consistency of a stable home has allowed her to focus on daily routines and personal goals in ways that were previously difficult. She especially appreciates having her own bathroom, a simple but meaningful comfort that gives her privacy and a stronger sense of independence. Living close to work has also reduced stress and helped her establish a more balanced and reliable routine.

For Jeff, welcoming Ariella into our home has brought new life to a space that had gone largely unused. He enjoys seeing that part of the house occupied and appreciated, and he finds real meaning in watching Ariella

navigate life after graduating from high school. As she faces the challenges that come with early adulthood, Jeff values witnessing her resilience, determination and growth as she builds confidence and charts her path forward.

I have embraced Ariella's presence just as warmly. With our own children grown and living independently, having a young person in the home again feels special. I love Ariella's personality and the positive energy she brings into everyday life. I have always enjoyed supporting young people, and sharing a home with Ariella has created a renewed sense of connection and purpose.

Like any shared living arrangement, our household has experienced a few challenges along the way. What has made the difference, however, is a shared commitment to communication and respect. When difficulties arose, we were able to talk things through and learn from one another, strengthening trust and understanding. Second Home played an important role throughout the process with the team providing guidance from the very beginning and continuing to offer support during moments that were more challenging, helping us navigate the experience with patience and confidence.

Even Bellybutton, our family dog, has gained a devoted companion.

Ariella takes Bellybutton on daily walks, giving the dog time outdoors in the fresh air while also creating a grounding daily routine for herself. These walks have become a meaningful part of the household rhythm and a reminder of how small routines can build stability and well-being.

One of Ariella's biggest life changes has been discovering how much she enjoys cooking. With access to a kitchen and the freedom to experiment, she now spends time preparing meals and trying new recipes—something she finds both creative and comforting.

The home has also become a place where she can invite friends over, an opportunity she rarely had before. Being able to host friends has helped her build community and experience a sense of belonging that comes from having a stable and welcoming space.

Together, the household has grown into a supportive environment where everyone benefits. Ariella has gained safety, independence and the opportunity to move forward with confidence, while Jeff and I enjoy the renewed energy and connection her presence brings.

What began as an opening in a home has become a shared experience of resilience, generosity and new beginnings—a reminder of how stability, support and community can change the course of a life. ■

SOCIAL JUSTICE



In Memoriam

Ellen Lowe

Nov. 24, 1930 – Feb. 7, 2026

Throughout her long life, Ellen Christiansen Lowe remained committed to social justice, equality and civic engagement. These were the hallmarks of her long career as an elected official, volunteer activist and paid lobbyist.

Lowe was the sixth of seven children born to Danish immigrant dairy farmers. When the family needed to relocate, they purposefully chose to live near Eugene and the educational opportunities available. Education was highly valued for the family's daughters as well as the sons.

Lowe began working with the League of Women Voters and AAUW (American Association of University Women) on a variety of issues, and she

educated herself on how the political process worked in municipal and state government. During an oral history interview with the Oregon State Capitol Foundation, Lowe explained how she became involved in issues “with folks that knew that some of their individual needs could only be satisfied by collective action.”

Her first efforts centered on good schools in Salem, a new city library and revenue sharing of state funds through the League of Oregon Cities.

Lowe also worked as a lobbyist for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon from 1986-1999. She championed state support for food pantries, a higher minimum wage and the Oregon Health Plan. In “retirement,”

she became the lead spokesperson for the No on 9 Campaign, helping defeat the discrimination against LGBTQIA+ citizens embodied in the ballot measure.

“Ellen Lowe was a legend and an inspiration,” said Jan Elfers, former EMO executive director. “Fearless in her advocacy for social justice. Her life and passion for making life better for those living on the margins is a remarkable example of the impact one person, with a belief in the power of collective action, can make. We will miss her.”

Prior to her death in February, Lowe lived mere blocks from the Capitol Building and remained a presence in the halls of Oregon State government.

Keeping Oregon Children & Families Housed

BY KEENAN MOORE & BRITT CONROY

EMO advocacy creates rural family homelessness prevention program

Oregon consistently ranks among the states with the highest rates of youth homelessness. Between 2023 and 2025, roughly 20,000 PreK-12 students in Oregon were impacted by houselessness. In a nation with one of the most powerful economies, this is a true community and moral failing.

To prevent child and family homelessness and keep kids in school, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Public Policy Advocacy team designed legislation, built a broad coalition and helped pass a 2023 bill that created the (Child and) Youth Emergency Housing Assistance (C)YEHA program.

This innovative program funds five organizations across Coos, Klamath, Lincoln, Douglas and Josephine counties dedicated to preventing family homelessness, and rapidly rehousing families who have lost housing.

By using (C)YEHA funds to support upstream prevention, families can maintain their housing and avoid catastrophe; temporary crises are overcome rather than snowballing into significant consequences like eviction or job loss. One-time payments for rent and utilities, security deposits, moving expenses, application fees, legal services and transportation, among other uses, ensure housing stability for students

and their families. (C)YEHA grant recipients collaborate closely with local schools to build comprehensive family support networks.

Our program design and advocacy efforts were inspired by experiences of EMO's Second Home and Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR) direct service programs. More than a dozen years ago, SOAR case workers were shocked to learn that homeless refugee families with young children had to wait three to six weeks for family shelter beds and far longer for long-term housing.

While the federal government and state of Oregon had created targeted programs to house veterans experiencing homelessness, the state had failed to set aside prevention, shelter and housing dollars to decrease Oregon's K-12 homelessness rate. Prioritization drives results, and it was long past time for Oregon to prioritize kids and families.

Our multi-year campaign to create a family homelessness prevention program was also a response to the painful stories of unaccompanied youth in Second Home (*learn more about Second Home on page 8*). Oregon has one of the highest rates in the country of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness—young people houseless and alone who have

often escaped abuse or neglect or who have been pushed out of the home by parents after revealing that they are LGBTQIA+. Many of the participants in the program became homeless while still within their family unit. For some, their path to homelessness started when their entire family was evicted, because they couldn't pay the rent, or they didn't have the means to apply for and secure housing of their own after being forced to double-up with relatives or friends after a job loss.

During the 2025 Legislative Session, Oregon Senator Lisa Reynolds—the legislative champion behind the creation of (C)YEHA—and Oregon Rep. Emerson Levy successfully broadened the C(YEHA) program to include not just housing insecure families with K-12 children but also pregnant Oregonians and families with kids as young as newborns.

The successes in the counties where (C)YEHA is currently funded can be replicated and implemented across our state to ensure Oregon's youth are housed. To encourage Governor Kotek to continue to fund (C)YEHA and expand this program to your community, go to oregon.gov/gov/Pages/share-your-opinion.aspx. The governor will release her recommended 2027-2029 budget later this year. ■

TEEN DATING

How to Go on a Date & Make It Back

Event offers safe dating guidance for Slavic teens and their parents

BY ALEXANDRA OBMANETS
Slavic Oregon Social Services
assistant program manager

Today's younger generation is growing up amid multiple real-life and digital safety threats. At EMO's Slavic Oregon Social Services (SOSS), parents in our program frequently ask questions about appropriate phone use for teens, whether it is safe for 10, 13 or 15-year-old children to have social media accounts, and how to understand issues such as sexting. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, new risks related to identity theft,

online exploitation and cyberbullying are also emerging, increasing the need for education and guidance for both youth and parents.

To address a few of these concerns, SOSS hosted a special evening last fall for Slavic teens and their parents called "How to Go on a Date and Make It Back." The goal was to create a safe and friendly space to talk about dating, safety and what healthy relationships really mean—without lectures or pressure.

Slavic Oregon Social Services (SOSS) places a strong emphasis on working with teens as part of our violence prevention efforts. Our Youth Program supports children and adolescents who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence or secondary trauma. The program focuses on emotional well-being, safety and healthy development through youth support groups, skill-building activities, parenting education, and close collaboration with schools and community partners.

To make sure the event truly reflected what teens wanted, SOSS first held a focus group with teenagers who helped plan the event—from the discussion topics to the menu. The result was a cozy, welcoming evening with live music and food that the teens helped plan.

In the focus group, the teens also suggested that they and their parents separate into two groups for part of the event. Parents met with SOSS staff, guest experts in education and psychology, and members of the Portland Police Bureau, while teens joined SOSS specialists for a playful, honest conversation about red flags and how to prevent dating abuse.

In total, around 80 people attended—teens, parents, and even representatives and principals from

local schools. The feedback was deeply encouraging. One teen shared, "I liked open communication with other teenagers, meeting new people, learning more about both boys and girls—and I began to understand them better."

Parents also expressed gratitude for the experience. One parent commented, "I appreciate meeting with psychologists, new people who run youth programs and representatives from the school district. The organization was top-notch." Another said, "I'd like to have more meetings like this. Our children are an important generation that we're losing. We lack experience communicating with teenagers. And it's especially difficult for parents."

At SOSS, we recognize a deep and urgent need for conversations like this within our community and plan to host more events like this in the future.

Most of the event's success was thanks to the dedication and creativity of SOSS Outreach Coordinator Olga Shcherbakova, who led the planning and brought everyone together. The atmosphere was warm, the conversations sincere, and the takeaway clear: both teens and adults are eager for more spaces like this, where understanding and connection come first. ■

WHAT IS TEEN DATING VIOLENCE?

Teen dating violence (TDV)—also called adolescent relationship abuse—affects millions of young people, and includes physical, psychological, economic or sexual abuse, harassment, or stalking of any person ages 12 to 18 in the context of a past or present romantic or consensual relationship.

1 IN 12

U.S. high school students experience physical and/or sexual violence in a dating relationship

88.9%

of transgender youth report physical dating violence, the highest rates among youth



Slavic teens and their parents at "How to Go on a Date and Make It Back."

SLAVIC OREGON SOCIAL SERVICES

Slavic Oregon Social Services (SOSS) was founded in 1994 by EMO. For over 30 years, we have helped survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Oregon, regardless of their gender, orientation, religion or immigration status. Our services are free and strictly confidential.

To learn more about our services, or to support our work with a financial gift, visit emo-soss.org.



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JOHN FUGELSANG

A conversation on
the Separation of
Church & Hate

SATURDAY, JUNE 6 | 7 P.M.

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral
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