

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

2009 Public Policy Priorities and Moral Imperatives for the Oregon Legislative Assembly

Faith in Action: Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is committed to bringing the voices of people of faith into the policy-making process at the Oregon Legislature and other venues. Our advocacy is designed to create systems, institutions and public policies that promote peace, justice and a life of possibility for all people.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon believes that the scriptural mandate to "love your neighbor as you love yourself" calls us to acknowledge the dignity of all people and to resist the denigration of any person or group in our society. We hear a biblical call to environmental stewardship, and believe we have a moral obligation to ensure that the living earth and its abundant natural resources are available to sustain subsequent generations both materially and spiritually long into the future.

Recognizing that while society in Oregon and the world at large is undergoing major cultural, social and economic changes, EMO draws strength and inspiration from its Judeo-Christian heritage as it responds to the needs of a changing world. Past assumptions, old divisions, and former understandings of our world and ourselves, demand re-examination in light of present understanding and future goals. EMO is committed to the task of continuing to grow in its understanding and transform the world for the common good.

The goal of our public policy advocacy program is to empower people of faith with the tools they need to put their faith into action. A full statement of the Social Principles that guide our work is available on our Web site at www.emoregon.org. This document outlines top priority issue areas and legislation for EMO for the 2009 Session of the Oregon Legislature.

- 1. Address state revenue crisis with new revenue sources:** The current economic downturn is undermining the stability of Oregon families and threatening a dramatic increase of hunger, homelessness and poverty in the state. In addition, when combined with a state revenue system that is highly dependent on the personal income tax, it is creating a revenue shortfall likely to approach or exceed \$3.5 billion for the 2009-2011 biennium. Unless new revenue sources are enacted, this will lead to devastating cuts to critical safety net programs for low-income families, seniors and the disabled.

EMO supports the enactment of new revenue sources that can help stabilize current and future budget projections. We believe the Legislature should increase corporate income taxation, add a new 11 percent tax bracket for high income taxpayers and increase the state's beer tax. We also urge the Legislature to redirect all kicker refunds into the rainy day fund and education stability account.

- 2. Preserve human service programs that protect the vulnerable and bring federal matching funds to Oregon's economy:** At a time when jobs are scarce and the economy is in decline, it is counter-productive both in human terms and in economic terms to cut state funding for in-home care for seniors, community mental health clinics, drug and alcohol addiction programs, and other critical human services. Not only does this reduce employment, but it often results in a reduction of federal matching funds for these programs. Maintaining high levels of federal funding for Oregon's human service programs provides an important boost to Oregon's economy at a time when it is badly needed. Moreover, many of these cuts end up increasing costs to taxpayers over the long-term. Among other measures,

 - EMO supports an increase to Oregon's beer tax in order to provide additional state funding for treatment and addiction programs, and other critical human services,
 - EMO supports **HB 2051** to establish a state general assistance program to assist low-income disabled individuals as they apply for federal SSI or SSDI benefits.
- 3. Expand Health Care access for Oregon's children and low-income adults and establish the Oregon Health Authority:** EMO supports the enactment of legislation that would guarantee affordable health coverage to all Oregon children and cover some additional 80,000 low-income adults to the Oregon Health Plan-Standard program. This expansion of health coverage for children and low-income adults would result in several hundred million additional dollars in federal matching funds, thus further boosting the Oregon economy. Health Care reform in the 2009 Session must also establish an Oregon Health Authority to consolidate and streamline state health programs and enact several cost containment measures recommended by the Oregon Health Fund Board.
- 4. Fund affordable housing construction and preservation, and expand funding for homeless shelters and emergency rental assistance:** EMO supports **HB 2436**, which provides a dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing programs through an increase in the document recording fee. We also support increased general fund support for the Emergency Housing Account, and other critical programs to provide emergency rental assistance, support homeless shelters, preserve mobile home parks and take other steps to help prevent a dramatic increase in homelessness in Oregon.
- 5. Strengthen family stability and reduce childhood poverty:** The Oregon Legislature has before it several proposals that would increase the economic stability of working families in Oregon and prevent a rise in childhood poverty. We should:

 - Reduce the tax burden on low-income Oregonians by increasing the current value of the state's refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC),

from 6 to 18 percent of the value of the federal credit, through the passage of **SB 392**.

- Pass a Family Leave Insurance program (**SB 966**) to enable workers to take time off under Oregon's Family Leave law to care for a new infant or a sick child or parent.
- Protect Families from hasty home foreclosures by passing **SB 628**, which requires mandatory mediation before a foreclosure sale can proceed and provides for notice and procedures for conducting mediation.
- Modernize the state unemployment insurance program so that more low-wage workers can benefit from insurance they helped pay for and so that laid off part-time workers can draw benefits while seeking new part- or full-time work.
- Fully fund the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program.

6. Preserve and Protect the Environment: The environment is a gift of God, and its destruction is a threat to all people. Our religious traditions affirm the sacred in all creation and our role as stewards of the earth. In 2009, EMO supports legislation to:

- place a declining cap on global warming pollution, and to increase energy efficiency and promote green building.
- ensure that Oregon's land use planning system considers the climate change impacts of planning decisions, and works to reduce the amount of driving Oregonians are required to do.
- renew and strengthen Oregon's pesticide use reporting system, in order to protect farm workers and the public at large from toxic pesticides.

7. Hunger relief: After several years of progress, Oregon's hunger rates are rising again. EMO calls on the Legislature to:

- Raise the state allocation to the Oregon Food Bank for emergency food services from the current \$2 million to at least \$3 million for the next biennium.
- Expand Farm Direct Programs for women, infants, children and seniors by increasing the benefits value and by expanding the number of clients served.
- Increase access to free school breakfast programs for more low-income children. Increase funding for school breakfast programs so that children whose families make up to 185 percent of poverty do not have to pay for school breakfasts.

8. Human and civil rights and religious freedom: Our member faiths are united in their belief that each person is created in the image of God and entitled to certain fundamental human and civil rights. EMO supports the following measures to preserve or expand the human and civil rights of all Oregonians:

- EMO opposes funding cuts for K-12 public education programs, and opposes SB 441 that would allow school districts not to comply with a range of state educational standards in light of the current state revenue crisis.
- EMO supports expanded funding for regular and early head start programs, and increased state support for need-based financial aid programs for college students.
- EMO supports legislation (HB 3027) to prohibit discrimination in rental housing on the basis of source of income, including federal or state rental assistance income.
- EMO supports increased funding for prison re-entry programs, in order to reduce recidivism and help former inmates take up a productive place in society.
- EMO opposes the death penalty, and supports legislation to abolish it in Oregon.
- EMO supports tuition equity for children of undocumented Oregonians, and opposes efforts to reduce basic human services for all our undocumented neighbors.
- EMO supports SB 786. This workplace religious freedom law would more strongly encourage employers to accommodate the religious holidays and observances and the religious attire of Oregon's religious minorities than does current law.

*"You are called to raise up the foundations,
to repair the breaches, to restore the streets to live in."
- Isaiah 58:12*