



You made a difference in Salem.

Dear Friend,

The 2011 session of the Oregon legislature has come to a close. While the results are mixed, I want you to know Oregon's religious communities, working together, have made a difference for our neighbors in need.

Beginning with Interfaith Advocacy Day and throughout the session, EMO worked with people of many faiths and many denominations to speak out for affordable housing, health care and programs to reduce hunger and homelessness in Oregon.

Throughout the session we held to this vision: in hard times we need to come together as a community and reach out to individuals and families struggling to stay housed, fed, and healthy.

Nearly 200 faith leaders and activists came to Salem from throughout Oregon for Interfaith Advocacy Day 2011 in March. As the session moved forward, more than 150 of you signed onto the *Interfaith Letter on Hunger, Homelessness and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*.

This letter was part of a series of activities undertaken by a broad coalition to push back against proposed cuts to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. This program truly serves the neediest of needy families - those families living in deep poverty.

The coalition's efforts included the Oregonian op-ed, "A Moral Challenge" written by ELCA Bishop David Brauer-Rieke and EMO Executive Director David Leslie. Coalition members also met with legislators and testified at hearings. An Interfaith delegation of prominent religious leaders held a special meeting with Governor Kitzhaber's Chief of Staff, Curtis Robinhold and First Lady Cylvia Hayes to make the case for more focused and better funded efforts to reduce poverty and protect those in need.

During the session we brought our collective religious commitment to civil dialogue and effective policy making on tough issues to bear on issues of immigrant rights by supporting tuition equity for undocumented youth and driver license access which unfortunately did not pass this year. Other bills we supported to strengthen the social fabric of our state included one to set up a task force to look at issues of work-family balance. In all these efforts your voices and your support for our work mattered.

Nonetheless, a difficult budget situation, combined with the unwillingness of most legislators to consider new tax revenue, resulted in cuts to the state budget that will harm students, seniors, children and the neediest among us.

Although we succeeded in stopping many of the worst cuts proposed for TANF and other programs, there were still cuts to job training programs, day care assistance, education funding, and more. Staffing cuts adopted for the Department of Human Services (DHS), for example, were so deep that the Director felt compelled to officially warn legislators that these staff cuts increased the possibility that Child Protective Services could be limited in how many in-depth investigations it could conduct in response to reports of possible child abuse— with potentially tragic consequences.

Now that Oregon has adopted annual legislative sessions, it is, of course, only a few months until the legislature convenes again in Salem. So in the days ahead we will reach out to many of you for suggestions and involvement as we continue to seek more effective ways to lift up the cause of compassion and justice in our state, and in federal policy debates.

But right now, I want to just say thank you. Thank you for lifting up your voices as part of our efforts during the 2011 legislative session.

On behalf of all of us at *Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon*, thank you, for keeping the faith.

Sincerely,

Kevin Finney
Public Policy Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
0245 SW Bancroft St. Suite B
Portland, Oregon 97239
kfinney@emoregon.org
503-221-1054 x204
503-250-0937 cell
www.emoregon.org