

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Nov. 21, 2011)

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Conference Brings Together Occupy WS, Tea Party, Coffee Party, & Arab Spring

Bay Area Gathering Addresses Polarization and Building Bridges

'Engaging the Other: The Power of Compassion' - a 4-day international conference - is slated for **December 1-4 at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California**

At a time when bitter polarization is ratcheting up across society and people increasingly relate in shrill voices from opposing "sides," a Kalamazoo based organization is holding an international conference to create a wider public dialogue about how we form adversarial images of "Us and Them," and how to consciously counteract this to improve relationships and bridge the divide, locally and global.

Common Bond Institute (CBI) is sponsoring the **6th Annual International Conference on "Engaging the Other:" The Power of Compassion (ETO)** at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California **December 1-4**. There will be presenters and participants from across the social-political spectrum, as well as internationally, offering a rich variety of perspectives and real-time opportunities to address conflict, practice respectful engagement, and promote compassionate relationships.

Examples of the program include sessions that bring together leaders from the **Occupy WS, Tea Party, Coffee Party, & Arab Spring movements** to explore possible common ground and links between these sweeping grassroots civil society movements. "Almost by default these movements are most often viewed as either unrelated phenomenon by 'other' groups, or comparing them in contrast as opposing efforts," says Steve Olweean, director of CBI and coordinator of the conference. "I think this plays into using our differences to miss the larger picture where commonalities may outweigh actual differences." Several sessions focus on addressing two possible roads before us - one toward toxic polarization, fragmentation, and being pitted against, and another toward solidarity, mutual support, and shared grassroots empowerment.

Since 2006, the ETO Conference has been promoting public awareness and proactive efforts toward a culture of peace. This year over 45 presenters will be on hand to offer keynotes, workshops, panels, daily facilitated dialogue groups, all-conference interactive experiences, and action planning sessions for practical applications beyond the conference. Among noted speakers is **Huston Smith**, who will be honored for his life long contributions.

The gathering emphasizes direct interaction by all and deals with the roots of fear-based belief systems, negative stereotyping, prejudice, scapegoating, and enemy images that lead to conflict and hostility. It's goals are to develop practical ways of bridging misunderstanding and distrust, and to advance reconciliation, peace, and an appreciation of diversity in a world shared by many Others.

"This is a time of heightened insecurity and turmoil in the US and many regions of the world, and the energy of fear associated with this serves to foment distrust and divisiveness within and between societies", said Olweean. "At a time when polarization is the culprit, we're working to bring more of the public eye and wisdom to bear on both why and how people are polarized and often create demonic images of each other, whether they're looking across the globe or across the street. In today's world, learning how to move past such artificial barriers to cultivate a shared consciousness of peace and cooperation are simply practical survival skills for us all."

The event is a collaboration between Common Bond Institute, Santa Clara University, Pacifica Institute, Global Ministries University, and the International Humanistic Psychology Association. CBI is also a partner with the **Charter For Compassion and Parliament of World's Religions**.

CBI has organized annual conferences on conflict resolution and humanitarian training projects in the US and other countries for over 22 years, and in recent months held similar landmark conferences in both Jordan and Israel, bringing together participants from all sides of the conflict. In 2012 CBI will hold 5 conference in 3 countries, including a new annual professional conference in Jordan addressing the role of **Transgenerational Trauma** in fueling present and future conflicts and violence within and between societies.

Complete information about program and registration are available online at **www.cbiworld.org**, by Email at **SOLweean@aol.com**, or by telephone at **269-665-9393**.

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