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APRIL 16, 2007: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

REV. DR. RONALD L. CLAASSEN NAMED THE THIRD RECIPIENT OF THE ROBINSON 'COMMON GOOD' AWARD

Rev. Dr. Ronald L. Claassen, a life-long community advocate for peace making and peaceful conflict resolution, has been named as the third honoree as California Central Valley's "Outstanding Advocate for the Common Good."

Claassen, director of Fresno Pacific University's Center for Peacemaking, will receive the award during a dinner program to be held Sunday evening, June 3, 2006, at Hope Lutheran Church.

Fresno Metro Ministry, the Interfaith Alliance of Central California, and the Fresno Ministerial Association sponsor this event. The award is named for Carl and Esther Robinson, central valley champions for social justice programs for more than 40 years.

"The world stage today is dominated by wars and other forms of violent conflict," says the Rev. Dr. David E. Roy, chair of the award committee and past-president of the FMA. "Certainly, anyone who promotes peaceful conflict resolution to the extent that Dr. Claassen has is serving the common good."

A major purpose of this event is to elevate the value of the common good in the minds of those living in central California.

"Wars inevitably increase polarization along political, religious, and economic lines. Now, more than ever, we need to be reminded of the importance of serving all people and not just those who are like us or who agree with us or who are on our side," says Roy.

One of the inspirations for this event was an FMA program centered on "Compassion and the Common Good." FMA members learned that the idea of the Common Good has both religious and secular roots. The emphasis on the Common Good, for example, finds strong support in many of the major religions of the world, including

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. It also can be found in our nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence with its emphasis on supporting and protecting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all.

A second and equally important purpose of the event, according to Roy, is to honor those whose life work exemplifies a persistent focus on the Common Good in contrast to concern for narrow self-interest. Claassen was the unanimous choice for this year's event.

Claassen's career has included teaching in elementary school, teaching mathematics as a Mennonite volunteer (alternative to military service) in Nigeria, and in college at Fresno Pacific. He has worked as a consultant in education and conflict management. He served as pastor for a time in Fresno and helped to design and teach the first Alternative Dispute Resolution classes at the San Joaquin College of Law.

In 1982, he was instrumental in founding the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) for the Central Valley. He led this program until 1999. During this period, more than 36,000 people participated in the work to bring together victims and offenders with the aim of restoring justice without resorting to the far more costly traditional legal-justice system. VORP continues today as a viable organization.

During this time, he and a colleague founded Mediation Associates as an alternative to the formal adversarial legal system for purposes of dispute resolution.

In 1990, he helped found the Fresno Pacific Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. He continues as the director of this multi-faceted program. In 1995, he helped design and continues teaching in FPU's graduate program that offers a Master of Arts in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies.

In 1996, Claassen helped design and oversee a local pilot court program in which the VORP Community Justice Process was used to create restorative justice sentencing for non-violent, felony offenders.

He has provided education and training to groups in more than 40 locations in the US and elsewhere that have wanted to initiate VORP programs. He has authored a training manual for that purpose.

He is part of an on-going effort initiated in 1998 to secure legislation that would name Fresno County as a pilot site to implement Restorative Justice. Also involved in the

planning have been members of the county Probation Department, the Sheriff's Dept., San Joaquin College of Law, Fresno State University, and the Center for Peacemaking.

Instead of simply punishing an offender, Restorative Justice involves the offender, victim, their support persons, and other community and system people as they recognize the injustice, search for how things can be made as right as possible, and develop a plan for a safe and healthy future. If they are not successful, a judge decides for them.

If established, this would be the first of its kind in the US. New Zealand pioneered a similar model for its entire juvenile justice system with significant results including fewer court decisions, fewer in lock-up custody and reduced recidivism. In one New Zealand city (Wellington), there was a two-thirds decline in the juvenile crime rate over a four-year period using this approach.

Claassen is the author of more than two-dozen articles and other publications. He has conducted more than 150 teaching workshops and seminars locally, nationally, and internationally on the topic of peace-making and restorative justice.

His education includes a BA in mathematics in 1967 from Fresno Pacific, an MA in mathematics in 1968 from Louisiana State University, an M.Div. in pastoral counseling and conflict management from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in 1981, and a D.Min. in peacemaking and restorative justice from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 2005.

He has been married to Roxanne Harvin Claassen for almost 40 years. They have two grown and married children and their first grandchild.

The committee named the award for Carl and Esther Robinson to honor them for their long service in Fresno. The Robinsons, both of whom are in their 90s, moved to Fresno in 1962 when Carl served as pastor to the Belmont Christian Church and, later, as chaplain at Fresno Community Hospital until his retirement in 1983. At Community, Carl developed what he called a "person-centered ministry," serving not only patients but staff as well. Both have served on the board of Fresno Metro Ministry. Esther was a founding member and Carl completed 25 years, ending as board member emeritus.

Esther worked for years with the League of Women Voters and has had positions with local, regional, and national boards of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. Along with Carl, she raised two daughters who are both working professionals (nursing and landscape architecture).

Carl remains active as a board member of both the N. California-Nevada Christian Church and the Beth Harnish Lecture Board at CSUF. He is a regular participant of the FMA, served as a part-time chaplain at the VA until 1996, and is on the combined Peace Education Task Force of the Christian Church and the United Church of Christ.

The award banquet is open to the public. Tickets are \$35 per person. Scholarships are available, if needed, for part or all of that amount. Reservation forms may be found on-line at www.robinsoncommongood.org. In addition, people may call the United Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, at 559-227-2050 for reservation forms and for more information.

The program starts at 5:30 p.m. Hope Lutheran is located at the NW corner of Fresno and Barstow.

The Robinson Award Committee includes the Revs. Natalie Chamberlain (United Christian, Disciples of Christ), Bryan Jessup (Unitarian Universalist Church of Fresno), David Roy, Paul Werfelmann (Hope Lutheran and the Interfaith Alliance of Central California), and Karl Wyneken (Lutheran, retired).

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