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March 4, 1996

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Preacher and political activist Wallis to visit Illinois Wesleyan

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—The founder and leader of the Sojourners community in Washington, D.C. and editor of *Sojourners Magazine* will visit Illinois Wesleyan and give four presentations on March 6-7.

With the theme, "Prophetic Spirituality and a New Politics," Pastor Jim Wallis will give a sermon for "Evelyn at Eleven" at 11 a.m., Wednesday, March 6. He will present "A Culture of Violence" at 7 p.m. On Thursday, March 7, he will present "Renewing the Soul of Politics" at 4 p.m., and "An Alternative Political Vision" at 7 p.m. All events will be held at Evelyn Chapel, except for the final session, which will be in the Davidson Room, Memorial Student Center.

Wallis founded the Sojourners community and magazine in 1971, which was first based in Chicago and later in inner-city Washington, D.C. The community's neighborhood center serves 1,000 families through food programs and uses after-school, summer and parental support activities to focus on at-risk youths.

"Wallis is one of the major leaders of Evangelical Christianity in the nation," according to William White, professor of religion and university chaplain. "He presents an important critique of the Christian Coalition."

Sojourners connects spirituality with social justice, Wallis said. The magazine is part of a Christian movement separate from the Religious Right.

"At Sojourners we aren't just doing a magazine," Wallis said. "And I'm not just an editor. We are engaged in building a movement—an extended family, a vital network of people who are working for a more just society."

Part of that movement includes the Cry for Renewal, a faith-based political voice that includes a diverse group of religious leaders who "made a joint declaration that the Religious Right did not speak for all Christians and that other forces needed to be heard throughout our nation," Wallis said.

The voice, Wallis said, was created to counter "the public impression of a monolithic right wing religious juggernaut ... it is community-based, value-centered and solution-oriented. It is a voice that leaves the old categories of liberal and conservative in the ashes of history."

Through a national "gang" summit, Wallis has helped to mobilize the religious community around issues of racism, economic justice, disarmament and peacemaking among inner-city gangs.

Wallis believes in a "vision" for the future: "There is an alternative; that's the message of Sojourners. We don't want simply to put out new ideas. We want to make it possible for people to become involved and make a difference in the world," he said.

Wallis was the first chair of the Witness for Peace Advisory Committee and a leader of the first Witness for Peace delegation to Nicaragua. He drafted the Pledge of Resistance and served as leader of its action signal committee.

Wallis helped originate the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and has planned and participated in several peace actions around the country. In a commitment to combating white racism, Wallis helped launch the Pentecost to Soweto campaign in solidarity with South African churches.

Wallis has published several books, including *Agenda for a Biblical People*, *The Call to Conversion*, *Revive Us Again*, *The Rise of Christian Conscience*, *Crucible of Fire: The Church Confronts Apartheid*, and *The Soul of Politics*.

Wallis attended Michigan State University and in 1970 went to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Ill. He became a target for outraged alumni when he organized prayer vigils in protest against racism and the Vietnam War. Wallis took his guidance from the Bible, he said, especially the Hebrew prophets who denounced injustice and reminded the powers that be of their responsibilities.

When Sojourners celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1991, Wallis said, "I am more clear than ever that social change will not take place without spiritual transformation. New politics and new spirituality go hand in hand, and Sojourners will continue to make that vital connection."