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Contact: Kelly Hughes, 312-280-8126
or kelly@dechanthughes.com

New Book by *New York Times* Bestselling Author Jim Wallis Revives Long-Neglected Idea of the Common Good

Whether Democrat or Republican, Tea Partier or Occupier, Christian, Jew, Muslim, or Atheist, our life together can be better, says public theologian and *New York Times* bestselling author Jim Wallis. He shows how a renewed commitment to the common good can transform public life in his new book *On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good* (Brazos Press, April 1, 2013).

“The common good is about so much more than partisan politics,” Wallis writes. “It grows out of personal and family lives, the mission and witness of congregations, the moral power of social movements, and the independent integrity of prophetic religious leadership in our public life.”

The longtime activist and progressive Christian voice has sought common ground and allied with conservatives on a range of issues. “When making a difference in the lives of poor and vulnerable people is seen as a nonpartisan issue, then we make the most progress,” Wallis says. He points to hopeful signs, such as religious leaders crossing theological boundaries to convince the President and his team and political leaders on both sides to form a “circle of protection” around the poor. In another case, nearly 150 evangelical leaders signed a statement in favor of immigration reform. “Something very important is happening in regard to poverty, immigration, unity, and common sense,” he says.

Two big ideas from conservative and liberal thought—personal responsibility and social responsibility, respectively—are essential to the common good, Wallis says, and they underly the book’s bracing antidote to the selfish and shallow ethos of the times. The first section, “Inspiring the Common Good,” makes the case that Christianity is about the way we live in the world, not just the destiny of the soul. The second gets into the nitty-gritty of what needs to be done, outlining “Practices for the Common Good” such as:

- Regaining civility in the public square and other areas of life;
- Redeeming democracy;
- Addressing the harmful role of money in politics;
- Rebuilding economic trust;
- Nurturing healthy households.

One key to making the common good our nation’s foremost concern is for people to make the transformation from appetites to values, he says: “People were made for family, community, and human flourishing, not consumerism, materialism, addiction, and empty overwork.” He calls for strengthening the institution of marriage, and urges parents to make their children their number-one priority. “What happens in our households is as central to the common good as what happens outside them. Being a husband, father and little league baseball coach has convinced me that the common good is about far more than what happens in the halls of power,” he says.

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Wallis celebrates the rise of a new generation of “Matthew 25” Christians, who seek to carry out Jesus’ mission for the poorest, rather than pursuing the comforts of heaven. They are inspired by one of the most challenging messages in the Bible: “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25: 40 NIV), which was also Wallis’s own conversion text when he was a young man.

“We people of faith may be the ultimate independents, willing to challenge all political sides on behalf of people and issues that command our moral attention. Fighting for biblical justice and the common good, not partisan political goals, will be the core of that faithful politics,” Wallis writes. “Responding to the call for the common good is always a very personal decision. My hope and prayer is that we will all decide for the common good in our personal and public lives and that we will teach our children to do likewise.”

Jim Wallis is president and CEO of Sojourners and editor in chief of *Sojourners* magazine. He is a bestselling author, public theologian, national preacher, social activist, and international commentator on ethics and public life. Wallis has written ten books, including the *New York Times* bestsellers *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* and *The Great Awakening*, and is a frequent speaker in the United States and abroad. He has written for major newspapers and appears frequently on CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, on shows such as *Meet the Press*, *Morning Joe*, *Hardball*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The O'Reilly Factor* and on NPR. Wallis also teaches at Georgetown University and has taught at Harvard University. He is married to Joy Carroll, is the father of Luke and Jack, and is a Little League baseball coach.

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On God's Side:
What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good
by Jim Wallis

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