

**IN BRIEF**

**Human rights activist speaks today in EMU**

Internationally known human rights advocate Bishop Samuel Ruiz García will speak at the "Bar-tolomé de las Casas Annual Lecture in Latin American Studies" lecture today at 2 p.m. in 150 Columbia. Ruiz García's speech, "Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples in Mexico," is hosted by the Latin American Studies Program and St. Thomas More Newman

Center Catholic Campus Ministry. A reception will follow the event at the EMU International Lounge. Ruiz García is an indigenous rights advocate for Mexico and Latin America. He served as the bishop of the San Cristóbal de las Diocese in Chiapas for almost 40 years until retiring in 2000. After the 1994 rebellion in Chiapas, Ruiz García served as a mediator between the Mexican government and the Zapatista National Liberation Assembly. He has been nominated three times for a Nobel Peace Prize and has received numerous international awards in recognition

of his human rights efforts. "He's an international figure," said Father David Orique of the Newman Center. "He's a man who believes deeply in the importance of humanity. He's deeply committed to the values of peace and justice." Carlos Aguirre, director of the Latin American Studies Program, worked to bring Ruiz García to campus after his speech in May was canceled because of health reasons. "It's an honor for us to host him here at the University," Aguirre said. "He will make a great impact on our community."

— Brittni McClenahan

**Bennis: Palestinian student expected activism**

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the Israeli- Palestinian conflict.

International law is only useful when it is held up as a tool, Bennis said. "They (international laws) are only worth the paper they're written on if we make that paper a flag that becomes part of our movement and we demand enforcement of these things," she said. Bennis said she is not taking sides in the conflict, but she supports international law. She is

against the United States supporting illegal occupation and wants the U.S. government to abide by international law. Bennis described "exactly what is happening," said Amal Equeiq, a graduate student from Taibeh, Israel. "Back home there is so much depression," Equeiq said. "You're always trying to search for hope." As a Palestinian living in Israel, Equeiq said she is considered a second-class citizen. When Equeiq first came to

Eugene, she expected to see more students politically active in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As an Arab Muslim, Equeiq said it can be dangerous for her to openly protest and wishes more students with the opportunity would become more involved. It warms her heart to see people holding "stop the war" signs, she said.

Contact the crime, health and safety reporter at [kgagnon@dailyemerald.com](mailto:kgagnon@dailyemerald.com)

**New Orleans: Displaced family strives to stay together**

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La., home during the hurricane and was unable to locate family members for two weeks after the storm. "The living room ceiling came off, and we were in three feet of water for two and a half days," Smith said. "We just sat there. We were wet. We had an 86-year-old woman with us."

As the waters receded, Smith and four family members set out to find her mother, nephew and sister, all of whom were unaccounted for.

Two weeks later, everyone had relocated to Plaquemine, La., with all eight living under one roof.

They traveled to Dallas, where there were offers of apartments, but the family left after realizing that if they stayed they would be split up into two households.

"One of the things we specified was that we would not be separated again," she said.

Now, Smith is seeking help to move to Oklahoma to join her father's family. The remainder of her extended family is splintering off to Houston, Plaquemine and Baton Rouge.

"This whole experience has been a learning and changing thing for us," she said. "It's a growing thing for us, and as a family it's brought us closer, but it's going to separate us too, and that's the devastating thing for us. But we need to get stable; I need to get stable."

Smith is unusual in her willingness to leave the state.

"There are a lot of opportunities out there, but the issue is that a lot of people just don't want to leave Louisiana," said Kristen Simmons, a social caseworker for Catholic Charities.

Simmons flew down from Albany, NY, a few weeks after Hurricane Katrina hit to do what she could to help those in need.

"I wasn't sure if I should come or not, so I prayed, and two days later I was on the plane," she said.

For the past two weeks, Simmons has been staying at a home owned by the CLC, arriving at the center at 8 a.m. each day.

She's returning to New York and to her husband next week, but she said she wishes she could stay.

Other caseworkers found themselves at the CLC after fleeing the hurricane themselves.

Christopher Albright, a relief caseworker, searched for a job in Baton Rouge after losing his in New

Orleans. He said he evacuated after watching the Weather Channel and deciding that this was "the big one." "New Orleanians have this strange notion that the city of New Orleans is somehow blessed or has some magical properties ... and this wasn't even a direct hit," he said.

He moved to his property in Baton Rouge and landed the job as a caseworker after pursuing employment in his original line of work — working with the elderly.

Although he had never worked in social services before, he said he loves his new job.

"It's been great ... I know that I'm doing well by doing good," he said.

After processing all the people in line, the caseworkers took a break and gathered for an informal meeting to discuss how they feel and to talk about any difficulties that have arisen. Though all five looked tired, they said their work is very satisfying, though it can be frustrating when they're powerless to help everyone who needs help.

"Sometimes, at the end of the day, I find myself saying, 'Do you have the papers? No? Well, you need the papers or I can't help you,'" Simmons said. "It's like you shut down."

While the caseworkers talked, a nun distributed the 3 p.m. batch of checks to the few people waiting in line. A few looked irritated, but most appeared happy, if not exuberant.

Samantha Mercadel, a homeowner from New Orleans East, beamed when she got her two checks — \$600 rent and \$88 for water. She lost everything in the home she bought and furnished two years ago. Nothing was recoverable.

"It's hard; it's so hard to start all over," she said. "You go and you see everything that you've worked so hard for all your life ... I said I was going to buy me a house before I was 30. I was 28, bought a house, furnished it, worked hard and we went back and it's all gone."

But despite her tears, Mercadel is still smiling.

"Today has just been a good day," she said. "I finally got some kind of assistance, and I'm grateful for that."

Contact the higher education reporter at [kbrown@dailyemerald.com](mailto:kbrown@dailyemerald.com)

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