

California (PRWEB) August 25, 2010 -- In a world where heightened religious intolerance is proving to be the norm and serves as content filler for print media, the airwaves, the blogosphere and beyond, a new book uses California as a window into the diversity of religion in America and shows how nearly a dozen marginalized communities are finding faith, sanctuary and community in the face of adversity.

The book, "Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited" and its companion traveling exhibition, is thoroughly interfaith. Through both book and exhibit the viewer is introduced to the nation's only halfway house for addicts self-identified as Jewish, a transsexual gospel choir, a Buddhist community in San Quentin, a Mormon congregation organized by the deaf for the deaf, Latina sex workers worshipping the female folk deity Santísima Muerte and more. Depictions of conventional middle-class religion are widely visible in the media but the American public rarely sees the sacred worlds of society's marginalized; the outcasts, the fallen and those that have been labeled "other" and, ironically, those whom religion aims to serve. "Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited" aims to refocus that lens.

Acclaimed photographer and essayist Rick Nahmias has, once again, gone in search of those living and coloring just slightly outside of the boxes typically deemed "mainstream" and found hues and shades of religion - and wonderfully colorful stories - that recognize the need and the deliverance of faith to a world not always etched clearly in black and white.

In Nahmias' latest book, "Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited," eleven unique and at-first-glance disparate religious groups are gently introduced to the reader through photography, first-person anecdotes and third-person observation as their spirituality, prayer and real lives intersect.

Within the pages of "Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited" readers will have, in addition to those groups already mentioned, an opportunity to meet:

- Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide who have established a Cham Muslim mosque in Orange County, California;
- Transcendence, the world's only all-transgender gospel choir;
- A Mormon church designed specifically for a deaf and hearing-impaired congregation;
- A Hindu ashram that incorporates yoga and meditation into their care for HIV/AIDS members;
- Inmates practicing Buddhism under the tutelage of a Zen Master while incarcerated at San Quentin;
- The Immaculate Heart Community, founded initially by dispensated Catholic nuns, pursuing a doctrine that focuses on social justice, the rights of women and advocacy for the marginalized;
- A group of rurally isolated Pentecostals and Baptists who travel long distances through California's

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dusty agricultural communities to meet in prayer;
- The interfaith and multicultural Women of Wisdom who conduct joint faith meetings between women from the "outside" with women inmates at the California Institute for Women;
- The Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo Native American tribes who, under the combined recognition as the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, continue to celebrate their native ceremonies, dances, language and prayer.

"Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited" - due out in mid-September through University of New Mexico Press - is the Los Angeles-based Nahmias' second title focused on the images and stories of those living in the margins of California's vast population. His last title, the acclaimed photo essay "The Migrant Project," was based on a photodocumentary exhibit that, seven years later, is still touring the United States.

Shot in medium format and using black & white film, "Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited" features nearly 100 portraits of those that Nahmias met, photographed, interviewed and took services with over a three-year period. The deeply personal stories and histories shared with Nahmias are alternately sad and joyful, provocative and inspiring, evocative and compelling. Artfully woven together with over three dozen prayers written by project participants specifically for this book, "Golden States of Grace" features a forward by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jack Miles. Captured during periods of quiet prayer, joyful celebration and casual conversation, Nahmias' haunting images are of people looking for sense - sense of self, sense of place and sense of belonging - in a complicated world.

More information about "Golden States of Grace" and author Rick Nahmias' work can be found online at www.goldenstatesofgrace.com and www.ricknahmias.com.

Interviews with Rick Nahmias (and some of the individuals profiled in the book...) are available by contacting Betsy Model at The Zephyr Group, 505-466-2770 or bmodel(at)groupzephyr(dot)com. A select group of images are available to accompany features or reviews and there are audio interview clips available for radio and pod cast use. Review copies available for qualified media.

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