MCC Elects New Officers, Welcomes New Directors

At its annual meeting in January, the Maine Council of Churches elected a new slate of officers to lead the organization in 2014:

**President: Richard Berman**

Richard has served on the MCC board since 2012, and most recently served as chair of the development committee. A well-known commercial real estate developer and generous philanthropist, Richard is active at St. Albans Episcopal Church.

**Vice President: Rev. Allen Ewing-Merrill**

Allen and his wife, Sara, are co-pastors of HopeGateWay United Methodist Church in Portland. He also serves as executive director of Hope Acts, a non-profit founded by HopeGateWay that provides support to immigrants and people in recovery from addiction.

**Secretary: Rev. Thomas Frey**

Tom serves as pastor of Peoples United Methodist Church in South Portland. He joined the MCC board in 2013.

**Treasurer: Edward Rea**

Ed came onto the MCC board in 2013; he has been actively involved with the development and finance committees and with civil discourse activities. He is a member of St. Albans Episcopal Church.

The Council is also pleased to welcome the following new directors:

- Rev. Edward Campbell
  *Presbyterian Church USA*

- Rev. Denis Dunn
  *United Church of Christ*

- Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen
  *Church of the New Jerusalem (Swendeborgian)*

- Drew McLaren
  *United Church of Christ*

- Bonny Rodden
  *Episcopal*

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From the Executive Director

A Day in the Life

Being "shared" by the Maine Council of Churches and a busy Lutheran parish in Portland can at times be challenging. I am certainly never without something to keep me occupied. Here's what a "typical" day looks like...

7:00 a.m. Start tweeting legislators about overriding the governor's veto of Medicaid expansion
8:00 a.m. Pastoral visit to Maine Medical Center
9:00 a.m. Skype meeting with MCC consultant on the "Feed the Hungry" project
10:00 a.m. Meeting with Associate Pastor to plan parish Holy Week services
12:00 p.m. Nuke some delicious homemade soup and put my feet up
2:00 p.m. MCC bank deposit and thank-you notes to our very generous supporters
3:30 p.m. Hit the gym to work off the delicious soup (and the mega-piece of bread that went with it)
5:00 p.m. Check MCC and parish emails
6:00 p.m. Parish evangelism meeting
8:00 p.m. Home!

...And sometimes during the day I sit in the sanctuary and do nothing but remain silent enough to hear God in all of this.

While the combination of parish life and MCC life might seem like a hectic balancing act, in many ways it works very well. The pastoral life is a good grounding for me, and it helps me to stay in touch with the reality of church life today. As a senior pastor, I can relate to the struggles and joys that come with being church. And at the MCC, I am reminded every day of how important it is to have wonderful denominational partners in the work of being God's presence in the world.

A day in the life. And life is good!

Blessings,
MCC Takes Lead Role in Advocating Against Torture

The Council spearheaded Maine’s participation in a nationwide campaign, organized by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), to call on the Senate Intelligence Committee to make public its report on its three-year investigation into the CIA’s torture of post-9/11 detainees.

MCC gathered signatures from over 110 religious leaders from across Maine on a letter to Senators Susan Collins and Angus King, both of whom sit on the Senate Intelligence Committee and were considered key votes on the issue. The letter ran as a full-page ad in the Bangor Daily News on December 7, 2013 and was repeated in the Portland Press Herald in March, 2014, shortly before the Senate Intelligence Committee was scheduled to vote on the issue.

In addition, several MCC members wrote op-ed pieces that appeared in newspapers around the state, urging Maine’s senators to vote for the report’s release, and a group representing MCC traveled to Washington, D.C. in October to meet with the senators in person to discuss this important issue. Thanks in part to these efforts, both senators joined their colleagues on the Committee in a strong, bipartisan vote in favor of releasing the CIA report.

In a joint statement released on April 2, the day before the vote, Senators Collins and King stated, “Torture is wrong, and we must make sure that the misconduct and the grave errors made in the CIA’s detention and interrogation program never happen again.”

NRCAT officials were impressed with the way in which MCC and its members quickly mobilized to make this campaign a success. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to respond to this important issue.

MCC Urges Legislature to Override Governor’s Veto of Summer Food Service

MCC Executive Director William Barter wrote an editorial, published in the Portland Press Herald on February 10, 2014, urging the Legislature to override Gov. LePage’s veto of LD 1353, An Act to Further Reduce Student Hunger. This bill, passed by the Legislature in July 2013, would require summer food programs in public schools where at least half the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches during the school year.

Bill notes, “In Maine, thousands of schoolchildren stay healthy and nourished through the school year in part because of the successful national school lunch program. When summer comes, these low-income, often working, families struggle to provide those extra meals to their children each week.”

The Legislature did, indeed, override the veto on February 18th.

Pictured left to right: William Barter, MCC Executive Director; Leslie Manning, Chair of MCC Public Policy Committee; Senator Collins; Jill Saxby, Board Member of the National Religious Campaign against Torture; and Marc Mutty, Board Member of MCC.
Why I Support the Maine Council of Churches
by Richard Berman, Board President

I was raised in Boston, which is known to be a melting pot of many different cultures. Because of that experience I believe it is so important to be talking to each other, becoming ever more tolerant of our differences as we at the same time unite around our common beliefs and hopes. MCC models that type of action through its ecumenical work and justice advocacy.

I donate my time to MCC because we are, and need to continue to be, the moral voice in Augusta. Decisions in Augusta and beyond greatly affect people. I believe people of faith need to make our legislators aware that those effects ought to be ones of love and compassion as the Gospels, Talmud, and Koran have taught us; when we come together as a united voice through MCC, we can and do have an impact.

Why do you support the Maine Council of Churches? Share your story with us at newsletter@mainecouncilofchurches.org.

Your Contributions Make A Difference
by Ed Rea, MCC Treasurer

2013 was a rebuilding year for MCC and you played a part. Individual and congregational giving is one third of MCC’s annual budget; we can’t continue to do our work without you.

Individuals are MCC’s backbone – in terms of time, talent and financial support.

2013 giving by the numbers:

• 109 people gave us financial contributions in 2013, an increase of 2 over 2012
• 40 donors were new in 2013 or had not given at least 2007
• 17 who contributed in 2008-2011 but not in 2012 renewed their support in 2013
• We hope to reconnect with 55 individuals who gave in 2012 but not 2013.

The support of individual congregations is also important to MCC. In 2013, 32 individual churches gave us financial contributions, 5 more than 2012. Ten churches were new supporters, 18 who also contributed in 2012, and 4 returning supporters from years prior to 2011. We missed hearing from 9 congregations who supported us in 2012 and hope they will be able to return this year.

Rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the mission of the Maine Council of Churches is to inspire congregations and persons of faith to unite in good works that build a culture of justice, compassion and peace.
**Maine Council of Churches Donors 2013-2014**

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<th>Acadia Friends Meeting</th>
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<td>Roger Addor</td>
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<td>Robert &amp; Christine Howes</td>
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<td>Cliff Ives</td>
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<td>David &amp; Judith Johnson</td>
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<td>Constance Basket</td>
<td>Richard &amp; Margaret Killmer</td>
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<td>Judy Kimball</td>
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<td>Merrill Bittner</td>
<td>Rita Kimber</td>
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<td>Thomas Boyer</td>
<td>Karen Kusiak</td>
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<td>William &amp; Karen Burke</td>
<td>Lutheran New England Synod</td>
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<td>Karen Byrne, The Cathedral of St. Luke</td>
<td>Robert Lynn</td>
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<td>Cynthia Christie</td>
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<td>Henry A. Male, Jr.</td>
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<td>Cox Memorial United Methodist Church</td>
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<td>Kimberly McBride</td>
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<td>Marcia Pottle</td>
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<td>Lani Graham</td>
<td>Muriel A. Poulin</td>
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<td>Reed Gramse</td>
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*Gifts received 9/26/13 - 4/9/14

**Every effort has been made to ensure the completeness and accuracy of this list. Please send corrections to wbarter@mainecouncilofchurches.org. Thank you!**
As evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus and said, “This is a remote place, and it is already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. Matthew 14:15-20

While the multiplication of bread and fish is miraculous, what is striking about this story is the reluctance of the disciples to feed the hungry. Coming from a place of scarcity, they were afraid and unwilling to share. In their limited thinking, there was no way to feed the hungry. Sound familiar?

The voices of scarcity and misplaced priorities are loud in Washington and Augusta. They say we can’t afford to feed the hungry. They believe that balancing a federal or state budget on the backs of the poor is morally acceptable. Maine has the 3rd highest rate of hunger in the country, just behind Alabama. Our hungry people need a miracle right now, and you can help make it happen!

“Bring them to me,” Jesus said. And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up 12 baskets of left over pieces. Matthew 14:18-20

Jesus didn’t buy the myth of scarcity, and neither do we. Jesus multiplied food by giving thanks to God for what he had been given. Generosity and thankfulness were enough for his miracle. As a person of faith, you have the power to work a miracle in the minds and hearts of lawmakers, and in the lives of hungry children, seniors, veterans, and working families.

The Maine Council of Churches is in the process of designing a Study Circles project called “Love your Neighbor; Feed the Hungry.” This program will be piloted soon and will be rolled out in time for your fall, winter, and spring programming. Through the sharing of personal stories about hunger, as well as possible solutions, we hope to mobilize congregations statewide to be anti-hunger experts!

If you are thankful for the food that God has given you, and if you believe in God’s ability to change hearts and minds, then be the voice of Jesus and advocate for those who need your help right now.

MCC is grateful for the generous support of the Episcopal Diocese and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development toward this new program.

MCC a Valued Partner in Advocacy
by Chris Hasteat, Maine Equal Justice Partners

For many years now we at Maine Equal Justice Partners have had the privilege and the joy of standing side by side with the Maine Council of Churches through some of the State’s toughest and most important debates over issues of economic and social justice. Throughout these challenging times we could not have asked for a more committed or effective partner than the Council. The strong moral voice that it brings to these debates underscores the urgency with which we need to address some of the most important issues of our times. The Council has been a leader in advocating for and protecting access to health care for Mainers with very little income compelling policy makers to recognize the basic human right that such action demands. You have stood with us on issue affecting families that receive public benefits and offered an ethical and compassionate counter to the cruel rhetoric and stereotyping that to too often drive this debate. Council members have spoken for increases in the minimum wage and the state earned income tax credit, both efforts to recognize the basic human dignity of work, and the need for wages to rightly value that work.

To say we are grateful doesn’t begin to describe how we feel towards the Council. It is more appropriate to say that the State of Maine and the lives of those who live here are far better for your work. For that we offer our deepest thanks.
Facilitating Civil Discourse During Campaign Season

Last fall, the Maine Council of Churches piloted a series of congregation-based events, providing resources for churches to organize local prayers for civil discourse in political campaigns through the November elections.

Again in 2014, MCC will take a lead role in calling for civil discourse among candidates and campaigns for local, state and federal offices. We are planning to host at least one event this fall, and hope to facilitate dialogue among candidates in Maine’s gubernatorial election, among others.

Thank You, Leslie Manning!

The Council would like to thank Leslie Manning for her leadership and guidance over the past year as President of MCC. She helped to shepherd our organization through substantial changes in structure, all the while maintaining the good work and integrity of the Council. Leslie remains on the Council as the denominational representative for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and she chairs our Public Policy Committee.

Judicatory Lunches

MCC recently hosted lunch for the judicatory leaders of our member denominations. The March meeting was attended by six out of nine denominational leaders, who enjoyed a fruitful discussion that generated some great ideas for future efforts at MCC.

We plan to host these meetings on a quarterly basis as a way of providing updates on the work MCC is doing, and to emphasize these individuals’ crucial role as owners and stakeholders of the Council.

A Covenant for Civil Discourse

Adopted by the MCC board in 2009, the Covenant for Civil Discourse was signed by more than 80 candidates and campaign officials by September 2012. Those signing the covenant pledge:

1. To act respectfully toward others, including those who oppose me/us in public debate, and to attempt to understand others’ point(s) of view. I/we would extend this attitude of respect to all those engaged in civil discourse in America.

2. To refrain from personal attacks, while maintaining the right to vigorously disagree.

3. To refrain from making statements which characterize my/our opponents as evil.

4. To refuse to make untrue statements in defense of my/our position.

5. To value honesty, truth, and civility while striving to find workable solutions.

6. To expect any person, party, campaign or organization working on my behalf, or to whom I contribute money, to meet these same standards for civil discourse.

To download a copy of the Covenant, or to view a list of candidates who have signed the Covenant, please visit the MCC website and select the “Witness” tab.
I/we want to be a friend of Maine Council of Churches with a gift of:

- $1,000
- $500
- $250
- $100
- $50
- Other $__________

Name: __________________________________________________________________________________

Address: ________________________________________________________________________________

City: ___________________________________________ State: _________ Zip: ________________

Phone: ___________________________________________ Email: _______________________________

Please make your check payable to Maine Council of Churches.

To make a secure online donation via PayPal, visit our website and select the “Donate” tab.

The Maine Council of Churches is a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Please mail this form with your gift to: Maine Council of Churches, 156 High Street, Portland, ME 04101. Thank you!