



I write this during Lent. But you are reading these words after Easter. I write this as mud-stained snow still lines Maine's roadsides. You are reading it, most likely, when you can look almost anywhere and see something green and growing.

"Times are tough," we're all saying now, and we speak the truth. But it's the job of the church, especially in its ecumenical incarnation, to know and live a larger truth. A better way is possible; abundant life is available; a light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. There is enough bread and fish to feed all without destroying the basket, sacrificing the community that shares it or rejecting the source of the food.

The miracle in the story of the loaves and fishes could not have occurred if even one human being in that vast crowd had made a selfish decision. If you and your children were hungry (or worried that someday you might be),

Pass It Along

by The Rev. Jill Job Saxby, Executive Director

He said to the twelve, "you give them something to eat." (Luke 9:13)

and someone handed you an endless basket of food, wouldn't it be the most natural thing in the world to hang onto it and not pass it along to your neighbor, much less that suspicious looking stranger sitting down the end of the row, or those people you've never even met, 50 rows back?

But on that day, in that story about how life is and how it could be, nobody held onto the basket. Each one refused to be the one who would stop the abundance flowing. Somehow, people decided to participate in the miracle unfolding in their midst even if they didn't see where it had begun or where it would end.

During these difficult times, aren't we being asked to do at least that much? The Maine Council of Churches exists to provide a united voice for our particular communities of faith, joined together in this unique way. On issues ranging from health care to poverty to climate change to human rights, we say, together, that there is "enough for all without destroying ourselves or the earth – but only if we all keep passing the basket to our neighbor."

The Council embodies this message just by its 70 year existence. State-wide, MCC brings together Maine's Protestants, Roman Catholics and Unitarian Universalists in mutual respect, collaboration and commitment to seeking common ground for the sake of the common good. By its very nature, MCC stands against the idea of "every church for itself," and for the idea that abundance is made possible by sharing, not only our resources, but our convictions, our voice, our hope. Inside this newsletter, you'll find information about what the Council is doing and how you can get involved.

Please visit our new website, find us on Facebook, help us organize events in your own community. In the end, the Council is nothing more and nothing less than a set of relationships. If you are reading this, you are already part of that ecumenical social justice legacy and its future. Please take what you need, give what you can and pass the basket along to your neighbors, including those 100 rows away, who will need its shared abundance in the future. They are depending on us to live in these times but to believe, with hope, in theirs.

And all ate and were filled. (Luke 9:17)

Board of Directors

Rev. Gary Akeley
United Methodist Representative

Fran Bagdasarian
Roman Catholic

Paul Cates
Religious Society of Friends Representative

Roger W. Comstock
Unitarian Universalist

Rev. Elaine Hewes
Evangelical Lutheran Representative

Bishop S. Clifton Ives
United Methodist

David Juers
Unitarian Universalist

Kenneth McAfee
*Treasurer
United Church of Christ*

Silver Moore-Leamon
*President
United Church of Christ Representative*

Rev. Ruth Morrison
United Methodist

Marc Muttly
*Vice President
Roman Catholic*

Rev. Elsa Peters
United Church of Christ

Christopher Pottle
Episcopal Representative

Rev. Richard Sanner
Presbyterian USA Representative

Rev. Richard Senghas
Roman Catholic Representative

Rev. Lev Sherman
Episcopal

Rev. Ken Turley
Swedenborgian Representative

Anne Underwood, Esq.
Roman Catholic

Kim Wettlaufer
Episcopal

Rev. Kitsy Winthrop
Unitarian Universalist

Donna Yellen
Roman Catholic

MAINE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

19 Pleasant Avenue, Portland, ME 04103

Phone: (207) 772-1918
info@mainecouncilofchurches.org
www.mainecouncilofchurches.org

STAFF

Executive Director: Jill Job Saxby
Office Manager: Sandra Buzzell
Associate Director: Eric C. Smith
Development Director: Martha Stein

For the Common Good

The Maine Council of Churches (MCC) has been engaged in a wide range of activities and programs since the beginning of 2009.

Health Care Reform: Maine Voices for Coverage (MVC)

A coalition of Maine organizations, including MCC, is focused on “transparency”—a call for insurers and providers to give more information (be more transparent) to those who use and pay for health care services. Having this information will enable us to make better informed decisions. On January 15th, MCC Associate Director Eric C. Smith spoke at a press conference on this issue, along with other MVC members. To learn more about transparency in medical care and other issues related to health care reform, please visit our webpage on this topic at: www.mainecouncilofchurches.org/healthcare.

Rev. Saxby Goes to Washington

Executive Director Rev. Jill Saxby attended the National Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Advocacy Days on March 13-16 in Washington, DC. She met colleagues from all over the country and attended workshops on climate change, the anti-torture campaign and on improving advocacy skills. Rev. Saxby joined Rich Killmer and Matt Hawthorne of National Religious Campaign Against Torture and visited with staffs of Senators Collins and Snowe, and Reps. Pingree and Michaud to advocate for new, anti-torture and human rights laws. See page 3 for more information on this topic.

MCC Sponsors CSA Fairs throughout Maine

On February 11th MCC, in cooperation with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) and other local groups, sponsored eleven Community Supported Agricultural (CSA Fairs). Our Environmental Justice Consultant Andy Burt organized these events which were attended by approximately 1000 individuals at the various sites. Our thanks to the nine churches that hosted the fairs. This year, some of the fairs included local fishing families in addition to farmers. Churches and congregations are reminded that there are still CSA shares available throughout the state. Contact MOFGA at www.mofga.org for more information.



Preparing for the Norway CSA fair: The Rev. Anne Stanley of Christ Episcopal Church, Ken Morse of Healthy Oxford Hills and Rev. Brendan Harnett of St. Catherine's Catholic Church. Photo by the Advertiser-Democrat, Norway, ME.

The CSA fairs are just one example of our Food and Faith programs. Food and Faith projects look at the connections between our body and spirit, our faith and food.

(For the Common Good continues on page 5)



Maine Council of Churches launches
Maine Religious Campaign Against Torture

www.maineCouncilofChurches.org/notorture

With a new grant from the **Open Society Institute** and in partnership with the **National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)**, the Maine Council of Churches has launched a new **Maine Religious Campaign Against Torture**.

Since 2006, MCC has been a member of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. In partnership with NRCAT, the Maine Religious Campaign Against Torture will work with Maine religious communities and faith-based activists to:

- Advocate for new, federal anti-torture and human rights laws—**because though the President's recent Executive Orders are a large step in the right direction, they can be reversed by a future administration.**
- Advocate for a non-partisan Commission of Inquiry with highly-respected members and subpoena power, to investigate torture policies and practices since 9/11/01 **because telling the truth about what happened is the first step toward ensuring that it never happens again.**
- Build a grassroots network of faith-based advocates who believe that torture is always wrong—**because the prophetic religious voice must be heard on behalf of the dignity of all human beings, saying "torture is a moral issue."**

How You and Your Congregation Can Get Involved

Sign the Call for an Independent Commission of Inquiry at www.maineCouncilofChurches.org/notorture online or print a petition to collect signatures in your faith community and mail back to MCC.

Fill out and return the form on the next page. Let us know how you'd like to be involved and how we can help you organize in your community. Return the tear-off sheet below, or email us at jsaxby@mainecouncilofchurches.org.

June is Torture Awareness Month. Plan an event, Bible study, video screening/discussion in your congregation, or join other local faith communities to co-sponsor an event. Lots of ideas and resources are available on our website or at www.nrcat.org. We would be pleased to help you plan and publicize a local event to raise awareness and participate in this campaign. Consider purchasing an anti-torture banner from NRCAT or creating one of your own to display on your church building.

Five Goals to End Torture

1. Secure an **Executive Order banning torture**—President Obama signed this executive order on January 22, 2009—just two days after taking the Oath of Office.
2. Secure a non-partisan **Commission of Inquiry** that will investigate and disclose the torture policies and practices of the U.S. government since September 11, 2001.
3. Monitor the special task force created by the Presidential executive order on interrogation to ensure that its recommendations provide for strong safeguards against rendition for torture.
4. Codify into law the elements of the executive order and other important anti-torture provisions:
 - **The “Golden Rule”**: Congress should create one national standard for interrogation by requiring the President to affirm publicly that every interrogation technique authorized for use by Americans is based upon the “Golden Rule” (would be considered proper if used on American soldiers).
 - **ICRC Access**: President Obama has ordered that the International Committee of the Red Cross be allowed access to all detainees. Congress should codify this into law.
 - **Video Recording of All Interrogations**.
 - **Repealing the MCA**: the Military Commissions Act (MCA) promotes the use of torture by allowing use of evidence gained through coercion and protecting officials who authorized/ordered abuse of detainees.
 - **Ending Rendition for Torture**: Once the Special Task Force makes its proposal on rendition, Congress should pass legislation ensuring that no person is transferred to another country if the person would be at substantial risk of being tortured.
 - **The Torture Victims Relief Act**: Congress should pass H.R. 1511, the Torture Victims Relief Act, funding domestic and international torture treatment centers to help survivors rebuild their lives.
5. **Grassroots Organizing**: Increase the number of people in the U.S. who believe that torture is always wrong—without exception. With support and resources provided by NRCAT, the MCC will encourage individuals and congregations to get involved through worship and study; community outreach (videos, dialogue, banners, posters, bumper stickers and public events), especially during Torture Awareness Month, June 2009.

Tear off and return to: MCC, 19 Pleasant Ave., Portland, ME 04103

Sign up to Participate in the Maine Religious Campaign Against Torture

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: address: _____

Your congregation or denominational affiliation: _____

I am willing to: (check all that apply):

- Sign the Call for a Commission of Inquiry (email required to register you on the petition with NRCAT)
- Receive occasional email action alerts from MCC on this topic (limited emails--we promise!)
- Email or call Senators Snowe or Collins and/or my Congressional Representative as legislation makes its way through Congress
- Write a letter to the editor
- Join other faith-based advocates for an op-ed board visit to one of Maine's newspapers
- Join others for an in-District visit with my Representative or Senators Snowe or Collins (or their staff)
- Organize a Bible study, video/discussion, letter-writing table or other event in my congregation
 - sometime in the next 12 months
 - in June, 2009 for Torture Awareness Month

For the Common Good

(continued from page 2)

Good News for the Environment

Environmental champion Andy Burt continues to represent Maine Council of Churches as one of the members of Maine Partners for Cool Communities. This coalition also includes Maine Energy Investment Corporation as well as the Maine chapters of the Sierra Club, Physicians for Social Responsibility and American Lung Association. Andy has been helping churches, synagogues and other community groups learn how to reduce energy consumption. The goals of this group are to reduce energy costs, take actions to build a clean energy economy, create good “green” jobs, improve public health through cleaner air and save tax payer dollars. If your church is interested in joining the many other “cool congregations” please contact Andy Burt at 882-6848 or adburt@gwi.net.

We were made in the image of God and placed in the garden to serve and protect the Creation.
(*Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:15*).

Sally Chappell, our Environmental Health and Toxics consultant, has identified her Christian mission as three E’s—ecumenism, ecology and education. Through a grant funded by the National Council of Churches, Sally has been working to educate congregations and individuals as to the hazards of environmental toxics. Clergy are asked to consider signing on to endorse *Christian Principles*

for a Healthy Body and Spirit. To read this document in full, go to www.ncccecojustice.org/ehprinciples.html. These principles were drafted as a collaborative effort of the National Council of Churches in consultation with its member denominations, and other ecumenical partners, including the Maine Council of Churches.

The Maine Council of Churches, in conjunction with 27 other organizations, has signed on as a partner in the Environmental Priorities Coalition. The coalition has identified six bills that will be brought before the Maine legislature. These bills include direct help for Maine families by providing funds for home weatherization and provisions that streamline and expand training and certification for energy auditors and installers to help Maine’s clean energy sector grow.

MCC Responds to the Recession

Economic Justice Consultant Dolores Vail continues her work encouraging neighboring churches to work together to develop both short and long term solutions to poverty on their communities. In April Dolores visited with ecumenical groups in Belfast and Farmington and the Good Samaritan Mission Committee of the Bath UCC church. Check our webpage for updates: www.mainecouncilofchurches/economicjustice. Dolores will report on strategies that have worked, challenges faced and ideas that might be replicated in other areas. While churches will not be able to solve the problems of poverty alone, it is amazing what can be accomplished when we work together to take care of our neighbors. Dolores may be contacted at tvail@maine.rr.com.

(MCC responds. . . continued next page)

www.mainecouncilofchurches.org

MCC is glad to announce that we have relaunched our website to bring you more information, faster and in an easy to use format. Staff members are now able to update the site without requiring the assistance of a technician. This allows us to keep you up to date and provide more details on issues and programs. We invite you to explore our site.

Please note that the calendar includes postings from churches and non-profit community members. We would be glad to include your social justice, environmental or human rights/peace events or programs. And if your church is working on an issue that you think others would like to hear about, let us know and we might feature your good works on our website.

Not online? Please call us at 772-1918. We would be glad to mail you any information mentioned in this newsletter.

Ecumenical Worship

MCC and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland hosted an ecumenical prayer service at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Lewiston on Sunday, January 25. The service was organized by Fr. Richard Senghas, Roman Catholic Director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Several MCC staff and Board members and Denominational Executives participated in the service.

MCC and the Interfaith Community Responds to Hate Vandalism

MCC joined hundreds of community members from diverse faith traditions to stand with members of Congregation Shaarey Tphiloh in Portland on February 1, 2009 as the synagogue removed a swastika that had been painted outside its building. Rabbi Akiva Herzfeld contacted the Council shortly after the swastika was discovered the morning of January 30th. When Rabbi Herzfeld said “we just don’t want to feel like we are alone” MCC immediately notified church and community members of this incident through phone calls and the Maine Faith Action Response (MEFAR) email network. Representatives of many MCC member churches turned out on the cold Sunday morning to support members of the synagogue. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, and many area churches also sent messages of support.

Following the removal of the vandalism outside, the crowd gathered inside the synagogue to hear remarks by community leaders. MCC Associate Director Eric C. Smith spoke on behalf of the ecumenical Christian community expressing sorrow for this threat to the community, and promising support to the congregation at this time of grief. Smith reflected on the words of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who worked against the rise of the Nazi state in Germany. “Bonhoeffer wrote that when the wheels of injustice are turning, the church has three roles: to call attention to the injustice, to care for those who have been thrown beneath the wheels, and to throw ourselves into the spokes to prevent it from turning further. We are here today to do all three.”

For more information on the MEFAR network and how you can stay informed of responses to hate incidents in the interfaith community, please contact Eric C. Smith at esmith@mainecouncilofchurches.org.

MCC Responds to the Recession (continued from previous page)

New Resource on General Assistance for Pastors and Churches

The MCC Economic Justice Program has produced a new resource card to help pastors and churches better understand General Assistance (GA) programs in Maine. With many churches receiving increased requests for financial assistance from community members, referrals to municipal offices to apply for GA can be an important step in helping people in immediate need. Pastors can be an important link in helping individuals apply and ensure their application is treated fairly. The GA cards are being mailed to all MCC member congregations in April. You can also view and download this resource on the Economic Justice page of our website.

MCC Opposes Legislation Aimed at Maine’s Most Vulnerable

On Tuesday, March 31, Executive Director Rev. Jill Saxby provided testimony in opposition to Maine state bills LD 254, An Act to Enact a 5-Point Welfare Reform Program and LD 321, An Act to Impose a State Residency Requirement for Eligibility for General Assistance. Rev. Saxby stated “the best measure of Maine’s strength – morally, socially and economically – is the way we treat the most vulnerable among us.” Proponents of these bills suggest severe new limits on individuals and families who receive general assistance and TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families), without consideration for parents caring for children, caregivers to the disabled, or other circumstances. The full text of Rev. Saxby’s testimony can be found on our website at www.mainecouncilofchurches.org/sermons.

The Other Maine

by Eric C. Smith, Associate Director

Maine is a small state. That's not something you hear very often – especially from denominational or ecumenical representatives charged with covering all 33,414 square miles. But there are only 10 states in the union smaller than us in area, or population. Still, because of the diversity of our landscapes, histories, and cultures, I have heard about the “other Maine” for most of my life here. Sometimes this “otherness” is defined in terms of geography: the other side of a river or route. More frequently it comes down to economics: access to jobs, industry, and services.

Economic Justice is a primary concern of the Maine Council of Churches, and a challenge facing congregations all over Maine. Our recent visits to churches on the northern and eastern edges of the state revealed a commonality with other regions.

Grace Braley, a member of the MCC Public Policy Committee, spent time in December visiting churches in Aroostook County, speaking with members of St. John's Episcopal Church and St. Mary's Catholic Church in Preque Isle, United Parish Church UCC in Fort Fairfield, and St. Louis' Catholic Church in Fort Kent. She learned about their particular ministries and listened to their local concerns.

In March I was invited to preach at Centre Street Congregational Church UCC in Machias, and I spent time visiting with other members of the ecumenical community in Washington County, including St. Aiden's Episcopal Church, Whitneyville Congregational Church UCC, Roque Bluffs Community Church, and Community of Christ Church in Jonesport. We spoke of the challenges in their communities, and the mission programs central to their life together.

All of these congregations, just like so many in central and southern Maine, are engaged in sharing food with the hungry, helping ensure neighbors stay safe and warm throughout the winter, reaching out to those who are disconnected, and assisting others in nearly every kind of need. As is so often the case when I ask a group of churches to tell me what they do in their community, I was inspired and exhausted by the list. Yet they are also looking outward at the systemic issues of healthcare, human rights, domestic violence, immigration, and environmental justice.

These visits give us insight into the daily work of so many people who are building up their communities and repairing the world in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Their stories inspire us to continue our work of uniting people of faith and congregations across denominations and across regions of our state to work together on tough issues that affect us all. Together we are continuing a faith tradition where the concerns of the marginalized and the “other” are always central.

Did you know. . .

that less than 15% of the Maine Council of Churches' operating funds are provided by our member denominations?

This means that we rely on the generosity of churches and individuals to do our work. Please be as generous as you are able so we can continue our important work.

Thank you!

Keep the Beacon Shining Brightly!

by Martha Stein, Development Dir.

In the year since I joined the Maine Council of Churches I have learned a lot and had an opportunity to meet many of our friends and long time supporters. MCC's 70th anniversary celebration was a success as nearly 200 of us joined together to recognize the many accomplishments of the Council. I am especially pleased to have launched our new website (see article on page 5).

As you can see from the articles in this newsletter, we have been busy—yet there is much work to be done. While never wavering in our determination to work towards a better world, we are faced with significant financial challenges that impact our operations. A few years ago, the Council recognized that the proceeds of a single bequest could not sustain it indefinitely. Difficult decisions were made—programs and jobs were eliminated, and the MCC emerged as a smaller, but still powerful force.

Unfortunately, there was no way to predict the downturn in the economy. MCC, like many other nonprofit organizations, churches and individuals, has seen the value of its invested funds plummet, and is once again facing financial difficulties. But, with your help, our beacon can continue to shine brightly! **Every contribution is important. If you haven't given to us before, please consider doing so today. If you are already a financial supporter, we thank you but ask that in these extraordinary times, you consider making an extra donation this year.** Your contribution will help ensure MCC will be here for current and future generations.

Save the Date!

On **Saturday, May 9th** the Maine Council of Churches will hold a program and fundraiser at O'Natural's, 83 Exchange Street, Portland from 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. At 4:00 and 6:00 pm Andy Burt will present information on **climate change and the role Maine's churches and communities are playing in addressing this critical issue**. We will also be holding a sale and silent auction. The sale will include books, plants and other modestly priced items. The silent auction will be conducted from 4:30 to 6:30 pm. **Auction items include trips, tickets to sporting events, original artwork and more**. A children's craft table will keep little ones busy! O'Naturals will donate 10% of the afternoon's proceeds from food sales to the Maine Council of Churches.

We hope to see you there. This event is a great opportunity for MCC staff and friends to reconnect and raise much needed funds for the Council. And you might find a great last minute Mothers' Day gift or something for yourself while supporting a good cause. There is no charge to attend the environmental presentation, children's activities or to participate in the auction.

For more information on this event, including a list of auction items, please **go to our website or contact the MCC office**.

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage PAID
Permit #406
Portland, ME