

Seeking common ground, working for the common good

Civil Discourse Fall 2016: “From Mudslinging To Mutual Respect”

Featuring Senator George Mitchell, October 20 in Waterville

As part of its ongoing commitment to promoting civility in politics, and in response to the disturbing vitriolic rhetoric pervading so much of public life today, the Council will host an important election year event on Thursday, October 20, in Waterville featuring Senator George Mitchell. Doors will open at 7:30am for a continental breakfast, and Senator Mitchell will begin speaking promptly at 8:00am.

The event, entitled *From Mudslinging to Mutual Respect: How to Make Politics More Civil*, will focus on what grassroots constituents and voters can do to support those candidates and elected officials who abide by the principles of civil discourse, and to hold accountable and change the behavior of those who do not. Senator Mitchell will reflect on these questions in light of his own experiences building bipartisan coalitions in the Senate from 1980 to 1994, and working for peace as

U.S. Special Envoy to Northern Ireland (1995-2001) and to the Middle East (2009-2011).



The Council was delighted that Senator Mitchell accepted our invitation to speak on this important topic during such a difficult time in our nation’s political life. Throughout his extraordinary career he has embodied a commitment to the ideals of civil discourse and statesmanship, exemplified by his now famous response to Oliver North during the Iran-Contra hearings in 1987: "Please remember that it is possible for an American to disagree with you on aid to the Contras and still love God, and still love this country, just as much as you do. Although He is regularly asked to do so, God does not take sides in American politics."

The October 20 event is free and open to the public. More details will be available on our website and Facebook page soon. Our website also has information about the Council’s civil discourse program, including links to our Civil Discourse Covenants.

MCC Urges Legislature to be Civil

Although the second session of the 127th Maine State Legislature will be known as one of the most contentious in the state’s history, it didn’t start out that way.

It began on January 6 in the House with a well-received prayer by the Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director of the MCC, reminding us that “politics is a noble calling to serve the common good.”

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Maine Council of Churches
www.mainecouncilofchurches.org
156 High Street, Portland, ME 04101
(207) 772-1918

From the Executive Director

I once heard theologian Donald Miller, author of *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*, speaking to an audience about storytelling. First he asked them to call out the names of their favorite movies. No problem—people thought of dozens of films. Then he said, “Now, call out your favorite parts of the Nicene Creed!” Awkward silence. His point? Truth is rooted in story, not rational systems. “The chief role of a Christian,” Miller says, “is to tell a better story.”



I was reminded of this lecture a few weeks ago when Cush Anthony and I sat in a wonderful fundraising workshop hosted by the Maine Association of Nonprofits. The facilitator, a dynamic and effervescent young woman named Alyssa Wright from the consulting firm *Raising Change*, told the group of nonprofit leaders, “The most effective and powerful thing you can do to help your organization is tell a passionate, inspirational and hope-driven story about what you do.” I remember thinking “Passionate, inspirational and hope-driven story? That’s a story church folks should know how to tell better than anyone!” After all, Jesus was a master storyteller, and Hebrew and Christian scriptures are a collection of some of the most passionate, inspirational and hope-driven stories the world has ever heard.

In recent months, I have had the privilege and opportunity to tell the Maine Council of Churches story to denominational gatherings of Quakers and Unitarian Universalists, and to preach to Presbyterian, UCC, and Lutheran congregations around our state, sharing the good news of all that the Council is doing to build a community of justice, compassion and peace. Members of our Board of Directors have been making presentations to their home churches and to other organizations interested in hearing about our mission and work. We hope that you will invite us to come and tell our story to your church, civic organization or residential community.

In the meantime, I hope that you will enjoy reading the compelling stories found in this edition of our newsletter—stories of advocacy, prophetic justice, peacemaking and vision. And I hope that these stories will move you to join us in seeking common ground and working for the common good here in Maine.

Blessings,

Rev. Jane Field
Executive Director

This newsletter is published twice annually by the Maine Council of Churches. Layout editor: Jennifer Dimond.

Wrap-up for the 2nd Session of the 127th Maine State Legislature

by Suzanne Lafreniere, Chair of the Public Policy Committee

The MCC Public Policy Committee identified five legislative priorities for this session of the Legislature. Throughout the past four months, the Committee has monitored progress, pursued advocacy through one-on-one meetings with key legislators, published letters to the editor and editorials in several newspapers, encouraged our supporters to speak with their representatives and senators, and worked closely with many of our official partners to ensure our efforts were closely coordinated with theirs. Here is a brief summary of the outcomes:

- LD 886 creates a new \$4 million appropriation to increase reimbursement rates for home- and community-based-care for senior citizens. The bill passed the House and Senate with veto-proof majorities in both chambers.
- LD 1531 provides that victims of aggravated sex trafficking are eligible to file for protection from abuse orders and protection from harassment orders. It passed in both chambers and was signed into law by the Governor on April 7.
- LD1649 creates a comprehensive solar policy for Maine, which is currently last in the region in solar development and job creation. It was crafted by an extensive group of stakeholders, including solar businesses and workers, municipal and community leaders, environmental groups, Maine's public advocate and utility companies. After lots of twists and turns, it passed but was vetoed by the Governor; the Legislature failed to override the veto by two votes.
- LD 633 is the sixth attempt at Medicaid expansion in Maine. It expands Medicaid but requires beneficiaries to pay a small premium, a "private option" model adopted in many other states. The bill was tabled and died on adjournment.
- Despite legislative discussions about a partial rollback of the new constitutional carry law that allows concealed guns to be carried without a permit, the proposal did not make it past the first step and failed to win approval from bipartisan leadership.

Council Votes to Support Passage of Two Ballot Initiatives in November

In November, Maine voters will face a slew of referenda on the ballot. Upon recommendation from the Public Policy Committee, the MCC Board of Directors has voted to publicly support two of them, and to take no position, for or against, on all others. The two initiatives MCC is endorsing are:

"An Act To Raise the Minimum Wage"—This citizen-initiated bill raises the minimum wage from \$7.50 to \$9 per hour in 2017 and by \$1 per hour each year after that until it is \$12 per hour in 2020. The minimum wage then increases at the same rate as the cost of living. The minimum wage for workers who receive tips increases from \$3.75 to \$5 per hour in 2017 and then by \$1 per hour each year until it matches the minimum wage for all other workers, which occurs no sooner than 2024.

"An Act To Require Background Checks for Gun Sales"—This citizen-initiated bill requires a background check before a firearm sale or transfer between individuals not licensed as firearm dealers. If neither party to a sale or transfer has a federal firearms license, the parties meet at a licensed firearm dealer, who conducts a background check on the transferee and completes the sale or transfer as though selling or transferring from the dealer's own inventory. Exceptions to the background check requirement are made for transfers between family members, while the parties are hunting or sport shooting, for emergency self-defense, in the presence of the transferor and in other circumstances.

Receive MCC News by Email



If you would like to go paperless by receiving our newsletter via email, please let us know! Simply email us at info@mainecouncilofchurches.org and include: your name, mailing address where you've been receiving this newsletter, and your preferred email address. You'll

receive an electronic version of the MCC News starting with the Fall 2016 issue, as well as our biweekly e-blast with the MCC blog and one or two short informational articles. Rest assured we value your privacy and will not share your email address or send you more than 2 emails/month plus the bi-annual newsletter.

UPDATE: The conservation program in partnership with Dead River Company to help churches save energy, originally scheduled for this spring, has been postponed until further notice.

What's MaineShare and Why is Their Ad in This Newsletter??

MaineShare gives employees in Maine workplaces an easy way to give a few dollars a week from their paycheck and support groups doing progressive social justice and root cause work on environmental and human problems facing our state. Maine Council of Churches is one of more than 40 statewide organizations designated as member groups who are eligible to receive tax deductible donations from employees of workplaces who facilitate payroll contributions through MaineShare. We are extremely grateful for the generous donations we get each year from folks all over Maine who choose us to receive their contributions through MaineShare. It's an efficient and effective way for donors to give, and allows us to spend less time fundraising and more time working to prevent and solve Maine's pressing problems. If your workplace already participates in MaineShare, please consider designating us to receive your contributions. If your workplace isn't participating yet, please have them contact MaineShare to get signed up! (207-622-0105; giving@maineshare.org)



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Civil Legislature

continued from page 1

She called on God, in the midst of a world plagued by division and conflict, to “help these legislators and help us, their constituents, to find a better way along a higher road, where we have the humility to remember that we have much to learn from people who see things differently than we do.”

The Council also provided legislators in both the House and the Senate with a letter, thanking them for their service and urging them to abide by the Council's Civil Discourse Covenant, which includes a pledge to treat others with respect, honesty, common courtesy and the dignity everyone deserves, and to refrain from personal attacks and characterizing others as evil.



Several legislators thanked Rev. Field for her words as she left the House chambers.

“God of justice and compassion, God of Republicans, and Democrats, and Independents, God of the poor, and the 1%, and the middle class, help us to break down the walls that divide us. Heal those here who have been hurt by adversarial rhetoric or uncivil conversation, who have heard others belittle their deepest beliefs. Forgive those here who have hurt others by using adversarial rhetoric and uncivil remarks, who have belittled the beliefs of others.”

Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C.

Over 700 people gathered in Washington, D.C. April 15-18 for the annual advocacy conference sponsored by the ecumenical Christian community. This year's theme was *Lift Every Voice! Racism, Class and Power*. The goal of the yearly conference is to strengthen the Christian voice and mobilize for advocacy on specific U. S. domestic and international policy issues. John Hennessy, Director of the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice and member of the Maine Council of Churches Public Policy Committee, was there representing the Episcopal Diocese and the Maine Council of Churches. John tells us, “The energy throughout the weekend was intense. In a major U.S. election year, with so much at stake, it was a powerful experience to participate in workshops and plenary events with progressive faith leaders from around the country.”



John Hennessy

The Rev. Dr. William Barber, President of the North Carolina NAACP & Convener of *Forward Together Moral Movement* was the keynote speaker who opened the conference. Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund, addressed the “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” in her remarks to the conference and spoke of the immoral rise of poverty and hunger in our nation, where we have the second highest rates among 35 industrialized countries despite having the largest economy in the world.

John will be briefing the MCC Public Policy Committee on the conference and sharing what he learned about how we can be stronger advocates as followers of Christ here in Maine where our voice is needed.

MCC Welcomes New President and Board Members

In January, the Board of Directors welcomed a new President, **Bonny Rodden**, who has served on the Board for the past two years, and been a part of its



Public Policy, Executive, Finance, and Executive Director Search Committees, the Communications Task Force, and the Civil Discourse Working Group. At the outset of her presidency, Rodden announced a top priority of strengthening the Council's connections to local churches.

"We need to reach the people in the pews," she reminded the Board.

"We need to let them know who we are, what we do for them, and how they can get involved in our mission to work for the common good." Rodden has had a long and distinguished career in journalism and public service and is a member of the Episcopal Church of Saint Mary in Falmouth.

Rev. Ken Turley is the new denominational representative to the Board from the Swedenborgian Church. In addition to serving as the pastor of the New Jerusalem Church in Fryeburg, and as President of the Swedenborgian Church in North America, he is also an accomplished musician, composer and recording artist.



Karen McLean Hessel is a new at-large member of the Board. A retired director of the Justice for Women program at the National Council of Churches, she is currently the co-convenor of Interfaith Worker Justice Southern Maine. Her roots are in the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) and she currently worships at First Congregational Church, South Portland.



Rev. Carolyn Lambert is a new at-large member of the Board who currently serves as the Senior Pastor of the Woodfords Congregational Church in Portland, and as Chaplain for the Kennebunk Police Department. Before her call to the ministry, she was an innkeeper in Kennebunkport for 25 years.



Charlie Priest is the newly appointed representative to the Board from the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. He is a Vietnam veteran who served for fourteen years in the Maine State House of Representatives. He is a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brunswick.



Rev. Alyssa Lodewick is the newly appointed representative to the Board from the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ. She is the Associate Director of the BTS Center overseeing their Innovation Incubator program. She is a member and trustee of the State Street Church in Portland.

Thanks to Retiring Board Members

The Maine Council of Churches bid a fond farewell to three members of the Board of Directors who, after serving the Council and their denominations faithfully for years, retired from the Board in December.

Richard Berman, a real estate developer who chaired the Board from 2014-2015, served for three years. He was also the representative of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, and chaired the Development Committee.

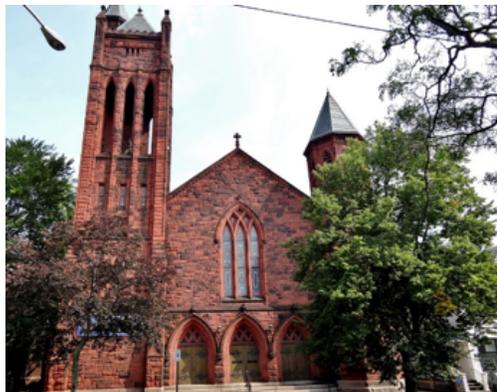
Marc Mutty served the Council for many years, working on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland and the MCC on public policy issues in Augusta as a member of MCC's Public Policy Committee.

Rev. Kitsy Winthrop, an ardent environmentalist who brought a revolving globe to Board meetings as a reminder of our responsibility to protect God's creation. A long-time member of the board, she was the denominational representative for the Unitarian Universalist Association and a member of the Public Policy Committee.

The Council thanks these cherished colleagues for their faithful service.

Why the State Street Church Donates to MCC

by Rev. Dr. Jeanette Good, Pastor



When the Maine Council of Churches wrote a faith-based and challenging letter to Governor LePage, we noticed. When the Maine Council of Churches sponsored a vigil against gun violence, we attended. When the Maine Council of Churches demonstrated that they are uniting the faith community to be a voice of justice and compassion in the public arena, we prayed for them. When the Maine Council of Churches said that they needed our financial help, we wrote a check, because we need the voice of the Maine Council of Churches to stand up for our core values.

The State Street Congregational Church of The United Church of Christ, located at 159 State Street in Portland, has been a faithful supporter of the Maine Council of Churches and a generous donor for many years.

Why We Give to the Maine Council of Churches

by Cliff Ives

I first met my future wife, Jane, during my junior year in high school sixty-one years ago. I went to her home church in Hallowell, Maine, to speak about my experience on an ecumenical youth trip to the United Nations in New York sponsored by the Maine Council of Churches. The trip was the first of a lifetime of ecumenical experiences which have shaped and enriched our lives. Participation in the ecumenical campus ministry at the University of Maine's Wilson Center laid a solid foundation for a lifetime commitment to The Maine Council and to National and World Councils of Churches. As a United Methodist pastor and spouse, we have appreciated how Councils of Churches have consistently amplified our voices of concern for justice, compassion, and peace. That is why we continued to support the Maine Council of Churches while living in another state, in addition to supporting that state's Council of Churches as well. Now, back home in Maine since 2004, we continue to appreciate and support the voice and witness of the Maine Council of Churches throughout our state and beyond. Through the years, our modest financial support has been an ongoing expression of our commitment to the Maine Council of Churches.



Bishop Cliff Ives and wife, Jane, live in Portland and attend HopeGateWay United Methodist Church. They have been faithful supporters of the Maine Council of Churches and generous donors for many years.

Board Celebrates the Achievements of Office Administrator Jennifer Dimond

At its April meeting, the MCC Board of Directors unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the significant accomplishments of our capable, patient, wise and creative office administrator, Jennifer Dimond. Two years ago, Jen decided to take a leap of faith and leave her successful marketing career to go back to school for an MSW. In addition to all of the work and responsibilities of being a full-time graduate student, Jen has continued to serve MCC as our part-time office administrator, and as our newsletter designer/producer. She manages our database, website, Facebook page, and donor acknowledgements, just to name a few of her duties. And when she wasn't busy at school or at the office, Jen found time to serve the Portland community as a member and then President of the Board of Directors of Hope Acts, a nonprofit that addresses needs for healthy living and housing security through its recovery and wellness programs, and its immigrant support programs including Hope House. For all these reasons and more, the Board would like to commend Jen and celebrate with her as she prepares to graduate this May. As the Apostle Paul would say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"



We Thank Our 2015-16 Donors*

Your Contributions Make a Difference

You can see in this newsletter the good work that the Council is doing to find common ground among our denominations to promote social justice and civility in public life. This is only possible through the hard work of our Executive Director, Board, and other involved volunteers, and through your support. One-third of our budget comes from individual and parish contributions. Please consider a gift now.

The Power of Planned Giving

MCC has, since the beginning of the year, been a beneficiary of the estates of two supporters; we are extraordinarily grateful for their generosity:



Jane Lester had been a donor to MCC for many years; her husband, Jim, once served on our Board. When they lived in Maine, they were members of the Midcoast Presbyterian Church.

They retired to Knoxville TN, but continued to value their Maine connections and the work of MCC. Shortly after Jane died in January, we learned that she included a gift to MCC in her estate.

Dorothy Larrabee, once a member of the United Baptist Church in Lewiston and later a member of the United Methodist Church in Auburn, had once served as a clerk for MCC. Upon Dorothy's death in October 2015, we learned that she and her husband Franklin had named MCC as a beneficiary of a trust held in their names.



Planned giving enables donors to provide for MCC in their estate plans, knowing their legacy will be used to continue the work of the Council for years to come. Planned giving also offers tax benefits; it is possible to provide for your family while also providing for MCC. Consult with your legal advisor, bank, or financial planner, and call us if we can provide additional information or assist with decisions.

Denominations*

ME Assoc. of the New Jerusalem Church
Maine Conference UCC
Maine Episcopal Missionary Society
New England Region UUA
New England Synod, ECLA
Synod of the Northeast, PCUSA

Churches*

Acadia Friends Meeting
Calvary UMW, Lewiston
Congregational Church in Cumberland
Durham Monthly Meeting of Friends
Falmouth Congregational Church
Falmouth Quarterly Friends Meeting
First Congregational Church, Wiscasset
First Parish Church, Brunswick
First Parish in Portland
First Parish, Gorham
First Universalist Church, South Paris
Hammond Street Congregational Church
Lewiston Friends Meeting
Southern Maine Friends Meeting
St. Michael's Parish, Augusta
State Street Church UCC
Somesville Union Meeting House UCC
Vassalboro Friends Meeting

Individuals*

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Sara Bancroft
Richard Berman

Merrill Bittner & Nancy Noppa
Dean & Mary Booher
Margrethe & William Brown
William & Karen Burke
Phyllis & Donald Chaffee
Janie Clark
Audrey Delafield
Diane Dicranian
Thomas Ewell
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