

Seeking common ground, working for the common good

PRAYING FOR A BUDGET THAT'S JUST AND HUMANE

Nearly 150 people at an interfaith prayer vigil in the State House Hall of Flags on Wednesday, February 22, held children's drawings of candles as leaders of ten faith traditions prayed for a moral, just and humane budget. Down the hall, the Appropriations Committee listened as Rev. Maria Hoecker (on behalf of Bishop Stephen Lane) and Rabbi Susan Carvutto testified against the governor's proposed budget. Thirty-five clergy wearing vestments stood behind them as a witness to the faith communities' solidarity with the poor, vulnerable and marginalized Mainers who would be harmed by the proposed budget cuts.



Paper candles shine at prayer vigil at the Statehouse.

Maine Council of Churches, Maine Episcopal Network for Justice, and Maine Equal Justice Partners worked together to organize the interfaith prayer vigil and testimony. Children of HopeGateWay, Woodfords Congregational, St. Mary's Episcopal,

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INTERFAITH ADVOCACY DAYS:

Putting Faith in Action in Augusta

Dressed in blue, a large cadre of faithful people button-holed their legislators in the halls of the Statehouse on March 28, advocating on behalf of the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and Mother Earth. They were equipped with facts and strategies they had learned during a two-day program called Interfaith Advocacy Days, organized by the Maine Council of Churches, the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice, and Preble Street Faith Action Network, and co-sponsored by Capital Area Multi-faith Association; Faith Linking In Action, Bangor; Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network; and the Winthrop Area Ministerial Association.

They filled the entire visitors' gallery in the House and were recognized by the Speaker. Then, as they drifted out into the halls again, they quickly learned the Statehouse is full of surprises. Word leaked out that the governor was giving an anti-welfare press conference so the newly minted advocates raced downstairs and congregated around the door. When the media stepped outside, dozens of people of faith greeted them, waving signs that called for a moral budget. Reporters quickly turned their cam-

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From the Executive Director

As this newsletter goes to press, we are focused intently on the 128th Legislature in Augusta. Hundreds of bills under consideration provide us with opportunities to speak from the perspective of our faith about social, economic and environmental justice, and to inspire, equip and empower congregations and people of faith across our state to do the same.

Meanwhile, our civil discourse group is helping to develop a pilot project to deepen understanding and strengthen relationships between immigrant communities and Mainers who have lived here for generations. And we are working with the Veterans' Administration office of chaplaincy to offer workshops for Maine clergy with veterans in their congregations who have suffered moral injury.

At the federal level, we have spoken out against the administration's travel ban, endorsed the "Together for Medicaid" initiative, and are proud that Board of Directors member Karen Hessel attended national Ecumenical Advocacy Days in DC.

At times like these, when the stress and the demands on our attention, energy and time can feel overwhelming, it is essential for us, as people of faith, to remember that only God can save the world. This is the very God who calls us "to ground our enduring, kingdom-oriented activism in the stillness of vocation rather than the anxiety of the world's brokenness" (Tyler Wigg-Stevenson), even as we answer Isaiah's prophetic call to be "repairers of the breach" who build up former devastations and repair ruined cities.

We pray that you will join us in answering that call.



Rev. Jane Field



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PRAYERS FOR A MORAL BUDGET (continued)



Interfaith Prayer Vigil in the State House Hall of Flags

and First Parish Unitarian Universalist Churches created the candle drawings, which were used as “stationery” by participants at the conclusion of the vigil to write letters to their representatives and senators that MEJP staff hand-delivered.

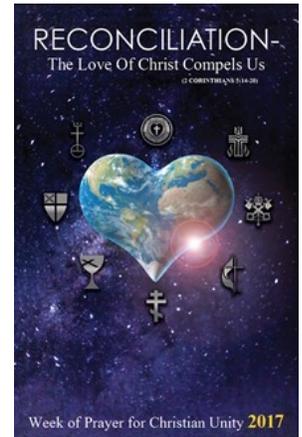
In her testimony, Rev. Hoecker said, “I believe the moral measure of any budget is how the most needy among us – “the least of these” – fare in our society.” At the prayer vigil, MCC Executive Director Rev. Jane Field said, “We pray that justice and compassion might shape the hearts and minds of our elected leaders so that they do not adopt a budget that shields the wealthiest among us while placing the heaviest burden on those who are already suffering the most.”

After the public vigil, MCC Public Policy Committee member Leslie Manning led a group who remained in the Hall of Flags throughout the afternoon to pray and keep vigil as the Appropriations Committee continued hearing testimony on the budget.



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Every January, Christians around the world celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The 2017 theme, “Reconciliation: The love of Christ compels us,” was the focus of worship services in Maine, including an ecumenical worship service in Brunswick on January 22, hosted by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and All Saints Parish, where MCC Executive Director Rev. Jane Field read the Gospel, and a service of evening prayer at St. Joseph’s College in Standish on January 25, where Rev. Field preached the homily and MCC Board Member Deacon Dan Sheridan led the liturgy.



CIVIL DISCOURSE NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER: On January 4, in the opening prayer for the first day of the 128th Legislature in Augusta, MCC Executive Director Jane Field urged House members to seek common ground and practice civil discourse, “showing reverence and respect for one another and the citizens whom you represent, even when—especially when—you disagree.” Board President Bonny Rodden delivered letters to all representatives and senators, thanking those who were among the record-breaking 189 signers of the Council’s Civil Discourse Covenant and urging those who had not yet signed to do so.

PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

“WALKS THE TALK”



When asked about the work of the Council’s Public Policy Committee since January, new chairperson Diane Dicranian replied, “All I can say is what a crazy and tumultuous ride it has been! We’ve reorganized our structure, changed meeting times and places. Since January the committee has actively participated in opposing or supporting over twelve different bills in Augusta, all the while keeping our sights focused on the importance MCC’s voice adds to every piece of legislation we address. I agreed to chair the committee because some key people promised to help in any way they could. When these special people of faith who daily walk the talk make that kind of promise, the possibilities become endless.”

Guided by John Hennessy from the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, Suzanne LaFreniere, Director of the Office of Public Policy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Leslie Manning of the Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy, and Dale McCormick of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, with input from partner organizations, detailed policy analysis from Joby Thoyalil of MEJP and advice from Andy Burt on environmental issues, the committee recommends action on bills directly related to MCC’s mission where the voice of faith can make a difference.

“We are a small group, mostly volunteers, aided by Cush Anthony from the Board of Directors and John Wilkerson (Midcoast Presbyterian Church, Topsham), with a new structure that allows for fluidity and quick response. With some trial and error, we’ve achieved a great deal of positive exposure and credibility in the eyes of church constituents and our legislators,” says Dicranian.

Overview of MCC Advocacy in 128th Maine Legislature

SUPPORTED: LD288 Prohibit Job Application Questions Regarding Criminal History

LD226 & Ballot Initiative to Expand Medicaid

LD1475 “LIFT” Comprehensive Bill Addressing Child Poverty in Maine

LD 1373 Solar Energy

ENDORSED: “Together For Medicaid” Initiative at Federal Level to Prevent Medicaid Cuts

OPPOSED: LD44 Lower Age for Concealed Gun From 21 to 18

LD 33 & LD220 Cut or Limit TANF Benefits

LD36 & LD219 Cut or Limit General Assistance

LD366 Require Local Law Enforcement to Engage in Federal Immigration Enforcement

WHY SHOULD YOU CONSIDER PLANNED GIVING?

Planned giving gives you the opportunity to provide for MCC in your financial planning. We cannot forecast the future, but it is good to know that your legacy will be used to continue the work of the Council for years to come. There are also tax benefits for you and your family in planned giving; it is possible to provide for your family while also providing for MCC. Consult with your legal advisor, bank, or financial planner. Call us if we can help you with making decisions or provide more information.

WHY WE SUPPORT THE MAINE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

MARGRETHE BROWN

Margrethe Brown, a member of South Congregational Church in Kennebunkport, was involved in the work of the Council as a Board member and President during the years that Tom Ewell was our Executive Director (1986 - 2005). In a recent conversation, Tom's joy as he remembered working with her was clear,

"Margrethe is a wonderful woman of faith and did so much for MCC. She was a trusted colleague and confidant for me. She is a great Dane!" (a joking reference to her Danish heritage of which she is quite proud). Margrethe and her husband Bill (a retired Presbyterian minister) have been generous donors for many years and we are grateful for that support. When asked why she donates so generously to the Council, Margrethe said, "I support the MCC's focus on bringing together different religious groups in common work around the issues of justice and care in our broader community."



ST. PAUL'S CHURCH

The community of St. Paul's, Brunswick is a proud supporter of the Maine Council of Churches. We are deeply committed to MCC and its advocacy for justice, peace and care of the earth in Maine and are proud of the high commitment that our bishop, The Rt. Rev. Stephen Lane has made to MCC. Our St. Paul's member, Charlie Priest, a former Maine legislator, recently joined the MCC board as the appointed representative of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Through his knowledge of public policy, lifelong justice advocacy and faith, our awareness of and involvement in promoting the common good and civil discourse has grown. We believe that God is calling St. Paul's into the community to work with our local MCC partner congregations to alleviate hunger and homelessness and to promote civil discourse. In these times of deep divisions, we are particularly inspired to be working closely with the variety of faith community members of MCC to promote justice, peace and the protection of the environment.



MCC WELCOMES NEW AT - LARGE BOARD MEMBER



In January, our Membership Assembly elected Tom Bancroft as an At-Large Member of the Board of Directors. A member of Union Church in Biddeford Pool, Tom is a psychologist with a long and distinguished career counseling disabled and disadvantaged adults and children in a variety of settings. Since retiring, he has served as a certified hospice volunteer and as a member of the Board of Directors of York Senior College where he teaches history and jazz. Tom is a native of Maine and lives in Saco with his wife, Nancy, who currently serves as Interim Pastor at Union Church.

ADVOCACY DAYS (continued)

eras back on and interviewed the advocates, who became stars on the evening news, spreading their faith-based message to thousands: we cannot abandon our poor, our hungry, our homeless or our earth.

The day before their action-packed visit to the Statehouse, nearly 150 participants and presenters filled the South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta where they joined together for worship, followed by a keynote address by the Rev. Dr. William Barter, as well as an interfaith discussion panel and four workshops.

“Addressing only statistics and facts removes the essential ethical framework and principles that bring us to this advocacy work. We have something unique and essential to bring to the table: a faith-based argument for justice,” Rev. Barter told the gathering. “For us as people of faith, ‘return on investment’ can never be our end game... our legislative testimony is a profession of faith.”

“It is so helpful to focus on living our faith rather than winning or losing a debate or election. It helps keep me focused and not get discouraged.” – Interfaith Advocacy Days Participant



Faithful advocates flash their “I support A Moral Budget” cards for the cameras .

Legislative issues were woven through prayers and music and during the workshops, leaders in theology along with public policy analysts from Maine Conservation Voters, Maine Equal Justice Partners,

and Maine Hunger Initiative provided detailed information on pending bills. Participants then crafted faith-based pitches to make the next day

to legislators. Apparently, those pitches were successful—word got back to the organizers that two legislators changed their opinion on a bill after being contacted by Advocacy Days participants.

COUNCIL WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER



At a special Membership Assembly meeting in December, the Council voted unanimously to welcome Union Church of Biddeford Pool as an official Associate Member (a category of membership for local congregations who wish to be affiliated with the Council but who are not part of one of our nine member denominations). Union Church, an interdenominational Christian church that recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, is located by the sea in Biddeford Pool and welcomes between 50 to 100 worshipers of all ages, with attendance peaking in summer months thanks to many “snow bird” members. They are an evolving community of faith seeking to reflect the love and compassion of God through their conduct, to follow the

teaching of Jesus to love God, neighbor, and self, to show reverence for the earth and all living creatures, and to give thanks for and celebrate the holy presence of God in all things. They provide financial and hands-on support to many local projects. “We sought out membership in the Maine Council of Churches to partner with other faith communities on important social justice issues in Maine,” says church council president Paul Schlaver.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 - 2017 DONORS*

Your Contribution – Why It's Important

By Ed Rea, MCC Treasurer

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 Board, other involved volunteers and Executive Director, and through your support. One third of our budget comes from individual and parish contributions; 100% of our Board members are donors. Please consider a gift now.

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ME Episcopal Missionary Society
N.E. Region Unitarian Universalist Assn.
N.E. Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
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First Universalist Church, South Paris
Lewiston Friends Meeting
Second Christian Congregational Church, Kittery
Southern Maine Friends Meeting
St. Alban's Episcopal Church
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Somesville Union Mtg House UCC
Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta
United Parish Congregational Harrison

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