

Maine Council of Churches

Seeking common ground, working for the common good



At a news conference Oct. 5, MCC President Bonny Rodden voices the Council's opposition to Judge Kavanaugh's nomination. – Patrick Whittle, AP Photo

MCC SPEAKS AGAINST KAVANAUGH NOMINATION

The Maine Council of Churches took an unusual step before the Senate voted to appoint Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court. We publicly opposed his nomination.

As a non-partisan organization, the Council generally does not support or oppose political candidates, appointees or nominees. Instead, we urge our legislators to focus on the principles and values at stake in elections and in the appointment and nomination process. Values like compassion, respect for human dignity, and justice for the environment and the poor. Before the Senate Judiciary Committee's

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IN THE WAKE OF TRAGEDY WE STAND TOGETHER

With profound sorrow and deep outrage, MCC condemns the anti-Semitic act of hatred and lethal violence perpetrated on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and calls upon the faith communities of Maine to stand in solidarity with our Jewish siblings against all forms of religious, political and cultural prejudice and hatred.

Vigils at Congregation Bet Ha'am in South Portland and at other locations across the state held in the days after the shooting reflected multifaith solidarity with Maine's Jewish community and a



At the Bet Ha'am vigil, Cantor Beth Strassler from Congregation Etz Chaim in Biddeford lights a candle for a victim from the tragedy in Pittsburgh.

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WE ARE MOVING OUR OFFICES!

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From the President

Speaking up civilly is what we do at the Maine Council of Churches -- and urge others to do-- "even if our voice shakes," as our bumper sticker says.

While we don't ordinarily take stands on appointments, we took the unusual move of opposing Judge Kavanaugh's nomination after the September 27 hearing because we felt that his answers did not reflect the values of integrity and honesty that our traditions cherish. Despite our disappointment in Senator Collins' vote, we were appalled by the outrageous vulgarity and threats of violence directed at her and her staff. We condemned such civil behavior.

As the Council moves forward in the months to come, our board will explore how to better define our membership, our motto, and the best way to partner with our denominations, congregations, pastors and people of faith. Even our office is on the move. In November we will relocate to Woodfords Church in Portland.

Be reassured, however, that at our board retreat in August, we recommitted ourselves to our public policy priorities that have been the heart of our advocacy work for years: poverty, hunger and homelessness, access to health care, justice for immigrants and protecting the environment. We also expanded our concerns to include LGBTQ rights and dignity. Our commitment to civil discourse also remains steadfast.

With our hearts full of God's love, we will continue to stand up to xenophobia, hate and the anti-Semitism that mercilessly destroyed the lives of innocent worshipers during a Shabbat service at Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh.

How long will it take for our work to be done? "The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind," Noel Paul Stookey reminded us at North Windham Union Church, NWUC, "The answer is blowin' in the wind."



Bonny Rodden
President, MCC



WELCOME REV. DR. JODI HAYASHIDA TO MCC BOARD



Rev. Dr. Jodi Cohen Hayashida is the called minister at First Universalist Church in Auburn, where she has served since 2000. Her ministry is rooted in the call to co-create beloved community, and she has worked with numerous organizations toward that end, including the Many and One Coalition, The Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry, and more recently, Moral Movement Maine and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Jodi graduated from Meadville/Lombard Theological School in 2000 with a Doctor of Ministry degree,

having previously earned a BA in history from the University of New Hampshire. Jodi believes in the centrality of communal worship and has been awarded the Paul Carnes Preaching Prize and Charles Billings Preaching Prize. She spends her free time with her husband and two daughters, gardening, making music, and using powerful tools to make concrete changes in the world.

SPEAKING OUT IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Over the past six months, MCC has had many opportunities to speak with the voice of faith on issues facing our state and our nation. Here are just a few of the highlights from our media coverage, press conferences, rallies, vigils and meetings with U.S. Senators Angus King and Susan Collins and their staffs. Check our website (www.maineCouncilofChurches.org) and our Facebook page for the complete articles, letters and statements.

Opposing Torture:

It is our view that anyone with a history of being involved with torture, permitting torture to take place, or destroying documents that provide documentation of human rights violations should be disqualified for public service.

Supporting civility in public office:

(In praise of the State Government Oversight Committee for holding the governor accountable for uncivil remarks directed at Senator Tom Saviello): Our faith calls us to treat each other with respect and dignity. We are grateful to Senator Roger Katz, Representative Anne-Marie Mastraccio and the rest of the committee for standing up for civil discourse and speaking out when an elected official falls far short of the expectations of his office.

Supporting transgender students:

(In response to the Kittery School Committee's unanimous vote to support transgender and gender expansive students): Though some Christians were vocal in their opposition to the policy, it is important for Kittery's students, families and schools to know that not all Christians share that attitude. In fact, there are tens of thousands of faithful Mainers who stand with the people of Kittery in seeking to build a culture of compassion, justice, dignity and peace for all.

Opposing separation of immigrant families:

To use sacred texts like [Attorney General Jeff Sessions did] to justify separating children from their parents, sometimes nursing children from their mothers, is an outrage! -- **Rev. Jane Field**

There is no moral defense for what is happening at the Southern border. There is no religious justification for the practice of separating families, and there certainly is no faithful reading of Scripture that justifies tearing toddlers away from their mothers' arms or forcing black and brown children to lie on the floors of detention centers, or letting children cry themselves to sleep without the comforting touch of another human being.

–**Rev. Allen Ewing-Merrill**



Opposing cuts to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

The proposed onerous additional work requirements aren't really about getting people employed in dignified work that could lift them out of poverty. They're punishments designed to withhold food from struggling, hungry people so that our government can pay for the tax cuts for wealthy people that Congress passed earlier this year.

At a news conference in May at Wayside Food Program's warehouse, faith leaders decried proposed changes in the food subsidy program that would make it more difficult for those living in poverty to receive benefits.

STAND TOGETHER (CONTINUED)

commitment to ending bigoted rhetoric that too often leads to violence.

Over the past two years, we have witnessed a disturbing increase in anti-Semitic bias incidents and hate crimes. The Pittsburgh shooting represents a horrifically predictable escalation along that despicable path as hate groups become more vocal, visible, and violent.

In a statement released the day of the shooting, the Council called on all leaders to become agents and models of civility and compassion, upholding the dignity and rights of all people to live in peace, and to embody the values reflected in a prayer written by Rabbi Seth Goldstein after his temple in Olympia, Washington, was attacked in 2015:

Our God and God of our ancestors, hate has been visited upon another community. Their sacred space has been violated. They feel vulnerable, afraid, angry and broken (and so do we). So we pray to You:

May strength come from our vulnerability, so we can support one another, and receive the support of others with gratitude and humility.

May compassion come from our fear, so we do not act from that fear, and we can pursue justice not revenge, peace not more violence.

May wisdom come from our anger, so we are able to see that an attack against us is an attack against all, and we are able to join in common cause with those who are similarly oppressed and targeted.

And may healing come from our brokenness, so we are able to rise from this challenge with renewed life, commitment and connection.

In light of this act of violence and hatred, we maintain our commitment to uphold the teachings and traditions of Your covenant, pursuing righteousness and compassion, justice and mercy, peace and understanding, love and friendship.

May You frustrate those who seek to do harm and uphold those who seek to do good. May the shelter of Your peace spread over us and over all who dwell on earth. And let us say, "Amen."

UNIVERSAL HOME CARE INITIATIVE DEFEATED

After careful consideration, the Maine Council of Churches endorsed Question 1: Maine's Universal Home Care Initiative. Although the referendum question was not approved by voters on Election Day, the Council will continue to hold the concern for people who are aging and those who live with disabilities in Maine — demographically the oldest state in the country.

The Universal Home Care Initiative would have guaranteed that any senior and any Mainer with a disability would have been able to access assistance with activities of daily living in order to stay in their home. Question 1 also offered support for family caregivers and increased wages for home care workers, funded by a 3.8% tax — 1.9% for employees and 1.9% for employers, or the full 3.8% for those who are self-employed — on individual income over \$128,400, affecting the wealthiest 2.6% of Mainers. Currently, income over \$128,400 isn't subject to the payroll tax.

The Council's decision to endorse the initiative affirmed the importance of three justice issues: (1) Dignity of those who are aging and people with disabilities; (2) Fair wages and benefits for home care workers, who are predominantly women, people of color, and immigrants; and (3) Fair and just taxes.

"It's disappointing that Maine voters did not approve Question 1, but this election outcome does not deter us from seeking other legislative solutions," said Rev. Allen Ewing-Merrill, MCC Vice-President. "Maine continues to need better options for home care, and a mechanism to fund the supports that aging Mainers and people with disabilities require. With a new legislature being seated in January, I hope we will send the strong message to our elected leaders that nearly all Mainers agree with the core purpose of this initiative, even if the majority of voters didn't agree with this particular means of accomplishing it."

We are Moving



In November, we're moving to Woodfords Church, which is handicapped accessible and has lots of parking. New mailing address: 202 Woodford Street, Portland, ME 04103. Phone: (207) 772-1918.

WHY I GIVE TO MCC



Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison

Why support the Maine Council of Churches? For me, it's all about gratitude. In trying times, when social insanity is rampant and keeping hope alive is an ongoing challenge, I'm grateful for the Council's persistent voice calling for justice and compassion in all things. The Council bears

witness to a truly different church and world, and that's the kind of good news worth our investment.

WHY WE GIVE TO MCC

Farmington Monthly Meeting of Friends



Within the Maine Council of Churches, Friends participate in the life of the Maine Council of Churches and receive inspiration to be spiritually proactive with responsive engagement in today's world.

MaineShare

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MCC SPEAKS AGAINST KAVANAUGH NOMINATION (CONTINUED)

Sept. 27 hearing, those values (rather than opposition to a nominee) had been the focus of numerous conversations we had with Senator Susan Collins, a swing vote in the Senate, and her staff.

But after Judge Kavanaugh's testimony it became clear to our Council and other religious leaders in Maine and the nation that he did not have the judicial temperament to serve on the Supreme Court.

In a statement Oct. 4, the Council announced that its Board of Directors had voted unanimously to call for the withdrawal of Kavanaugh's nomination. If his nomination was not withdrawn, the Council urged Maine's senators to vote against him on the Senate floor. At a news conference the following day, MCC President Bonny Rodden, Vice President Allen Ewing -Merrill, Executive Director Rev. Jane Field, Maine UCC Conference Minister Rev. Deborah Blood and Rev. Dr. James Gertmenian spoke to local and national media about our reasons for opposing the nomination.

The Council concurred with a statement released Oct. 3 by the National Council of Churches, which is not affiliated with MCC: "Judge Kavanaugh exhibited extreme partisan bias and disrespect towards certain members of the committee and thereby demonstrated that he possesses neither the temperament nor the character essential for a member of the highest court in our nation."

The Council, long an advocate for civil discourse and integrity in our public servants, was also deeply concerned by a number of Judge Kavanaugh's statements during the hearing regarding his high school yearbook entries and history of drinking in high school and college. Several of those statements were contradicted by classmates and seemed disingenuous. The Council believes that unquestionable integrity is critical for a lifetime appointment to a seat on our country's highest court.

Five hours after our news conference, Senator Collins announced her support for Kavanaugh and the next day he was confirmed. King opposed him.

We pray that the nation will heal from this difficult episode in our history, and God will comfort victims of sexual assault whose traumatic memories were ripped open by the credible testimony of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford.

STOOKEYS' BENEFIT CONCERT HELPS MCC

Playing his acoustic guitar, Noel Paul Stookey (of Peter, Paul and Mary) and his wife, Rev. Betty Stookey charmed a crowd at North Windham Union Church Oct. 13 with an interplay of songs and words calling for recognition that the universal nature of God's love transcends all faiths.

He opened the concert with "One light, many candles; one sky, many stars; one sea, many rivers; one love, many hearts." Rev. Stookey said, "We need a language with which to reach beyond our doctrinal, liturgical and often polarizing expressions of belief. We need a way to overcome our differences and see our commonality without fear of losing our spiritual integrity."

The event featured readings, prayers and music celebrating the diversity and shared common ground of the world's great faith traditions. It capped off another successful season of NWUC's "Music With A Mission" program, a concert series that has raised \$60,000 over the past six years for local non-profits and charities. Board President Bonny Rodden and Executive Director Rev. Jane Field were honored to represent the Maine Council of Churches, which was chosen by "Music With a Mission" to receive a portion of the concert's proceeds.



CONGRATULATIONS ANNE D. BURT



"Andy" was honored by the Chaplaincy Institute of Maine (CHIME) on Saturday, October 20, for her "lifetime of activism for peace, social and economic justice." She is a former MCC staff member and now faithful volunteer liaison for the Council to the Environmental Priorities

Coalition, a partnership of 34 environmental and public health organizations in Maine. The Planetary Chaplain Award comes with \$500, which Andy plans to use to finish her latest film project .

Please Consider Remembering MCC in Your Estate Planning

Planned giving is an opportunity for you to provide for MCC in the future while enjoying tax benefits for you and your family. Your legacy will be used to continue the work of the Council for years to come. Call us for more information at (207) 772-1918.

Save the Dates

PART-TIME PASTORS, FULL-TIME CHURCHES: Part II of a Convocation Series on Sustaining Small Congregations

April 5-6, 2019

We are proud to join with The BTS Center and the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ in offering a follow-up event to last year's BTS Convocation, "Growing By Half." Registration details will be released soon—stay tuned!

INTERFAITH ADVOCACY DAYS 2019

March 25-26 in Augusta

Mark your calendars and look for registration to open in early January.

THANK YOU



MCC President Bonny Rodden thanks Carol O'Donnell of First Parish UCC Brunswick for their Outreach Committee's generous grant to support our Community Conversations program.



Another sighting of the new MCC bumper sticker on Maine's highways and byways! We need it now more than ever: "Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes."



THANK YOU TO OUR 2018 DONORS*

Your Contribution – Why It's Important

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. Please consider a gift now.

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Union Church, Biddeford Pool

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Brunswick Friends Meeting
Congregational Church in Cumberland
Durham Monthly Meeting of Friends
Episcopal Church of Saint Mary
Falmouth Quarterly Friends Meeting
Farmington Friends Meeting
First Congregational Church, Wiscasset
First Parish in Portland
First Universalist Church, South Paris
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HopeGateWay
Lewiston Friends Meeting
Maine Association of New Jerusalem Church
Mid-Maine District NEC United Methodist Church
North Windham Union Church
Portland Friends Meeting
Raymond Village Community Church
Second Congregational Church, Kittery
South Congregational Church
Southern Maine Friends Meeting
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brunswick

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