

A FAITHFUL RESPONSE TO TWO DEADLY PLAGUES

COVID-19

March 8 was the last Sunday most congregations in Maine were able to gather in their buildings for worship before the arrival of the coronavirus required everyone to stay safer at home. Since then, MCC’s member denominations, the churches in their care, and the clergy who serve them have displayed remarkable courage, creativity and compassion, fulfilling a commitment to keep The Church open even while our buildings are closed. The Maine Council of Churches has been doing everything we can to support and equip them while we also continue our ongoing efforts to advocate for justice and peace at a time when the pandemic has unveiled stark racial and economic disparities, and has revealed how quickly our fragile earth can begin to heal when we lighten our footprint.



RACISM

In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 laid bare the racist systems, policies and ideologies baked in to the very structure of the United States, revealing the living consequences of more than 400 years of race-based oppression and privilege—consequences that until now society has found all too easy to ignore or deny: staggering racial disparities in wealth, income, employment, mortality rates, access to health care, and now, in infection and death rates from the Coronavirus.

Then, in the midst of this revelation, came the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by white men, and the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of white



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings! My name is Alyssa Lodewick, and I am the new president of the Maine Council of Churches. I am an authorized minister in the United Church of Christ and serve as the designated term pastor of Woodfords Congregational Church in Portland.

At MCC's April board meeting, as we were discussing how the Council might support the efforts of our denominations to address COVID-

19, a question about the Council's identity and function crossed my mind: What is the relationship between the Council and its seven member denominations? Does the *Council* serve as a resource to them? Or, do *member denominations* serve as resource organizations for the *Council*, providing us with expertise, guidance, and financial support? These questions are even more pronounced now that we are also seeking to address racism, policing methods, and the need to protect all people from violence, including people of color—since surely, in God's eyes, black lives do matter.

Back in April, a wise colleague suggested that I was framing the question about the relationship between the Council and its member denominations too simplistically... and she was right. Resources and information flow both ways – and usually in circular, rather than linear, patterns. For example, denominations – as well as other nonprofit organizations – sometimes seek the Council's help in magnifying their voices in public policy discussions. At other times, the Council seeks input from our member denominations to produce programs and resources that consolidate and showcase wisdom from across the denominational spectrum. MCC's "At the Threshold: Congregations and Their Buildings in the Time of COVID-19" is a good example of this kind of synthesis. On the other hand, our directory of anti-racism resources spotlights each denomination in its own particularity.

At its best, ecumenism brings different faith communities together to engage in dialogue, explore theological consensus and difference, and take collective action. Certainly, in these days of COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter movement, political strife, and economic uncertainty, we need more of all three: helpful conversation, deep thinking, and meaningful engagement. I feel privileged to be ministering with the Maine Council of Churches at this particular time in history – which is filled with opportunity and challenge alike – and I heartily invite you to join us as we "seek common ground and work for the common good." Thanks for your support. I look forward to working with you.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alyssa". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

BRAVE LITTLE CHURCHES DOING BIG THINGS



Who could have imagined Pentecost looking like this? It is just one more way that churches have had to adapt to the Pandemic.

Here are a few of the congregations around our state that denominational leaders mentioned as doing extraordinary work in these difficult days.

Emmaus Lutheran Church, Falmouth – This ELCA congregation was in the midst of searching for a new pastor when the pandemic hit. And then came the news that their interim pastor had been diagnosed with Stage IV cancer. Despite uncertainty and anxiety, the church developed vibrant online worship services, moved their candidate search online, and stepped up to be sure there would be no interruption in their interim pastor’s health insurance.

Mission At The Eastward, Farmington – MATE is a ministry of the Presbyterian Church (USA) involving small congregations in underserved rural communities and offering social outreach programs. Just before the pandemic struck, MATE had become an independent non-profit—only to learn that the out-of-state mission trip work crews they rely on every summer to repair and renovate 70-80 homes for families in need wouldn’t be able to come this year. So, they have pivoted and are now recruiting in-state crews from other Maine churches.

Midcoast Friends Meeting, Water of Life Lutheran Church, St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, and Second Congregational Church of Newcastle, in partnership with St. Patrick’s



Midcoast Friends Meeting provides storage for the diaper bank.

Catholic Church and Damariscotta Baptist Church, run the Lincoln County Ecumenical Diaper Bank out of the Newcastle Food Pantry. Midcoast Friends Meeting stores the diapers (11,000 were distributed in 2019!) and the Second Congregational Church houses the food pantry—all of which has had to move to

curbside delivery in their parking lot. Volunteers from all six churches take turns staffing the diaper distribution table every Tuesday morning.



Mariellen Whelan, a diaper bank volunteer, prepares to distribute packages of diapers curbside.

BRAVE LITTLE CHURCHES DOING BIG THINGS, continued

The River Network is a group of six United Methodist Churches near the Kennebec, that has been increasing collaboration specifically in community engagement. They held a school vacation virtual VBS in March. Two of these churches, Dresden Richmond UMC and East Pittston UMC, are good examples of small town and rural faith communities who have made a rapid and positive adaptation to previously unfamiliar and uncomfortable technologies and East Pittston is developing an outdoor worship and meditation space for the community.

First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Kennebunk moved quickly in early March to establish a Congregational Well-Being Task Force to oversee their congregation's responses to the pandemic. They established online worship, pastoral care hours, and church business meetings, and within a week had created Community Circles of 6-10 members each to ensure that everyone had the friendship, food, medicines, and spiritual resources that they needed. They are continuing to actively step into the demand of this moment to imagine new ways of being in community, of supporting one another, and of noticing and caring for the most vulnerable.



NO ON 1 CAMPAIGN SUCCEEDS!



In March, Dr. Laura Blaisdell and Caitlin Gilmet, co-chairs of the “No on 1” Coalition, celebrated that the campaign to keep a new law strengthening Maine’s school vaccination requirements succeeded in defeating a people’s veto referendum by a 3 to 1 margin at the polls. MCC was proud to be a member of the coalition. The Council had actively supported passage of this bill in the spring with a letter to the senate who then approved it by one vote.

Photo credit: Brianna Soukup, Portland Press Herald

Economic Opportunity | The Environment | Social Justice & Peace | Education
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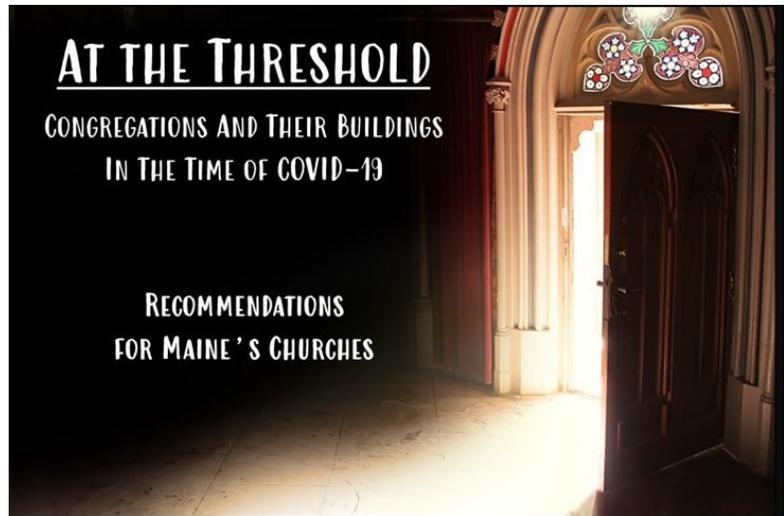
THIRTY YEARS OF GIVING | 1990-2020

MCC HELPS CHURCHES RESPOND TO THE PANDEMIC

“THIS IS ECUMENISM AT ITS BEST”

That’s what Wisconsin Council of Churches Executive Director Kerri Parker said when we at the Maine Council of Churches reached out in late March to work with her on developing guidelines for Maine’s congregations to follow during each phase of the pandemic and recovery. We hope the same can be said of all of our efforts to help Maine’s churches and communities respond to the impact of COVID-19, including:

- Coordinating a joint statement by all seven of our member denomination leaders
- Hearing MCC President Rev. Alyssa Lodewick as a featured guest on Maine Public’s “Maine Calling”
- Seeing Executive Director Rev. Jane Field interviewed on the podcast “Faith and Spirituality in a Time of Crisis”
- Hosting two webinars: “Resource Sharing and Support for Churches Providing Social Services During the COVID-19 Emergency,” and “Funeral Practices in the Time of COVID-19”
- Publishing an open letter to Governor Mills and Dr. Nirav Shah applauding their efforts and calling on faith communities to refrain from in-person worship gatherings
- Issuing a statement with minimum safety precautions for drive-in worship services
- Releasing “At the Threshold: Congregations and Their Buildings in the Time of COVID-19” in consultation with Maine’s CDC
- Serving as a consulting organization to the FEMA/MIT Recovery Project for Maine



Please Consider Remembering MCC in Estate Planning

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 for more information at (207) 772-1918 if we can help you with making decisions or provide more information.

law enforcement officers. In response to this revelation of the violent and virulent pandemic of racism, people have risen up to protest in towns and cities across the country, including here in Maine.

Protests are a valuable tool in raising awareness, voicing demands, and expressing solidarity. And they are not enough. See the adjacent page to read about ways our churches and people of faith can take vitally important steps toward becoming anti-racist in deeds as well as words, because eradicating racism requires backing up antiracist ideas with actions that change policy. Talking is not enough. Study is not enough. Skipping over the discomfort and disruption caused by confronting privilege and power in a rush to talk of “reconciliation” is definitely not enough, as it only serves to assuage white guilt and asks people of color to “reconcile” themselves to the status quo of white privilege.



Katrina Brown, in her extraordinary film, “Traces of the Trade,” invites her white family members, white church members, and all viewers, to shift the way they think about racism, privilege, and the living consequences of the slave trade in America. Instead of guilt and punishment, what if *grief* and *responsibility* became the way white Americans began to approach anti-racism work?

In that spirit, in August of 2018, MCC’s Board of Directors made the decision to begin doing intentional work on our own racism and white privilege, with the goal of transforming the way we carry out the Council’s mission. We started setting aside time at every Board meeting for study and discussion and doing homework between meetings. And it began to have an impact on our actions, advocacy and priorities:

- During our 2019 advocacy days event, we featured a panel of women of color discussing the “savior complex” which too many well-meaning white justice advocates have
- In the spring of 2019, we testified in unconditional support of Wabanaki tribal sovereignty, realizing that adding conditions (e.g., against casinos) would be exercising white privilege and power and would undermine true sovereignty
- When our loan to the Four Directions Development Corporation came up for renewal, we voted to forgive it—relinquishing the power of wealth our privilege had garnered for us, and restoring some small portion of what is owed to our Wabanaki siblings
- Civil Discourse has been a signature cause of MCC, but a clearer understanding of white power and privilege helped us to see how white calls for “civility” were often experienced by people of color as thinly veiled efforts to silence them and preserve the status quo. So, we began planning for a statewide symposium to be offered this fall: “Saying ‘Peace, Peace’ When There Is No Peace: How Promoting Civil Discourse Risks Protecting White Supremacy”
- We have begun discussions about hosting a New England region summit on “The Church and Reparations” in 2022.

We share all this not to boast, but to demonstrate that even small steps in the right direction can lead to significant advances. ***If we did it, so can you and your congregation.*** To help equip you for this work, we are providing a starter list of resources (see next page). Use them with our blessing that you might be a blessing.

ANTIRACISM RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES AND PEOPLE OF FAITH

We have compiled a reference sheet of anti-racism resources and curricula produced by each of our seven member denominations. It can be downloaded from the “Resources” tab on our website.

WATCH AND LEARN



Rev. Linette George is one of two African-American UCC clergy serving in Maine. You can view her Pentecost sermon on the Dedham Congregational Church Facebook page under “Videos.” *“My job is to speak my truth, to tell you what it is really like... to be a child [of color in Maine] and to have nightmares and very tangible fears when I would be out in public that someone would do to my own father what I saw done to a black man by the police in Minnesota. That fear was real. It was real. ... You [white people] do not know that fear. I don’t want you to have to experience it, but I want you to understand it.”*

Kimberly L. Jones, author, filmmaker and host of Atlanta’s Well-Read Black Girl book club speaks on Pentecost Sunday during a protest in Atlanta. She asks, “How Can We Win?” after 450 years of race-based oppression and violence. To view an edited version on YouTube, search for: *How Can We Win Kimberly Jones Video Full Length David Jones Media Clean Edit*



“Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North,” an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival and featured on PBS’ “POV,” tells the story of a white Episcopalian Yale Divinity School student who discovers her Rhode Island ancestors were the largest slave-trading family in U.S. history. The film website, www.tracesofthetrade.org, includes a downloadable study guide for communities of faith. The film is available for purchase from the website, or as a 48-hour online rental at Vimeo for \$2.99.

REQUIRED READING

[Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America](#) by Ibram X. Kendi

[How To Be An Antiracist](#) by Ibram X. Kendi

[Between the World and Me](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates

[Dear Church: A Love Letter from A Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S.](#) by Lenny Duncan

[The Cross and the Lynching Tree](#) by James Cone

[America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege and the Bridge to a New America](#), by Jim Wallis

[White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](#) by Robin Diangelo

FIRST TO GIVE, FIRST TO FORGIVE LOAN BENEFITING TRIBES



With help from the Penobscot tribe and a special loan program, Awendela Dana was able to buy a home on Indian Island, and over 10 years refinance the loan, borrow against the equity to fix her roof and have her payments deferred when her daughter needed emergency medical care.

“Tribal people have a hard enough time – most will never own a home. Four Directions is able to make home ownership a reality,” she said.

Ms. Dana’s affordable home is one of 91 that Four Directions, a community development financial institution, has financed in the past 19 years. Four Directions also provides business loans and financial education for members of the four Wabanaki tribes.

To provide the loans, however, the organization needs capital and support.

That need prompted the creation of the Giving Winds Capital Campaign, a collaboration among mainstream religious denominations, churches and individuals that provided gifts and loans to Four Directions so Four Directions, in turn, can provide loans to Wabanaki citizens.

It was the Maine Council of Churches that appealed to its denominations for funding for the Giving Winds, raising \$672,595 that was matched by the federal government. It was the Maine Council of Churches that provided the first low-interest loan in 2005.

At a board meeting in February, it was the Maine Council of Churches that became the first lender to forgive its loan.

Susan Hammond, executive director of Four Directions; Helen Scalia, its development director; and the Council of Churches hope the Council’s move will inspire the other 20 lenders to follow suit. By turning their loans into gifts, they will join 96 other individuals and groups that have already contributed to Giving Winds with outright gifts. Four Directions benefits from forgiven loans by eliminating interest payments and by improving its financial standing so it can provide more loans and education.

For more than a year, board member Diane Dicranian urged the Council to forgive its \$25,000 loan when it came up for renewal. Representing Quakers on the board and as a strong advocate for tribal sovereignty, Dicranian said it is heart-breaking to see how the Doctrine of Discovery allowed missionaries to take Indians’ children, their heritage and their land.

“Forgiving the loan is the very least we can do,” she said. “It’s a mortgage on land that was theirs in the first place.”

On February 14, Rev. Carie Johnsen testified on behalf of MCC before the Maine legislature’s Judiciary Committee to support tribal sovereignty for Maine’s indigenous nations. This is an excerpt of our testimony:

The Maine Council of Churches affirms the sovereignty of Maine’s Native American tribes, supports their right to self-determination, self-governance, self-sufficiency and cultural identity... We call on the people of Maine and the legislators who represent them to recognize that tribal sovereignty is a historical fact and must not be disregarded in favor of political expediency or for any other reason. Recognition of tribal sovereignty will help to preserve the tribes’ culture, land, religious expression, and sacred spaces and to ensure the survival of Native People. We believe that placing any conditions or restrictions on such recognition would, by definition, negate the very meaning of “sovereignty,” and furthermore, would perpetuate the colonial mindset of white privilege that feels entitled to control, define or limit tribal sovereignty—a mindset that has, from the very first encounters between European colonizers and Maine’s tribes, perpetrated violence and injustice against the indigenous people whose home this was for millennia before that first contact, leaving a legacy of economic, social, and cultural marginalization and destruction.

FIRST TO GIVE, FIRST TO FORGIVE LOAN BENEFITING TRIBES, *continued*

The Giving Winds was created after the Maine Council of Churches opposed a referendum that would have allowed casinos to operate on Indian land. The Council and its denominations contended that gambling is “immoral” and should be opposed at all costs.

When Tom Ewell, executive director of the Council at the time, explained to a roomful of tribal leaders why the Council objected to the referendum, the Indians were infuriated, Ewell said recently from his home near Seattle to where he retired. How could religious leaders be so hypocritical that they would object to casinos at the same time churches on tribal land relied on Bingo to pay for their schools? How could people of faith be working with tribal leaders to reduce poverty on reservations at the same time they were opposing an initiative that would improve economic vitality?

“Boy, did they let us have it. It was one of the saddest days of my life,” Ewell said.

“I had always stood by my principles,” Ewell said but was chastened by Roy Partridge, the Episcopal priest who had accompanied him. “In this case, when it was principles vs. relationships, it was relationships that should win out.”

At that point Ewell vowed that the Council would raise money to compensate for the lost revenues that casinos would have provided. He had no idea how he would do it, but he appealed to denominations and they came through. Cush Anthony, a current board member, was particularly successful at convincing Unitarian Universalists.

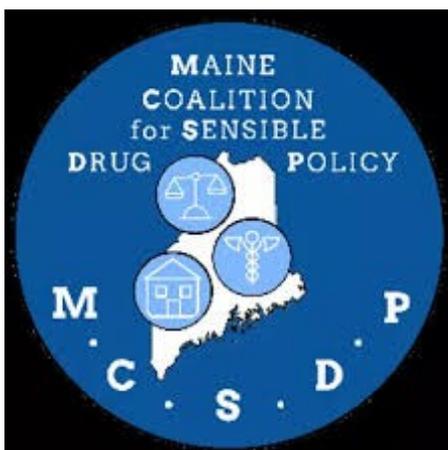
“If I am the hero, Helen Scalia is the heroine,” Ewell said. She pointed the Council to Four Directions, as a community development lending model that would benefit the tribes in Maine.

Ewell said he was “deeply pleased” when he heard about the Council’s decision to forgive the loan. “It showed that relationships can go through rough times but, with reconciliation, can grow with trust .”



MCC President Rev. Alyssa Lodewick, Quaker Representative Diane Dicranian, Four Directions Consultant Helen Scalia and MCC Treasurer Mac McCabe at February 26 Board of Directors Meeting, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Brunswick

PUBLIC POLICY UPDATE



The MCC Board of Directors voted to join the Maine Coalition for Sensible Drug Policy on January 17th, 2020. The coalition was formed in 2018 out of an awareness that the recommendations of the State of Maine’s Opioid Task Force did not go nearly far enough in addressing the root causes or concrete realities of the crisis of addiction in Maine. The focus of the coalition is “advancing evidence-based practices, emerging promising approaches and innovative new solutions that will meaningfully address the opioid crisis and other failings of Maine’s drug policy.” The voice of faith communities in this work is critical. Drug users and those struggling with addiction are frequently demonized and public policy often mirrors that dehumanization. Our collective affirmation that every life is sacred and that both policy and practice must reflect that sacredness is an essential part of the new moral narrative the coalition is creating.

THE BTS CENTER AND MCC CO-HOST “UNTO DUST” WITH GREG MILLER



Fine art photographer Greg Miller has spent every Ash Wednesday for more than 20 years out on the streets of New York City, toting a large-format 8x10 camera and looking for strangers who have the mark of a cross smudged in ashes on their foreheads. With his unique style of “street photography” and his ability to establish trust in a matter of moments, he creates extraordinary portraits that have a numinous, sacred quality. Many of these photographs have been published in a book, “Unto Dust,” L’Artiere Editions, 2018. MCC and The BTS Center were honored to host Miller for an exhibit, lecture and book signing on



February 6. The audience was a fascinating blend of art students, professional photographers, clergy and people of faith whom Miller helped to see that theology and art share vocabulary, perspective and values when it comes to the beauty of every person, and the reward of risking vulnerability to connect with strangers. Two 6-foot prints of Miller’s portraits remain on exhibit at The BTS Center, 97 India Center, in Portland.

COMINGS AND GOINGS ON OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In January, two members of our Board of Directors concluded their terms. We are so grateful for their faithful service to the Council and wish them well in their next adventures.



Rev. Tom Frey, the pastor of Peoples United Methodist Church in South Portland, served for several terms as Secretary and member of the Executive Committee. His calm and clarity even in the midst of turmoil, his impeccable instincts for good process, and his easy, contagious laugh made him a beloved and respected colleague to all who served with him.



Charlie Priest, member of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Brunswick, served for four years as the representative of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. A veteran of the U.S. Navy and attorney by trade, Charlie’s 14 years as a member of the Maine state House of Representatives meant the Council relied on his wisdom and experience to guide our discernment on many legislative issues. He also chaired our Development Committee overseeing our fundraising and grant writing. **Bonny Rodden**, former MCC President, has been appointed to take his place as the Diocesan representative to the Council.

In January, our Assembly elected three new officers (**Mac McCabe** is continuing as our Treasurer):



Rev. Alyssa Lodewick
(UCC, Portland)
President



Rev. Carolyn Lambert
(UCC, Kennebunk)
Vice-President



Rev. Dr. William Barter
(ELCA, Brunswick)
Secretary



In March, we welcomed our newest at-large member to the Board. **Marge Kilkelly**, member of Christ Church Episcopal in Gardiner, is a public policy strategist and passionate advocate for rural Maine. She is a Policy Program Manager at Maine Primary Care Association and has directed nonprofits including Head Start, domestic violence programs, and advocacy groups. She has worked in all levels of government, serving sixteen years in the Maine Legislature, four years as a town selectman and six years in DC as a Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Angus King Jr. She and her husband live in Dresden on Dragonfly Cove Farm, where they raise meat goats, poultry and pigs for local markets.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2018-2019 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.

Denominations and Associate Members

American Baptist Churches of Maine
Episcopal Diocese of Maine
Maine Association of New Jerusalem Churches
Maine Conference UCC
New England Conference UMC
New England Synod, ECLA
New England Yearly Meeting of Friends
Vassalboro Quarterly

Churches and Organizations

Acadia Friends Meeting
Brunswick Friends Meeting
Congregational Church in Cumberland UCC
Durham Monthly Meeting of Friends
Episcopal Church of Saint Mary
Falmouth Quarterly Friends
Farmington Friends Meeting
First Congregational UCC
First Parish UCC
First Universalist Church of South Paris
Hammond Street UCC
Mid-Coast Presbyterian
Midcoast Monthly Friends
Portland Friends Meeting
Narramissic Valley of Friends Meeting
Nashua Presbyterian
Network for Good
Second Christian Congregational UCC
South Congregational Church UCC
Southern Maine Friends Meeting
State Street Church UCC
United Parish Congregational Church of Harrison & North Bridgton
Woodfords Congregational Church

Individuals

Roger and Frances Jane Addor
Andree Appel
Cushman Anthony
Sally and Ron Bancroft
Rev. Dr. William Barter and Roy Taylor
Carole Beal
Robert and Anne Bencks
Richard and Theresa Berman
Constance Bingham
Robert Bishop
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Rev. K. Gordon White
Lucinda White and Thomas Kelley
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Rosemary Word
Donna Yellen

*Gifts received 6/1/2019– 6/1/2020

Every effort has been made to ensure the completeness and accuracy of this list. Please send any corrections to finance@mainecouncilofchurches.org or mail to MCC, 202 Woodford St., Portland, ME 04103.



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IN TIMES LIKE THESE...

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The articles in this newsletter tell the story better than any fundraising letter ever could: *the Maine Council of Churches makes a difference*—in the life of our congregations, in the lives of people of faith and good will, and in the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors who need trusted allies and advocates to stand with them for justice, compassion and peace.

To do this work, we rely on your prayers and partnership... and we rely on your pocketbook, too! **Generous donations from individuals and local congregations make up more than a third of our operating budget.**

This spring, we decided that, rather than send you another fundraising appeal letter, we would let the story of our work speak for itself. Enclosed with this newsletter, you will find a small white envelope with some huge potential—when you use it to send us a tax-deductible donation, we will take your gift, combine it with the others we receive, and put it to work building a world where peace is built with justice and justice is guided by love.

Thank you!