October 31, 1938:
The Maine Council of Churches is Organized

The Maine Council of Churches formally came into existence on October 31, 1938, at the United Baptist Church, Lewiston, Maine. The Rev. John Woolman Brush, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waterville, was elected the Council’s first president.

The founding denominations of the Maine Council of Churches were the Congregational-Christian Conference of Maine, the Maine Annual Conference of the Methodist Church the Northeast Region of the American Unitarian Association, and the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends.

Growing Diversity

From its inception, the Maine Council of Churches has looked for opportunities to welcome new member denominations. In the early years the membership grew quickly; The Universalist State Convention joined the Council in 1939. Both the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) and the Salvation Army became Council members in 1943. In 1944, the Presbyterian Church (Newburyport Presbytery) was received into membership. The A.M.E. Zion Church in Portland joined in 1951, and in 1952, the Evangelical United Brethren became members of the Maine Council of Churches.

In 1953, an invitation was extended to the Episcopal Diocese to join the Council. In his measured response letter, Episcopal Bishop Oliver L. Loring declined the Council’s invitation with the hope that language in the Council’s statement of purpose would one day conform to that of the National Council of Churches with regard to “the Lordship of Christ.”

The issue was revisited in 1965 and 1966, under the leadership of MCC Executive Secretary Luther Allen. In an effort to draw the Episcopalians and the American Baptists into the Council and with their active participation, a new constitution was drafted, but with a problematic preamble attached. It quickly became apparent that the language of the preamble would force the Unitarian Universalists to withdraw. A headline in the Maine Sunday Telegram, February 20, 1966, screamed “Unitarians Face Ouster from Church Council.” The question became, would the Council adopt language “bringing the churches who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ into living contact with one another?”

The answer was “no.” By a final vote of 24-4, the new constitution was adopted but the preamble was not. The Unitarian Universalists would stay; the Baptists would again withdraw, and it would be twelve years before the Episcopal Diocese again would consider Council membership. Luther Allen soon bowed out as executive secretary. With the Council’s resources dwindling in a conciliary age, the handwriting was on the wall.

The Ecumenical Commission

In 1968, in the spirit of Vatican II, the Maine Council of Churches joined the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland the Episcopal Diocese of Maine to form the Ecumenical Commission of the State of Maine.

A year later the Council voted to give its energies to the Ecumenical Commission and to vote itself out of existence. It nearly happened.

As will be seen on the pages that follow, the Maine Council of Churches was reborn and reconstituted in 1974, thanks entirely to a bequest by Elsie L. Libby of Wells.

In 1978, the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, under the leadership of Bishop Frederick B. Wolf, became a member of the Maine Council of Churches. In 1982 Bishop Edward O’Leary led the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland to Council membership. A year later the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, led by Bishop Cyril Wismar, was welcomed as a Council member.

In 2006, the Council welcomed the Maine Association of the Church of the New Jerusalem as its ninth member denomination.

Executive Secretaries

Rev. Harry E. Titus 1938-1939
Marion Ulmer 1940-1963
Luther L. Allen 1963-1967

Executive Directors

Thomas C. Ewell 1986-2005
Rev. Jill Job Saxby 2005-present

Maine Council of Churches
Members 2008

Episcopal Diocese of Maine
Maine Association of the Church of the New Jerusalem
Maine Conference, United Church of Christ
New England Annual Conference, United Methodist Church
New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
New England Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends
Northeast District, Unitarian Universalist Association
Northern New England Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
**THE EARLY YEARS**

**1938-1940**

- The Maine Council of Churches is organized at United Baptist Church, Lewiston.
- Reverend Harry E. Titus is appointed Executive Secretary, and offices are established at 178 Middle Street, Portland.

**Founding Members**

- Congregational-Christian Conference of Maine
- Maine Annual Conference of the Methodist Church
- American Unitarian Association Northeast Region
- New England Yearly Meeting Religious Society of Friends

**1939**

- MCC secretary Rev. Harry E. Titus serves as Dean of the 18th Session of the Eastern Maine Summer School at Machias, June 18-24. Faculty includes Rev. Ellis J. Holt, Calais, Rev. J. Wesley Prince, Kennersink, and Miss Mary Sherman, Dorchester, Massachusetts.
- Universalist State Convention is elected a member of the Council.

**1940**

- “News on the Religious Front” first airs on WGAN Radio (8:30pm Saturdays) with Rev. Franklin P. Cole as commentator.

![Image of Rev. John Woolman Brush, MCC President 1938-1940](image)

John W. Brush, first president of the Maine Council of Churches, was, at the time of his presidency, pastor of First Baptist, Waterville. He went on to become a professor of church history at Andover Newton Theological School, where he served from 1940 until his retirement in 1964.

![Image of Rev. Franklin P. Cole](image)

![Image of Maine Council of Churches Board of Directors at Waterville (1942)](image)

**SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.**

12
1941

- MCC studies industrial defense needs in coastal Maine. As a result 6 full-time social workers are hired to coordinate religious services and activities in defense housing areas. Five will be supported by member denominations, one by the Maine Council of Churches.

1942

- September: “Spiritual Foundations of Freedom,” a weekly newspaper series is published in 20 weekly and daily Maine newspapers.

- The “United Education Alliance” forms in order to raise concern for unchurched children and youth.

1943

- Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) becomes a Council member.

- The Salvation Army is elected to Council membership.

- A religious survey is conducted in Admiralty Village, Kittery, Maine, under the direction of MCC representative Miss Esther Jakesy to identify needs in the defense housing project.

1944

- The Presbyterian Church USA (Newburyport Presbytery) is elected to Council membership.

- “Church School of the Air” first airs at 10:30am on Sunday mornings on the radio stations of the Maine Broadcasting System (WCSH, WRDO, and WLBZ).

1945

- 1st Annual World Order Essay Contest for high school youth statewide is organized by the Maine Council of Churches.

- MCC begins an Audio-Visual Library to assist church schools.

- “Book of Books” (a Bible Study) first airs on Sunday mornings on three radio stations of the Maine Broadcasting System.

Miss Marion L. Ulmer
Executive Secretary
Maine Council of Churches
1940-1963

From 1921 to 1938, Miss Marion Ulmer served the Council of Religious Education. She is first listed in the Portland Directory as Council “secretary” in 1935.

In 1940, Miss Ulmer succeeded Rev. Harry E. Titus as executive secretary of the Maine Council of Churches. A devout Universalist, it was her friendship with Elsie L. Libby of Wells (and Elsie’s admiration for Miss Ulmer’s “Church School of the Air” radio broadcasts) that are credited as the reasons why, in 1961, Mrs. Libby named the Maine Council of Churches as the principle heir to her estate.

Upon retirement from the Council, Miss Ulmer moved to Florida with her sister Madelyn. Marion became a volunteer for the USM Florida Chapter Alumni Association. Today, a scholarship is offered by the Association in honor of Marion and Madelyn Ulmer. Marion Ulmer died in Brandon, Florida in May 1985.

In 1979 the Marion Ulmer Fund of the Maine Council of Churches was created in her honor. The Fund made possible nine biennial Seeds of Promise religious education events, from 1983 to 2001.

SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
THE POST-WAR YEARS

1946

- MCC's Social Action Committee launches a Negro Friendship Project.
- First World Order Caravan for high school students is initiated - to the temporary UN headquarters at Lake Success, New York.

1947

- First Churchmen's Legislative Seminar brings together Protestants in Augusta to study the work of the Maine State Legislature and their responsibilities as Christian citizens.
- Six young people competed in the Greenough Chapel (at Immanuel Baptist Church, Portland) in the Southwestern Maine semi-finals of the third World Order High School Essay Contest. They are: Miss Aphrodite Doukas and Allen Cook (Portland HS), Barbara Gee (Deering HS), Sarah Packard (Gorham HS), Tolford Young (Westbrook HS), Ronald Schutt (Lisbon HS).

1948

- Chaplaincy Program is launched at Bomazeen Boy Scout Camp.
- Rev. Lindley J. Cook is hired as an MCC field worker to counsel and assist in the development of community inter-church programs. (In September, his son, 19-year-old Ralph Cook, a pre-divinity student at Earlham College, is sentenced to two years in prison for refusing to register for the peace-time draft.)


November 1947:
Maine Council of Churches Sponsors World Order High School Essay Contest

The United Nations in session at Lake Success

SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
THE POST-WAR YEARS

1946-1950

1949

3rd Churchmen's Legislative Seminar


- MCC administers the Boy Scouts of America God and Country Award

- Women of the Council sponsor a World Day of Prayer, World Community Day, and a drive for overseas relief.

- Religious Education Workshops, conducted by MCC staff and volunteers, are held.

1950

- "News on the Religious Front" (heard on WGAN) "is a favorite of those seeking accurate information on the day's religious events."

- Mrs. Carl Kingsbury is hired as a Field Worker to contact families in rural communities (where no church schools exist), help mothers with plans for religious education in the home, helping them use the MCC broadcast "Church School of the Air" as a weekly resource.

- MCC president represents the Council at the constituting meeting of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, in Cleveland, Ohio.

- The Maine Council of Churches and the Christian Civic League of Maine abandon conversations about a formal relationship.

- 71 young leaders from Washington and Hancock Counties attend the 29th consecutive session of the Eastern Maine Summer School at Machias, sponsored by the Council.

Rev. Chauncey Wentworth
MCC President
1949-1951
District Superintendent
The Augusta District
Maine Annual Conference of the Methodist Church

Interviewing God & Country Award Candidates

Church School of the Air Discussion Group 1949

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THE COUNCIL IN THE FIFTIES

1951

- A.M.E. Zion Church is welcomed as a new member of the Council.
- MCC publishes “Our Maine Indians,” encouraging congregations to provide direct services to Indians and encouraging more equitable legislation.
- Rev. Robert Mayhew is appointed Legislative Agent for the Council.

1954

- MCC sponsors a Churchmanship Conference at First Parish Church, Gorham, and School Street Methodist Church, Gorham.
- MCC sponsors a one-day conference on religious programming on television, led by Rev. Charles H. Schmitz of the National Council of Churches Broadcast and Film Commission.
- MCC sponsors “The Friendly Beggar” program for Hallowe’en, encouraging children to go door-to-door gathering sewing supplies for mothers overseas.

1952

- Revised Constitution and By-laws formally unites the former Maine Council of Religious Education with the Interdenominational Commission of Maine.
- Evangelical United Brethren denomination joins the Maine Council of Churches.
- MCC opposes Universal Military Training.

1955

- 1,791 church school teachers attend MCC’s annual Christian Education Workshops.
- “The Door Is Open,” a panel show moderated by Rev. W. Lloyd Williams, is televised over WCHS-TV. “Window on State Street” also airs on Channel 6, co-sponsored by the Council.
- MCC’s School of Religion is held in Portland (State Street Church, Immanuel Baptist, Chestnut Street Methodist, Woodfords Congregational).

1953

- “Christian Youth Speak” begins broadcasting on television.

The Friendly Beggar

When you’ve given threads and pins,
Just put me on the door,
So prowling ghosts and goblins
Will ring your bell no more.

1954 World Order Caravan to the United Nations


SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
Teenagers Dorothy Woods and S. Clifton Ives are Named 1955 Averill Award winners by the Maine Council of Churches

In 1945, the Maine Council of Churches began sponsoring the World Order Essay Contest for Maine high schoolers. Each year, statewide contest winners were awarded with trips to the United Nations in New York City. Beginning in 1950, the Averill Plaque was awarded to one boy and one girl who made the best report on the contacts they made following their trip. The 1955 winners were Dorothy Woods of Kittery Point and S. Clifton Ives of Lewiston.

Cliff’s Notes
On the right are five handwritten note cards by high schooler S. Clifton Ives of Lewiston, Maine, that he used in giving his talk to church groups upon his return from the 1954 World Order Caravan.

SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
1956

- Disciples of Christ Church in Bangor joins the Council.
- MCC helps as Maine becomes the third state to introduce the Girl Scout “God and Country” Award.

1957

- 14th Annual Christian Education workshops are held (Greenville, North Leeds, Sanford, West Scarborough, and Waterford).
- Town and Country Committee initiates a study of rural church standards.
- Dr. Krista Streith addresses ministers’ conferences in Bangor and Portland on “Successful Marriage and Family Living.”
- On behalf of the Maine Council of Churches, Phyllis Mosman Cobb, AAGO, conducts a Church Music Workshop to train organists and choir directors.
- “Radio Church of the Air” and “Book of Books” continue to be heard on the stations of the Maine Broadcasting System (WCHS, WLZB, and WRDO).
- Rev. Mrs. Mildred Huffman is the Council’s Christian Education Field Worker. Rev. Harvey Ammerman is the Council’s Legislative Agent.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956

The Hungarian Revolution was a spontaneous nationwide revolt against the Stalinist government of Hungary and its Soviet-imposed policies. In November 1956, a large Soviet force invaded Budapest, crushing the revolution. An estimated 2,500 Hungarians died, and 200,000 more fled as refugees. The Maine Council of Churches, working on behalf of Hungarian Relief for Refugees (a program of Church World Service), recruited Hungarian-speaking translators to aid refugees as they found their way to Maine in search of homes and jobs.

MCC Leaders 1956

Left to right: Miss Marion Ulmer, Rev. Lester Boobar, Rev. Shirley B. Goodwin, Rev. Charles R. Monteith, Mrs. N. Wesley Haynes

SEEKING COMMON GROUND. WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD.