

MORE THAN “THOUGHTS & PRAYERS” Maine Churches Respond to Ukraine

As Ukrainians crowd trains to escape Russian invaders and fires turn their homes into charred, empty shells, churchgoers in Maine watch in horror, wanting to help in any way they can. They’re hosting prayer vigils, benefit concerts and bean suppers, and they are connecting with Ukrainians here in Maine.

Churches are urged to send the money they raise directly to their national denomination’s relief agency in order to provide appropriate aid as quickly and efficiently as possible to those suffering trauma in Ukraine, as well as the 11 million Ukrainians who have been displaced.

Each of the Maine Council of Churches’ seven member denominations has a humanitarian relief and aid agency ([list is on our website with links](#)) and most are members of ACT



Ukrainians receiving aid from ACT Alliance partner Hungarian Interchurch Aid

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Photo by Kristina O’Brien

IT IS TIME... TO RETHINK OUR CALLS FOR “CIVILITY”

On a recent sunny spring morning in Brunswick, a young Black pastor stepped into the pulpit of the Unitarian Universalist Church wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with “It Is Time.” That’s the name of the organization he founded to help Maine communities address and end systemic racism. Actually, these days, founder Dustin Ward, who was raised in Presque Isle

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FROM THE MCC PRESIDENT

I recently participated in a beautiful gathering at the Gilsland Farm Audubon Center in Falmouth.

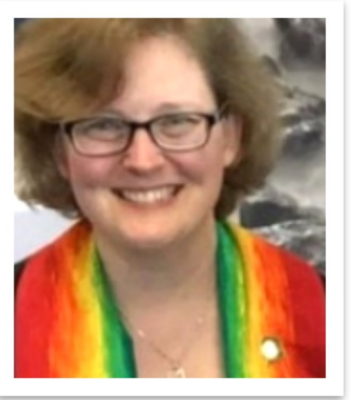
Sponsored by Greater Portland's multifaith community, it was a service of remembrance for the millions of people around the world who have died due to COVID. During the gathering, we dedicated a tree that had been planted in memory and honor of over 6,000,000 precious lives lost around the globe – including 1 million in the United States alone and over 2,300 in our beloved state. The gathering time included musical offerings as well as moving prayers and laments from Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian wisdom-faith traditions.

Sitting on the lawn of Gilsland Farm, I couldn't help but notice the environment around me. We may have been lamenting, but the beauty and joy of the natural world persisted all around us. The sun shone against a bright blue sky. Temperatures were in the 70s and pleasantly warm. Wild turkeys strutted across the Center's lawn. The gentle buzzing of honeybees, hard at work around the Audubon Center's hives, dominated the soundscape.

As I looked toward the woods in front of me, my eyes noticed various types of trees: hemlocks, birch, oaks, maples, aspen, and more. Struck by the diversity that exists in nature, I remembered a biology professor's lesson that forests are strongest, healthiest, and most resilient when they contain a wide variety of trees. When individual trees die and diversity is lost, forests suffer.

I'm guessing God's world is like that, too. Surely, the complexity, richness, and depth of the Source of Love that Undergirds the Universe is best reflected in diverse wisdom and faith traditions; I harbor doubts that a single denomination or church can fully reflect the gorgeous mosaic of the Holy. This newsletter contains stories of how diverse communities of faith are working to realize God's goodness on earth. In different ways, we labor to care for all of Creation – but as we work together and alongside one another, we accomplish more than any of us could on our own. Ultimately, we are bound to one another. Like forests, we need diversity to thrive.

For each individual life lost to COVID ... for each tree that dies in a forest ... for each faith tradition that suffers under the weight of persecution, let us lament. And then let us re-root ourselves in the Source of Creation and nurture seeds for a new generation – one strengthened by diversity, collaboration, and love.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Jane Field".



THE MORAL PANDEMIC OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

What Maine Churches Can Do

At 2:30 on a Saturday afternoon in May, an 18-year-old white domestic terrorist wearing tactical gear, carrying an AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle, and filming himself on a live video feed, walked into Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, New York, and shot 13 people. 11 of them were Black. The 10 who died were all Black.

Before the attack, the shooter posted 180 pages of hate-filled writing with a common racist theme: he believed it was necessary to prevent white Americans from being “replaced” by people of color. So he identified the zip code nearest his home with the most Black residents and drove there to kill as many as he could.

This “Replacement Theory” is part of a larger ideology known as White Christian Nationalism, a movement that fuses Evangelicalism with state power, American exceptionalism, patriarchy, homophobia, gun culture and white supremacist beliefs.

“What should people of faith who stand against White Christian Nationalism do? And how do we nurture faith communities to increase their immunity from nativist gospels, militarized White-Jesus idols and xenophobic personality cults that incubate theologies of oppression?” one commentator asked recently. And we at the Maine Council of Churches are seeking answers to that question, too. To begin, we have [posted a resource page on our website](#).

We must break the silence, define and name White Christian Nationalism—within ourselves and others—and identify the ways this theological contagion is spread through misinformation and gross distortions of the life and teachings of Jesus by those who turn a blind eye to the witness of Hebrew and Christian scripture that the way of God is a way of justice, compassion and peace. And then we must develop resilient, hardy strategies of resistance and disruption.

The day after the Buffalo shooting, MCC reached out to our trusted and esteemed colleague Dustin Ward—to offer our support and to ask for his wisdom and guidance. The resource page we created is, in large part, thanks to him. At the end of our conversation, Dustin said this:



Photo: Matt Rourke, AP

***I don't want to be fearful of going to the grocery store myself.
Help me fix that anxiety by working with white parishioners on this.***

And so we will.

You can take action NOW:

Get involved in advocacy work through the [Maine Gun Safety Coalition](#).

Donate to support Buffalo attack survivors and victims' families. [Tops Market and National Compassion Fund gofundme page](#)



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BUSY LEGISLATIVE SESSION COMES TO A CLOSE

The second session of the 130th Maine State Legislature was still concluding when this newsletter went to press, but a final update on the outcome of the nearly 40 bills MCC prioritized for faith-based advocacy will be available on our website in mid-June.

Among our top priorities were two bills seeking to redress unjust and inequitable treatment of our Wabanaki neighbors. LD 1626 (to recognize their tribal sovereignty) had a record-breaking number of people testify in support, including all 9 of MCC member denominations and associate members, and passed both the House and the Senate, but was allowed to die on the Appropriations table to avoid a threatened gubernatorial veto. LD 906, (to provide Passamaquoddy tribal members clean drinking water) passed and was signed into law.

Climate justice successes included passage of a bill to ban PFAs (“forever chemicals”) in land applications, and passage of a bill to reduce solid waste from out of state being dumped in Maine’s landfills.

A bill to enact recommendations to end hunger in Maine by 2030 became law, as did a bill designed to ensure that the state collects better data related to racial populations.

At the Federal level, MCC Vice-President Carolyn Lambert was invited by our partner organization, Bread for the World, to meet with Senator Susan Collins regarding key legislation that would address food insecurity in Maine, particularly among children. Lambert also worked with Oceana, a DC-based non-profit dedicated to protecting and restoring the world’s oceans, to author an op-ed on banning offshore oil drilling along Maine’s Atlantic coast that appeared in the [June edition of in the Working Waterfront newspaper](#). In June, MCC Secretary, Pastor Christophor Gilbert, will represent the Council in DC at a Bread for the World two-day event.



Vision for An Equitable Maine press conference. Evelyn Johnson Moore, Board member and co-chair of Public Policy Committee holds MCC sign.



Andy Burt, member of MCC’s Public Policy Committee, attending the rally for Passamaquoddy drinking water rally.

Seeking common ground,
working for the common good

IT IS TIME...TO RETHINK OUR CALLS FOR “CIVILITY”

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and graduated from USM and Gordon Conwell Seminary, isn't called “pastor” anymore—after the murder of George Floyd, he left parish ministry to start work as a Racial Equity and Reconciliation Advocate—but on May 5, he preached to the audiences gathered in Brunswick and online for MCC's civil discourse symposium, “Saying ‘Peace, Peace’ When There Is No Peace: How Demanding Civility Risks Protecting White Privilege.”

“How often have you heard, ‘We shouldn't talk about politics in church,?’” Ward asked the audience. A knowing chuckle murmured through the room. “We back off from difficult conversations out of a fear of fighting and then we call it ‘being civil.’ But it's not being civil; it's simply not dealing with it, and that creates harm. Same goes for pursuing unity at all costs, which silences us—and silences God. Such a misguided pursuit of ‘civility’ and ‘unity’ leads us to take no action and to go quiet. I call us, instead, to make *action* our goal, not just peace.”

For more than a decade, MCC had a signature program promoting civil discourse. But in recent years, hearing BIPOC voices saying that White folks demanding “civility” was often a covert way of protecting the status quo of privilege, we pushed the pause button on our program until we could recalibrate it. Thanks to generous grants from the Eleanor Humes Haney Fund, First Parish UCC in Brunswick, and the Prejudice and Poverty program of the New England Yearly Meeting of Quakers, we were able to invite Dustin Ward to lead us in this important first step.

And it was just a first step—more action is required. We left the gathering on May 5 committed to taking action, agreeing it is time that White folks question their motives for demanding ‘civility’ and saying ‘peace, peace’ when there isn't peace for their neighbors of color; it is time that White folks learn how to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, to get angry at injustice (and say so) and be courageous listeners to the righteous anger of the marginalized. It is time to take action to dismantle racism and work together to create a world as God's love would have it.

You can watch a video of the May 5 lecture on our [YouTube channel](#). A bibliography of essays exploring civility and racism is [available on our website](#). To invite Dustin Ward to work with your faith community, school district or municipal government, contact him at www.itistime.me

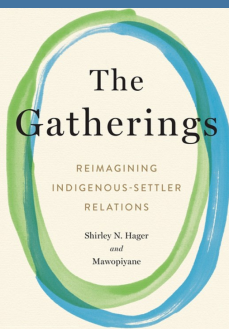


Dustin Ward addresses the audiences gathered at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Brunswick and online on May 5.



UPISKTWO AND THE ART OF REIMAGINING

A conversation with Shirley Hager and Rev. Shirley Bowen about The Gatherings



Upisktwo*
***a Mi'kmaq word that means "we return to that original place, and let's try again."**

In February, MCC welcomed two Maine authors, Shirley Hager and Rev. Shirley Bowen, for an online conversation about The Gatherings, a book they helped co-author that recounts the experiences of a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals who came together thirty years ago in Wabanaki territory to explore some of the most pressing questions at the heart of Truth and Healing efforts in the United States and Canada. Meeting over several years in long-weekend gatherings, in a Wabanaki-led traditional Council format, participants had their assumptions challenged, perspectives upended, and stereotypes shattered. They formed alliances and friendships that endure to this day.

Hager and Bowen discussed how the many voices represented in The Gatherings offer insights and strategies that can inform change at the individual, group, and systems levels. "These voices affirm that authentic relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples – with their attendant anxieties, guilt, anger, embarrassments, and, with time, even laughter and mutual affection – are key to our shared futures here in North America," said Hager.

You can watch a recording of this event on our [YouTube channel](#).

WELCOME NEWEST ASSOCIATE MEMBER

MCC welcomes our newest Associate Member, HopeGateWay Church, Portland! This membership status is open to local congregations and communities of spiritual practice who are rooted in Hebrew and Christian scripture and have a



demonstrated commitment to the purposes of the Council, but who are not part of one of our member denominations. HopeGateWay joins our other Associate Member, Union Church in Biddeford Pool. Located on Forest Avenue in Portland, HopeGateWay is an independent congregation (not affiliated with a denomination) that understands its mission through the lens of Micah 6:8 – doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. They envision a world that embraces community, celebrates inclusivity, expresses creativity, seeks transformation, and practices simplicity.

The Maine Council of Churches is proud to be a part of two statewide coalitions working for the common good:

[Vision for An Equitable Maine](#) is a working group of 34 Maine-based organizations who share the goal of making Maine a more equitable place to live and who work together to build support for the changes we are seeking.

[Credit to Kids](#) is a working group of statewide organizations with capacity to help ensure all eligible Maine families receive the Child Tax Credit, a program that has cut monthly child poverty by 30% and is keeping 3.7 million children out of poverty.



Credit To Kids

OBSERVING A SABBATH FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Congregations throughout Maine observed a Sabbath for Reproductive Justice* as faith leaders, in sermon and prayer, marked the January anniversary of Roe v Wade, the 1973 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision protecting the legal right of women and couples to decide for themselves, according to their own beliefs and values, whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy. (*Since having “choice” doesn’t mean much if you don’t have the resources necessary to exercise that freedom, the term “reproductive justice” better conveys a comprehensive vision that includes reproductive health and rights, especially for marginalized members of society.)

Because this constitutionally protected right is now at risk, and because we recognize the unique role faith leaders can play in moving society in more just and compassionate directions, the Maine Council of Churches reached out to clergy, urging them to help their congregants “think more deeply about these matters in light of their faith.”

It's unfortunate that some topics – abortion in particular – are rarely, if ever, spoken of in the sanctuary. When they are talked about, it's often only in whispers out in the parking lot. As Christian ethicist, Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison, one of the Sabbath project's organizers and a volunteer chaplain for Planned Parenthood, put it, “For the spiritual well-being of our congregants, we need to do better.”

In his work as chaplain, he's seen firsthand the importance of clergy speaking up publicly and prophetically about abortion rights. “I've had the privilege of sitting with people of faith as they were deciding whether to carry a pregnancy to term. Almost to a person they shared their deep regret that their own pastor, rabbi, or priest had never spoken about these matters from the pulpit, or had only spoken cruel words of judgment, shame, and condemnation. Pastorally, they felt bereft. Spiritually, they had been fed stone, not bread. We can no longer afford the silence.”



Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison



Rev. Suzanne Roberts, M.D.



Rev. Christopher Gilbert



Rev. Justine Sullivan

When MCC has testified before the state legislature to affirm that many people of faith believe abortion can be a moral choice, legislators and people in the hearing rooms have gone out of their way to thank us, saying they wish more of us would speak up because too often, the only voices of faith that are raised are the ones shaming, blaming, and judging those who seek or provide abortions.

Maine clergy who participated in January's Sabbath for RJ reported that they received overwhelmingly positive responses to their sermons, everything from a standing ovation and “tears of joy and relief,” to expressions of gratitude from those who had long hungered in silence for a healing, compassionate, and non-judgmental word about these tender matters. This project has proved, once again, that prophetic ministry and good pastoral care belong woven tightly together, the warp and woof of life-giving ministry.

Go to [MCC's YouTube channel](#) to see videos of several Sabbath for RJ sermons preached in Maine in January.

Theological resources about reproductive justice are available on [our website](#).

MORE THAN “THOUGHTS & PRAYERS”

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Alliance, a coalition of 137 denominations that partner with experienced workers on the ground in Ukraine and neighboring countries. Financial donations benefit the local economy of Ukraine and of countries receiving refugees, and it avoids the high cost of processing, sorting and storing incoming in-kind-goods shipments from overseas.

Some churches have decided to help in their own way. Trinity Episcopal Church in Portland organized an assembly line of about 90 volunteers who packaged 30,000 meals of oatmeal and dried fruit to be sent to Poland to feed refugees. The church raised \$10,000 to pay for the ingredients, bags, and transportation costs as part of “The Outreach Program,” a national non-profit that has provided 550 million meals to those in need in the United States and internationally.

“We can pray and sing hymns of peace, we can get together and rally in protest, but it’s not enough.

People want to feel they are doing something physical to help the refugees who are experiencing the madness of Putin,” said Rev. Peter Swarr, Trinity’s rector. Volunteers from other churches helped, too: Woodfords Congregational, St. Peter’s Episcopal, and First Lutheran, in Portland; and First Parish UCC in Yarmouth.

In Waterford, the small congregation at the UCC Church collected \$2,600 in donations and a pickup truck full of non-perishable items such as tuna, sardines, crackers, cookies, and pet food. The church’s food drive, initiated by a member of the congregation, was part of the “From Maine to Ukraine” humanitarian aid program organized by the Retail Association of Maine and the Maine Tourism Association in conjunction with the Retail Association of Ukraine. Rev. Doretta Colburn said many parishioners told her they wanted to do more than contribute money; giving food made them feel more of a personal connection to the people they were helping.

MCC member denominations also urge people of faith to contact their Congressional delegation to advocate for aid for all refugees in war-torn countries, including Ukraine. In addition, the Quakers’ American Friends Service Committee calls on Congress to invest in diplomacy, refugee protection, and international cooperation rather than flooding the region with additional weapons that escalate the violence and lead to refugees’ despair.



Members of Trinity Episcopal, Woodfords Congregational, St. Peter’s Episcopal, First Lutheran Churches (all of Portland) and First Parish UCC, Yarmouth, worked together to pack 30,000 nutrition packets for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

PRAYER FOR UKRAINE

God of mercy, justice and peace, our spirits are heavy with sorrow, our souls shocked at the sudden and breathtaking violence, the invasion of Ukraine by their neighbor Russia.

We pray for lives caught in the grip of this war, for those in neighboring countries as their hearts and doors open to refugees, for the Ukrainian faith communities that they be protected from harm and sustained in their efforts to feed and shelter their neighbors, for peacemakers and protesters in Russia that they will be heard and their lives preserved.

May we undergird our prayers with tangible resources to help.

May we reach deeply, give generously, and welcome extravagantly.

May we lift our voices in strong and unified advocacy.

And even as we breathe in lament, may we breathe out mercy, hope and peace.

--The Rev. Dr. Laurie Kraus, Director, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance



Truth Tellers

a film by Richard Kane

"Shetterly is . . . an invaluable chronicler of 21st century America."
—Bill Moyers

Virginia Film Festival
FARMington
Hampton's Dec Fest

PRESENTED BY
KANE-LEWIS PRODUCTIONS and UNION OF MAINE VISUAL ARTISTS

ROBERT SHETTERLY ARLAN SHETTERLY BAYARD RUSTIN BILL MCKIBBEN KELSEY JULIANA
REV. LENNOX YEARWOOD SHERRI MITCHELL MAULIAN DANA BILL BIGELOW ZAYNA BRYANT
BREE NEWSOME FANNIE LOU HAMMER JOHN LEWIS REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. REGGIE HARRIS

PRODUCED BY RICHARD KANE EDITED BY MELODY LEWIS-KANE WRITTEN BY JUDY HALLET
DIRECTED BY RICHARD KANE & BOB ELFSTROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BETTY BURKES (EDITED BY) MARGA VAREA



**Penobscot Tribal Ambassador
Maulian Dana**



**Musician
Reggie Harris**



**Artist
Rob Shetterly**

In March, The BTS Center invited MCC to partner with them in hosting a screening of *Truth Tellers*, a new documentary film about Maine artist and activist Robert Shetterly and his project “Americans Who Tell the Truth.” The film shows how Shetterly uses art to celebrate the voices of courageous activists, past and present. Following the screening, we presented a live question and answer session with Rob Shetterly and two of his portrait subjects, musician-activist Reggie Harris and Penobscot Tribal Ambassador Maulian Dana, both of whom are featured in the film.

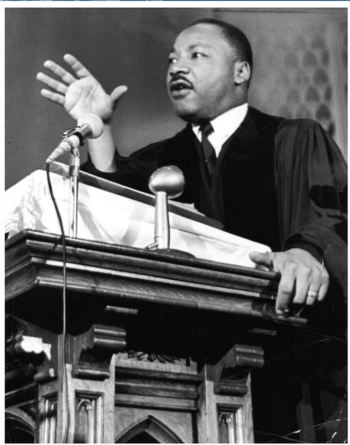
You can watch a trailer for the film, as well as a recording of the panel discussion on [The BTS Center website](#).

MLK DAY 2022 – COMMITTED TO LISTEN

COMMITTED to LISTEN

a public reading of
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s
sermon “Remaining Awake
Through a Great Revolution.”



MONDAY, JANUARY 17
12:15 pm (Eastern) • Online
Register: www.thebtscenter.org



For the second year in a row, MCC and The BTS Center hosted a noon-time observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, featuring the voices of faith leaders from around the state reading King’s 1968 sermon, “Remaining Awake Through A Great Revolution.” The event also included special music and a time for prayer.

You can watch a recording of this year's MLK Day event on our [YouTube channel](#)

All are invited.
Co-hosted by

HOW HAS MCC MADE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE?

We've collected a series of short stories, captured on video and told by your friends, colleagues and neighbors who want you to know how MCC has made a difference in their lives. You can watch these video stories on our [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) channels.

We want to hear your story, too! Email your one-minute video to info@mainecouncilofchurches.org and let us know how our work and witness has made a difference in your life.

The generosity of people like you makes it possible for us to do the work of inspiring Mainers to unite in building a culture of justice, compassion, and peace. So we're not just asking for your stories—we're also **asking for your support**.

[Make a donation](#) to our spring fundraising appeal and help us to continue making a difference. Here's how:

- Use the enclosed envelope to mail us your gift
- Or click the "Donate" button in the Instagram story-videos or on our website to make a secure online donation
- Or scan this QR code for a fast, easy, and secure way to give via your smartphone



THANK YOU!
YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE



THANK YOU TO OUR FALL 2021-SPRING 2022 DONORS*

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Falmouth Quarterly Friends Meeting
HopeGateWay
Maine Conference UCC
New England Conference UMC
New England Synod, ELCA
New England Yearly Meeting of Friends
Presbytery of Northern New England
Unitarian Universalist Association
Vassalboro Quarterly Friends Meeting

Churches and Organizations

Brunswick Friends Meeting
Congregational Church of Edgecomb UCC
Durham Monthly Meeting of Friends
Farmington Friends Meeting
First Congregational UCC, Wiscasset
First Parish Church UCC, Brunswick
First Universalist Church of South Paris
Hammond Street UCC
Narramissic Valley Friends Meeting
Portland Friends Meeting
Second Christian Congregational UCC
Somesville Union Meeting House
South Congregational Church UCC
Southern Maine Friends Meeting
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary
Trinity Episcopal Church Lewiston
United Parish Congregational Church of
Harrison/North Bridgton
Vassalboro Friends Meeting
Williston-Immanuel United Church
Winthrop Center Friends Church
Woodfords Congregational Church

Individuals

Cushman Anthony
Brendon Bass
Carole Beal
Joan Beal
Robert and Anne Bencks
Richard and Theresa Berman
Dean and Mary Booher
Rev. Dr. Jackie Brannen
Margrethe and William Brown
Anne Burt
Rev. Edward and Phyllis Campbell
Ann and John Carman
Sarah Carta
Ann Carter
Rev. Phyllis and Don Chaffee
Rev. Marcia and Howard Charles

Joshua and Katharine Chasan
Cynthia Christie
Jan Clark
Marci Clark
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Anne Daly
Cheryl Dearman Mills
Christine DeTroy
Diane Dicranian
Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison
Tom Ewell
David B. Field
Jane Field
Rev. and Mrs. James Fletcher
Debi and Tom Forsyth
Rev. Dr. James Gertmenian and Susan King
Rev. Christophor Gilbert
Rev. Jeanette Good
Eden Grace
William and Nancy Gregory
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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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WHERE'S JANE-O?



Our Executive Director has been on the road, around Maine and beyond!

Augusta (State House)

Brunswick (UU Church)

Durham (Friends Meeting)

Kennebunk (Holy Cross Lutheran Church)

Falmouth (Emmaus Lutheran Church)

Cape Elizabeth (St. Alban's Episcopal Church)

Portland (home base)

Exeter NH (NH Council of Churches)

This is possible thanks to the expansion of our Executive Director position to full-time!