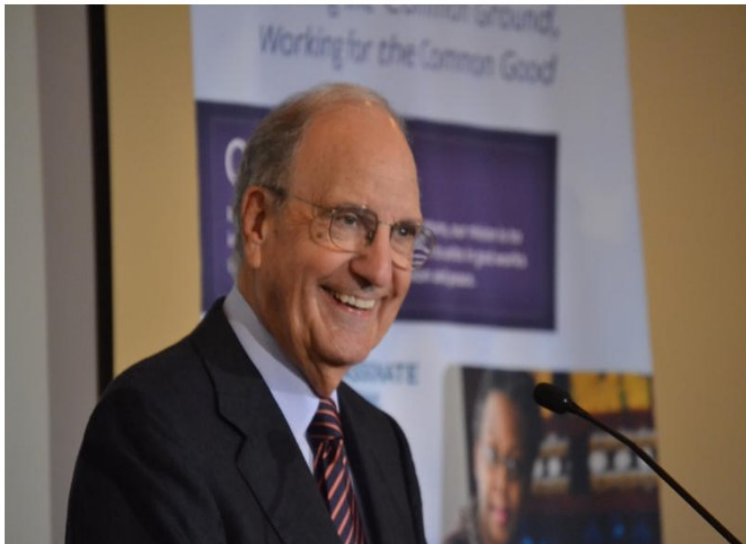


## SENATOR GEORGE MITCHELL ON ‘THE TRUE PRACTICE OF RESPONSIBLE DEMOCRACY’



Former Maine Sen. George Mitchell speaks at a symposium in Waterville Thursday on civility in politics.  
MAL LEARY/MAINE PUBLIC

The Maine Council of Churches welcomed nearly 200 people from all over the state who gathered Oct. 20 to hear Senator George Mitchell speak about an issue of deep concern to citizens across our nation: how to make politics more civil. Mitchell's candor, humility and thoughtful reflection were the very embodiment of civility, as he laid out his careful analysis of the problem without de-

meaning or disrespecting any candidate or party.

Senator Mitchell said politics have always been rough and tumble in our country, but the difference today is "many of the words are spoken by the candidates themselves, recorded and repeated endlessly on cable television networks and in social media."

Many defend candidates' use of profanity, disrespect and threats as 'telling it like it is' and 'not being politically correct,' he said. "But this argument is based on an erroneous belief that being a straight talker somehow justifies... the public use of vulgar, inflammatory and insulting words. Nothing could be further from the truth. Swearing in public, insulting and threatening those with whom you disagree is often a way to obscure the truth and avoid serious discussion, not to engage in it."

"What is difficult," he said, "is to publicly address complex issues in a serious way and in respectful language, respectful of both the American people and respectful of your opponents. That is the true practice of responsible democracy."

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## From the Council President

During the past few months in my role as Council president, I have listened to the comments of people in churches, at retirement communities and at a back-to-the-earth fair. I have shared a podium with Senator George Mitchell. I have hugged a Maine veteran after a photo-op with the Governor. Despite these disparate venues, I was reminded again and again of the importance and relevance of the motto of the Maine Council of Churches: "Seeking common ground, working for the common ground."



To me, it is clear: We need to step away from our differences so we can stand together on issues that really matter to humanity. Thus I was deeply moved and inspired by reading the joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran declaration on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, "From Conflict to Communion."

Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Yunan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, urged Roman Catholics and Lutherans in that October 31 declaration to "draw close in faith to Christ" rather than dwell on painful conflicts in the past. "We pray to God for inspiration, encouragement and strength so that we may stand together in service, upholding human dignity and rights, especially for the poor, working for justice, and rejecting all forms of violence."

That sounds a lot like the Mission Statement of the Council: "Rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, our mission is to inspire congregations and persons of faith to unite in good works that build a culture of justice, compassion and peace."

We at the Maine Council of Churches believe that despite our differences, we share common concerns, and that we must pull together for the sake of humanity. I hope that you share these beliefs and will join us in our mission.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Bonnie Rodden".

Bonny Rodden

MCC Board members staffed an information table at the Common Ground Fair in September and offered visitors the opportunity to sign an "I'm For Civility" pledge based on our Civil Discourse Covenant. It was a wonderful opportunity to let more Mainers know about the mission of the Council to build a culture of justice, compassion and peace. Pictured here: Board President Bonny Rodden in front of the ARRT civil discourse banner that provided a backdrop for the MCC booth.



*continued from front page*

Senator Mitchell's prescription for increasing civility in American politics included:

Reversing what he sees as a "steep decline in the standards of journalism"

Reducing the role of money and fundraising in campaigns that "corrupts our process and undermines our institutions," and overturning the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*—what he called "among the worst Supreme Court decisions every made in American history"

Reducing "hyper-partisanship," especially by redressing gerrymandering of political districts that creates primary nominees who are "the most ideological, most rigid, and most unwilling to compromise"

Speaking out as individual citizens and in organized groups like the Maine Council of Churches, and contributing time, effort and money to those who share a belief in the importance of civility.

Voting. "Most importantly, citizens can vote.

Through the ballot box, we can choose our public officials and express our values as a nation."

Mitchell addressed several other issues during the speech, including the need to mitigate the effects of an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity, the contribution of immigrants to the strength of our nation, and the importance of acknowledging the reality of climate change.

This event was made possible, in part, by generous grants from the Maine Humanities Council and the First Parish Church of Brunswick, and by individual, church and denominational donations. It is part of the Maine Council of Church's ongoing efforts to promote civil discourse among Maine's citizens, communities of faith, candidates and elected officials. An in-depth resource guide for congregations and civic groups is available as a free download from our website, [mainecouncilofchurches.org](http://mainecouncilofchurches.org), under the "Programs" tab.

Maine Public Radio and Television have archived audio and video recordings of Senator Mitchell's speech, available at [mainepublic.org](http://mainepublic.org).

## BALLOT INITIATIVES PASS

On November 8, Maine voters passed one of two ballot initiatives endorsed by the Maine Council of Churches: Question 4 – Minimum Wage Increase. "With approval of this referendum question, Maine has moved closer to the Council's ideals of justice and compassion," said MCC Executive Director Rev.

Jane Field. The Council was pleased to stand with the Right Rev. Stephen Lane, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, when he spoke about raising the minimum wage, saying "This is an issue of faith and it is a matter of justice and hope."

Voters did not pass Question 3 that would have closed the loophole on background checks for gun sales. "When all gun sales require a background check, domestic violence homicides decrease, as does the number of law enforcement officers shot in the line of duty. This initiative would have made Maine's homes and streets more peaceful," said Field. "The Council will continue to pray and advocate for victims of gun violence and to support measures promoting safe and responsible gun ownership."

The MCC Public Policy Committee now turns its attention to identifying the Council's top legislative priorities for the 2017 Legislative Session, and preparing for a statewide event in March in Augusta to inspire and equip people of faith to do effective public policy advocacy.



Mike Tipping/Maine Beacon

## **VOICES OF FAITH ADVOCACY DAYS IN AUGUSTA MARCH 2017**

By John Hennessey, Member of MCC Public Policy Committee and Director of the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice

The Maine Council of Churches is working with our partners at the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice and Preble Street Faith Action Network to develop an interfaith advocacy training and lobbying day next March. With a goal of putting faith into action in Augusta, the two-day event will further our efforts to build a strategic faith coalition at the state level.

Participants will discuss best practices, asset-based based community development, optimizing collaboration and much more. The first day will include thoughtful sharing of information, prayer and community-building and on day two we will mobilize for advocacy at the State House.

The Advocacy Days event will likely be scheduled for the third or fourth week of March to coincide with what will surely be intense negotiations around the state biennial budget.

The planning committee will begin its work in earnest soon after the election and is seeking additional members to share in this important work. It's a tremendous opportunity for you to get involved! Please reach out to MCC Executive Director Jane Field or MENJ Director John Hennessey to learn more.

jfield@mainecouncilofchurches.org  
jhennessey@episcopalmaine.net

## **SIGNING THE CIVILITY PLEDGE IT'S THE POPULAR THING TO DO**

When the Maine Council of Churches asked candidates for U.S. Congress and the State Legislature this year to sign a pledge to be civil, a record 189 responded - 76 more responded than during the election season two years ago. Fifteen and some local candidates were so eager they signed without even having been contacted by the Council. A complete list of those who signed can be found on the Council's website at [mainecouncilofchurches.org](http://mainecouncilofchurches.org)

Brendan Rielly, who chairs the Westbrook City Council, encouraged candidates in his city to sign saying, "I think we have a responsibility to behave respectfully toward each other and model for our children how to participate in and run for government."

The increase in pledges reflects the results of a recent poll by Colby College and The Boston Globe that found 90 percent of Americans believe that civility in politics is important. Here in Maine, tickets for Senator George Mitchell's speech "From Mudslinging to Mutual Respect: How to Make Politics More Civil," sold out before the event was even widely advertised.

The Council also sees evidence that citizens value civility in their personal, as well, since many people have eagerly signed their own individual pledges for civil discourse. Two local congregations have also adopted the covenant as a basis for civility in their church's life. Copies of both the candidate and individual covenants are available for download at [mainecouncilofchurches.org](http://mainecouncilofchurches.org), under the "Programs" tab.

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## **MCC WELCOMES NEW OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR**



It's not easy starting a new job. There are people to meet, systems to learn, priorities to get straight. But Megan Akers was thrown into the orientation vortex a few days after she was hired as MCC's new part-time Office Administrator. The Executive Director went on an unexpected medical leave, the Council's website server was down for a few days and emails were pouring in with candidates signing the Covenant for Civil Discourse.

Megan managed to handle it all with aplomb while balancing two other jobs and duties as a mother. She was a vital addition to the staff at the Mitchell event in Waterville, where you may recognize her as the person who checked you in.

Welcome, Megan. We promise – or should we say, hope – it won't be so hectic in the future.

## ON THE ROAD WITH A MISSION

We may not have fancy buses or jet airplanes like the Presidential candidates, but members of the Maine Council of Churches Board of Directors and our executive director have been hitting the road these last six months, taking our message to “the people in the pews.”

We have visited churches, denominational gatherings and retirement communities letting people know about the Council’s mission, our activities and how their members can become involved. We have given sermons, coffee-hour talks and 5-minute briefings.



Revs. Margrethe Brown, left, Charles Whiston, and Joan Mabon, center, join Board President Bonny Rodden and MCC Member Rev. Alyssa Lodewick, far right, after a recent presentation at South Church in Kennebunkport. Revs. Brown and Whiston are former presidents of the MCC and Rev. Mabon was on the property committee.

While the Council is well-known among legislators and our secular partners and within Governor LePage’s administration, we have discovered we are not as recognizable to the public at large. We need to educate spiritually-minded individuals and members of our churches that the Council provides a complementary resource to their outreach efforts. With the backing of nine denominations, the Council has more weight than individual churches going it alone to influence legislation, hold legislators to the highest standards of civility, and develop programs that help the disenfranchised and the poor.

Since June, board members and the Rev. Jane Field have visited Piper Shores in Scarborough, Ocean View in Falmouth, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Brunswick, South Congregational Church in Kennebunkport, the UCC Statewide Conference in Bangor and the Congregational Church in Cumberland. Let us know if you would like us to visit your place of worship.

## WHY SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH SUPPORTS MCC

**By The Rev. Charles Whiston, Minister, South Church, Kennebunkport**

*South Congregational Church has been a generous donor to MCC for many years.*

Our support of and work with the MCC reminds us that we are not the only faith community in town. It reminds us that the gospel is greater than Kennebunkport, greater than the United Church of Christ, greater than York County.....yes, and even greater than the state of Maine. It serves as a humbling reminder that we can draw wider understandings of the Spirit at work from other practices and faith expressions. In this way, we join with others in striving to nurture the core values and ethics of faith-filled living, and be further inspired in our discipleship. The Maine Council of Churches enriches us, plain and simple.



## FAREWELL TO RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS

### Leslie Manning

By Rev. Dr. William Barter

Leslie Manning will be leaving the Board after seven years of dedicated and faithful service to the Council. During her tenure, Leslie has served as the denominational representative for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and as Vice President and President, helping to guide us through a major transition in 2012 and 2013. We are deeply grateful to her and she will be greatly missed by her friends and colleagues on the Board, with whom she leaves a legacy of caring.

Leslie sees the challenge of peacemaking as a key component of living out the Gospel. And believes that the church is not a place we go to - it is who we are...to maintain our Gospel witness is to keep our countercultural truth alive."

Leslie will continue her work as the legislative coordinator for the Friends' Committee on Public Policy and as a member of the Council's Public Policy Committee.



### Father Richard Senghas

By Rev. Jane Field

After serving for ten years as the denominational representative for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Father Richard Senghas retired from the MCC Board of Directors in October. Until his recent retirement, he was the Director of the Diocesan Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, and his commitment to interfaith and clergy groups around the state, from Sanford to Bangor, has been one aspect of his ministry that his colleagues on the Board will sorely miss.

Before his ordination to the priesthood in 1998, Father Dick was an orthopedic surgeon. Because of his unique perspective as both a medical doctor and priest, he has been an extraordinarily effective advocate in Augusta, testifying on important legislative issues like the expansion of Medicaid. In March 2013, he told legislators, "Catholic teaching is that health care is a basic right, and there should be adequate and affordable health care for all, for all."

We wish Father Dick a long and happy retirement at his home in Piper Shores, where, among many other activities, he is an avid director of the community's croquet tournaments.



## MCC WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER



In October, the Most Rev. Robert P. Deeley announced that Father Richard Senghas would be stepping down as the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland's representative to the Council (see tribute elsewhere in this newsletter), and that Dr. Daniel

Sheridan would be the newly appointed representative, effective immediately.

Dr. Sheridan is a professor in the Theology Department of St. Joseph's College in Standish and also the Director of the Diocesan Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs. His areas of expertise include history of religions and comparative religions within the context of Catholic Systematic Theology. He has a great interest in world religions, the future of Catholic education, history, and the American Civil War. He is an avid reader and his hobby is model trains.

# THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 DONORS\*

## Your Contributions Make a Difference

The Maine Council of Churches relies on donations from individual donors, local congregations and our nine member denominations to support our operating budget. We are pleased to report that in 2016, 100% of our Board of Directors supported our work with a financial contribution, as well as with contributions of time and talent.

### Denominations

Maine Association of the New Jerusalem Church  
Maine Episcopal Missionary Society  
New England Conference United Methodist Church  
New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America  
New England Yearly Meeting of Friends  
Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland  
Synod of the New England Presbyterian

### Churches

Congregational Church in Cumberland  
Durham Monthly Meeting of Friends  
Episcopal Church of Saint Mary  
Falmouth Congregational Church  
Falmouth Quarterly Friends Meeting  
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First Universalist Church, South Paris  
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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](mailto:finance@mainecouncilofchurches.org) or mail to MCC, 156 High St., Portland, ME 04101.*

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