



The Rev. Dr. James Gertmenian opens Advocacy Days.

UNITED METHODISTS DIVIDED

One of our seven member denominations — The United Methodist Church, an international denomination with 12 million members worldwide, and the second-largest Protestant denomination in the United States — is facing deep division that may lead to schism.

This moment of decision follows 47 years of debate around questions regarding human sexuality, currently focused on two sticking points: (1) the ordination of self-avowed LGBTQ persons, and (2) the right of clergy to officiate at same-sex marriages.

In February, 864 delegates gathered in St. Louis for a special three-day session of its global decision-making

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PEOPLE OF FAITH FIND THEIR VOICE AT ADVOCACY DAYS

“As you do this exhausting, difficult, often daunting work, do not presume victory, or assume you have all the answers, or let yourself be manipulated by partisans, but rather rejoice in the fact that you are in the embrace of the Holy One.”

With these words, keynote speaker Rev. Dr. James Gertmenian reminded more than 70 people of faith gathered at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church in Augusta for our 2019 Faith-Based Advocacy Days that while they celebrate political changes in Maine that have led to advancement for progressive causes it is important to be aware of “the dangers of winning.” He urged them to stay focused on the ultimate authority that guides our work. He also warned against despair, presumption, self-righteousness, and the temptation to believe we will ever be able to “go home” from activism. (You can read his address in its entirety under the “Advocacy Days” tab on our website.)

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Ophelia Hu Kinney, Maria Girouard, and Fatuma Hussein spoke about privilege at Advocacy Days panel.

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From the Executive Director

“As people of faith united in our belief that every human being is a child of God, created in the image of God and beloved by God, we promote the full humanity and dignity of every person, the sacredness of all Creation, and the opportunity for everyone to achieve their full potential.” So begins our Council’s new Moral Agenda, a statement of our beliefs, values and priorities that the Board has enthusiastically adopted as a guide for our advocacy and programs. Public Policy Committee Co-Chair John Hennessy (Director of the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice) and Board member Rev. Allen Ewing-Merrill (pastor of HopeGateWay and Executive Director-Elect of The BTS Center) crafted this important document, adding theological rationale for each of the agenda’s six elements:

- **The full civil, political and economic rights of every person regardless of race, creed, gender expression, or sexual orientation**
- **Elimination of hunger and poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable**
- **Affordable and accessible healthcare**
- **Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone**
- **Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing and public safety**

I invite you to read the Moral Agenda in its entirety on the Public Policy Committee page of our website, and to join us in answering God’s call to make this agenda a reality as together we pray:

Grant us, God, a vision of your world as your love would have it: a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor; a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them; a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect; a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love. Amen.

Rev. Jane Field

Executive Director



MCC ADVOCACY OVERVIEW



The first session of the 129th Legislature in Augusta has produced more than 2,000 bills, and MCC's Public Policy Committee has been monitoring a record number of them. At the time this newsletter went to press, most were still in process with Joint Standing Committees. MCC Board members, volunteer advocates, members of the Public Policy Committee, and our Executive Director have been testifying, writing editorials and letters to editors, and collaborating with our twelve partner organizations to be sure that the voice of faith is heard in the halls of the State House.

Among the bills we are urging legislators to support are:

Criminal Justice: LD 1221 & LD 1572

Reduce Prison Sentences for Rehabilitative Activities; Fair Chance Housing

Environment: LD 797, 1282, 1284, 1433, 1443 & 1532

Climate Action; Green New Deal; Climate Change Impact on Maine's Marine Species; Reduce Toxic Chemicals in Packaging; Safe Packaging Act; Eliminate Single-Use Plastic Carry-out Bags

Gun Violence: LD 1312

"Red Flag" Bill

Health Care: LD 798, 949 & 1261

Repeal Vaccine Exemptions; Prevent Overdose Deaths; Authorize Certain Health Care Professionals to Perform Abortions

Housing: LD 1337

Establish a Homeless Opioid Users Service Engagement Program (H.O.U.S.E.)

Human Rights: LD 77, 944, & 1025

Establish A Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Populations; Ban Native American Mascots in All Public Schools; Prohibit Provision of Conversion Therapy to Minors

Labor: LD 1410

Create Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits

Poverty: LD 1317 & 1491

Restore Services to Help Certain Noncitizens Meet Basic Needs; Establish a Maine Work Credit

Restorative Justice: LD 1010 & 1370

Develop a Model School Disciplinary Policy; Address Violent Behavior in the Classroom



VALUED VOLUNTEER: CHERYL DEARMAN MILLS

Maine Council of Churches can only have the reach and impact it does thanks to the extraordinary commitment and hard work of volunteers. Our paid staff (a 20-hour/week Executive Director, 6-hour/week office administrator, and 2-hour/month bookkeeper) couldn't possibly do it all. We rely on a true "working Board" to do the heavy lifting, as well as committee members, our secular partner organizations, and trusted liaisons like our indomitable environmental advocate, Anne D. ("Andy") Burt. This year, we have welcomed a new face to our volunteer roster, Cheryl Deaman Mills, a member of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Kennebunk who also volunteers with the "Welcoming New Immigrants" project. Cheryl, a retired educator, stepped up to take a leadership role on the coordinating committee for our 2019 Faith-Based Advocacy Days, including facilitation of the workshop on immigration and race. Her steadfast commitment to the six-month planning process and her courage in taking a leadership role in the most complex of our four workshops was extraordinary and made the event better for leaders and participants alike. We are grateful for her generous spirit and support of our mission and we look forward to working with her on new projects very soon!

METHODISTS DIVIDED CONT

body, called General Conference, with one agenda item: to consider several different proposals, each aimed to settle the decades-long dispute over whether and how to fully include the LGBTQ community. These decisions are particularly challenging in an international denomination where theological positions are polarized within the United States and globally.

The 2019 General Conference adopted The Traditional Plan, which retains exclusionary policies and tightens accountability for LGBTQ pastors and clergy officiating at same-sex marriages. In April, the United Methodist Judicial Council, which serves as the denomination's Supreme Court, reviewed the decisions of the General Conference and largely upheld the General Conference decisions.

The denomination's social principles hold the tension, on one hand saying, "We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God," and imploring families and churches not to reject or condemn LGBTQ persons; and on the other hand stating, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

In 2016, the New England Conference, the regional body to which Maine belongs, adopted an official resolution of non-conformity, vowing to practice ecclesial disobedience in opposition to exclusive denominational policies. The New England Conference has continued to ordain LGBTQ persons, and many New England United Methodist pastors have elected to follow their conscience with regard to same-sex marriages.

Conversations are ongoing throughout the United States and in New England about possible reconfigurations within the denomination, with both progressive and conservative factions discussing the formation of new denominational bodies. Another global General Conference session will meet in Minneapolis in May 2020.

FROM AWAY? STILL CONSIDER A DONATION TO MCC

Something I've realized since becoming a year-round Maine resident is how easy it used to be, when I was here on vacation, to delude myself that I was in Brigadoon. When vacation was over and it was time to leave, Maine went "poof" and ceased to exist until it was time for me to come back again. Talk about "from away"! Then a few years ago I began donating to the Maine Council of Churches at the suggestion of a friend. When Maine became my home for real, and I began to look around for ways to participate in community life as a full citizen, the MCC website and newsletter became my go-to resource. I discovered that the organization I had somewhat casually supported has a foot in the door to a very wide world, partnering with dozens of religious and secular organizations from all over the state, embracing people of all faiths, including the un-affiliated and "un-churched," and consistently, creatively working for the common good. I'm awed by the impact the Council is having on public affairs, working with tireless persistence on a shoestring budget and staffing.

So much more could happen.

We who are forever "from away" but are connected to Maine – by camps, jobs, friendships, vacation homes, family relocations – would do well to consider a donation to the Maine Council of Churches. Whether we think of this as a casual gift, an act of faith, or an investment in the Maine we hope always to come back to, our connection is strengthened. That, in all ways, is in the interests of all.

Beth Mason is now a year-round Scarborough resident, but for many years lived in Connecticut and spent summers in Waterford, Maine.



WHAT WOULD WE DO IF WE WERE BRAVE?

MCC was proud to partner with The BTS Center and the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ to host Convocation 2019, "Brave Change: Courageous Churches," on April 6 in Freeport. This was a gathering for faith leaders who want to lead change bravely during a time of powerful, disruptive

transformation in church history. We grounded our work in 2 Timothy 1:7, "God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love." We talked about grief, hope, and the reality that discerning a way forward often means needing to let go of some things that are holding us back. Several "brave churches" were invited to present their stories of risk-taking and change, including Waterville United Church of Christ and Faith Lutheran Church, Windham.

ED REA RETIRES

After six years of burying himself in the finances of the Maine Council of Churches, Treasurer Ed Rea has retired from the Board of Directors. He is also moving from Portland to a smaller place in Cape Elizabeth. To avoid giving him just another certificate of appreciation to throw away, we gave him an edible one during a celebration at his beloved Celtic Eventide Service at Saint Alban's Episcopal Church. We also gave him a Thanksgiving Prayer that read in part:



*"He came to us as The Fixer –
Not to silence figures très beguiling
But figures in need of reconciling.
And he did that well, thanks be to God.*

*He toiled over checks and balances
In the dusty warren at Immanuel –
Fun for him, but to us ... pure Hell.
And he did that well, thanks be to God.*

Much more than a "numbers" man, Ed's deep spirituality and fine-tuned sense of justice will be missed. We wish him well.

WE WELCOME NEW TREASURER MAC MCCABE



The Board of Directors welcomes Frederic "Mac" McCabe as its new Treasurer. Mac is a member of St. Luke's Cathedral of Portland and served as their Treasurer for many years. As a part of St. Luke's community, he has participated in Family Promise and Preble Street's breakfast program. In the summer months, he and his wife often worship at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brunswick. Mac holds an MBA from Harvard University and has served as the president of five different companies, including O'Naturals in Maine. He has worked for L.L. Bean and Eileen Fisher, among others. He is now a full-time consultant who works with companies that have a social or environmental mission. Mac has a passion for social justice with a focus on issues related to working class jobs and labor.

ADVOCACY DAYS CONT

Gertmenian kicked off a day-long series of workshops March 25 led by legislative advocates and theologians on issues being considered by the state legislature this session: climate change, immigration and race, healthcare and the opioid crisis, and hunger and poverty.

An afternoon panel discussion, "Moving Beyond the Savior Complex," explored how efforts by the privileged to "help" people who have been marginalized or historically disadvantaged can be misguided or inappropriate. Panelists included Maria Girouard, executive director of Wabanaki REACH, Ophelia Hu Kinney, communications specialist of Reconciling Ministries Network, Fatuma Hussein, executive director of the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine, and moderator Rev. Sara Ewing-Merrill, pastor of HopeGateWay and executive director of Greater Portland Family Promise.

The next day, the newly-minted advocates visited the State House to meet with their legislators. MCC, along with the other Faith-Based Advocacy Days sponsors—Maine Episcopal Network for Justice, Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network and Preble Street Faith Action Network—held a press conference announcing the Council's new "Moral Agenda." Later, leaders of the group discussed the Moral Agenda in meetings with Governor Mills, Speaker of the House Sara Gideon and Senate President Troy Jackson.



Rev. Jane Field, MCC Executive Director and Public Policy Co-Chairs Rev. Carrie Johnsen and John Hennessy with Governor Mills, House Speaker Gideon and her dog Jacoby, and Senate President Jackson.



FAREWELL AND GODSPEED TO A BELOVED FAITH LEADER



The Right Reverend Stephen T. Lane will be retiring in June after serving for the past eleven years as the ninth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Bishop Lane's tenure has been shaped by his lifelong commitment to peace with justice and he has been a stalwart supporter and trusted friend of the Maine Council of Churches. On April 24, community and faith leaders gathered at USM's Hannaford Hall to honor and celebrate Bishop Lane's legacy of social justice ministry. The theme for the evening lectures was "Voices of Faith and the Faithful in Maine: Thoughts on Public Policy and Civil Discourse," and featured speakers included Senator Angus King (by video with special

surprise guest Presiding Bishop Michael Curry), Ben Chin, Reza Jalali, Rabbi Carolyn Braun, UCC Conference Minister Rev. Deborah Blood and many others. MCC Executive Director Rev. Jane Field was invited to speak about civil discourse and how voices of faith can make a difference. Quoting Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, she thanked Bishop Lane for showing us all "a still more excellent way" to treat others, especially at times of deep division: to love with a fierceness and tenacity brave enough to step into the breach and strong enough to repair it when we get there .

The Council gives thanks for Bishop Lane's faithful leadership, good counsel, courage and gentle spirit, and extends our wishes to him for a long and happy retirement.






EPISCOPAL DIOCESE WELCOMES NEW BISHOP



The Rev. Thomas Brown will be ordained and consecrated as the 10th bishop of the Diocese of Maine on June 22 with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry officiating. Before coming to Maine, Rev. Brown was serving as Rector of the Parish of the Epiphany in Winchester, MA. Following the announcement of his election, Bishop-elect Brown commented, "[It is] so clear to me that the church in Maine is living the good news of Jesus Christ. I am humbled and overjoyed to accept the invitation to join the people [in the diocese of Maine] as their bishop. I give God thanks and praise for this call, and the opportunity to continue building the church in Maine on Christ the solid rock." After receiving his Master of Divinity from The Church Divinity School of

the Pacific he served as Rector of St. Michael Episcopal Church in Brattleboro, VT and as the Director of Alumni/ae and Church Relations at The Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, CA. He has held many leadership positions in The Episcopal Church and in the Diocese of Massachusetts. The bishop-elect and his spouse, Rev. Thomas Mousin, have moved to Portland and are the new neighbors of MCC Treasurer Mac McCabe! The Council looks forward to extending a warm welcome to Bishop-Elect Brown and to many years of shared ministry and mission as together we build peace with justice and guide justice with love.

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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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