

## **“Our Hearts Are Broken, Our Spirits Are Not” MCC Aids in Response to Lewiston Mass Shooting**



Just hours after the October meeting of MCC's Board of Directors adjourned on Wednesday, October 25, all hell broke loose in Lewiston when Robert Card began shooting. In less than 15 minutes, 18 people lay dead or dying, another 13 were injured, much of central Maine began 48 hours of lockdown while helicopters with spotlights flew overhead searching for Card, and our sense of safety was shattered.

We will never be the same.

Soon after the news broke, MCC began working with the leadership of our seven member denominations to reach out to their clergy and their 18 congregations in the affected area. Less than 24 hours after the shooting, Bishop Thomas Brown of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine hosted a statewide online prayer vigil in which MCC Executive Director Jane Field took part. In the days that followed, MCC focused on providing comfort and support to judicatory leaders and to the clergy of those 18 churches while connecting them to resources arriving in the state, including two specialized trauma chaplains trained to work with clergy after mass shootings.

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

***Where there is no vision, there is no hope.***

—George Washington Carver



This newsletter shares stories about vision. A vision embraced by our Board of Directors as they lead MCC into its ninth decade of service to this great state and its people of faith. A vision of social justice integral to the life of Rev. Fred Pease. A vision to help end hunger in Maine that a member of our associate congregation, Union Church of Biddeford Pool, saw become a reality. The vision of people in York County working together to welcome their newest neighbors. These stories are a testament to the truth that where there is vision, there is hope. Or, to paraphrase Proverbs 29:18, where there is vision, the people do not perish. You will also find the story of how we in Maine are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. In the aftermath of the mass shooting in Lewiston, we mourn the deaths of 18 innocent victims, the injuries sustained by many others, and the loss of our sense of safety. Yet even here, as we make our way through the deep shadows death has cast, we will fear no evil, for we are not alone. People from all over the state have come alongside our neighbors in Lewiston, and people from around the country are standing by all of us here in Maine, embodying the greatest commandment: to love neighbor as self. We are not alone because God, who is Love, is with us.

We are entering the holy season of Advent, when we prepare to welcome the One whose life was a testament to that love. During Advent, we will hear the words of the prophet Isaiah, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,” and, with tiny candles in our hands and tears in our eyes, we will softly sing of love’s pure light and the dawn of redeeming grace. And in that sacred moment, the vision of the world as God’s love would have it will begin to heal our broken hearts.

May it be so.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane Field".

## PANEL DISCUSSION IN YORK ON WELCOMING NEWEST NEIGHBORS



*Photo credit: Brianna Soukup*

In the [Nasson Community Center kitchen in Sanford](#) where asylum seekers are preparing their meals, translator Maynor Campos greets Executive Director Jennifer Davie.

The fellowship hall of First Parish Church UCC in York was full on the evening of October 18 when MCC Executive Director Rev. Jane Field moderated a panel discussion among asylum seekers and staff and volunteers who support them. Sponsored by Southern Maine for Racial Justice, [Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition](#), and Welcoming Immigrants Our New Neighbors, the event gave asylees the opportunity to tell their own stories, while the staff and volunteers shared the most effective ways people can offer assistance and help new arrivals feel welcome.



## MCC's Next Chapter Is Off To A Great START!

MCC's Board of Directors adopted new mission, vision, values and strategy statements on June 22, 2023, enthusiastically committing to moving boldly forward into the organization's future while treasuring its 85-year history of faithful ecumenical witness and work in Maine.

The mission of the Maine Council of Churches is to speak with a prophetic voice of faith, connecting people within, through, and beyond the church to create a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world.

The core value that is the foundation of our work and witness is love of neighbor. This value is expressed in five guiding principles: seek wisdom, journey with humility, derive strength from community, build trust, and demonstrate courage.

To accomplish our mission, we: **Connect people** across denominations, faith and wisdom traditions, organizations, races, ages, classes, national origins, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities; **Equip them** to take action so that our collective impact can be more powerful; **Provide educational opportunities** where we can teach and learn from one another; and **Advocate** for statewide public policies that create a more just, equitable, compassionate, sustainable, and inclusive community in Maine.

Included with this newsletter is a [four-page brochure](#) that illustrates what these statements are all about. We encourage you to share this insert with members of your congregation, your friends, your family. Please let us know if you would like additional copies to distribute. You can also find the 3-part blog series "unpacking" the new statements on our [website](#).

Our Board is proud to announce we have begun the next phase of ensuring MCC's financial sustainability with expanded capacity. We have convened a Strategic Advisory Resource Team (STARTeam) of professionals with experience in organizational development, fundraising, and ecumenism to guide us through the next leg of the journey. That team includes Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing Merrill, Rev. Amanda Gerken Nelson, Dr. Liz Parsons, and Helen Scalia, along with three members of the MCC Board. We are so grateful for their willingness to share their wisdom and expertise with us at this critical juncture in the life of the Council.



### LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

The ground from which our principles grow.

Illustration: ARRT!

## WELCOME NEWEST BOARD MEMBER



In June, MCC welcomed the Rev. Michael Cartwright as the new representative to the Board for the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). He was elected in August to serve as an officer (Secretary) of the Board, as well. Pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Brunswick since 2021, he is also the optician at Berries Hearing and Optical Center (Brunswick), is active in the Brunswick Area Interfaith Council, and serves on the board of the Brunswick Downtown Association. Michael graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, with his Master of Divinity degree in May of 2000. In his free time, you will find Michael tinkering with house projects at home in Topsham, playing with his dog Tsunami and enjoying his 2 backyard chickens, Grace and Frankie.

# MCC AIDS IN RESPONSE TO LEWISTON MASS SHOOTING

continued from page 1

We were interviewed by CNN, MainePublic, and the [Portland Press Herald](#); appeared with ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, civil rights leader Rev. William Barber, and others offering prayers for Lewiston in a [November 1 online National Call to Prayer service](#); participated in the Vigil for Maine; and, in partnership with the Massachusetts Council of Churches, established the [Lewiston Deaf Access Fund](#) to ensure ASL interpreters were paid for their work at the funerals and other events.

On Sunday, November 5, All Saints Sunday, MCC was honored to host the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, who, after worshiping at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke in Portland, spent the day in Lewiston, meeting and praying with area clergy and visiting the memorial sites where she spoke with community members as they paid their respects.

Friends, this is a marathon we are running, not a sprint. Healing and restoration for Lewiston and all those who have suffered loss or been traumatized will take years of patient, compassionate, hard work. Improving the effectiveness of Maine's gun safety laws will also require enormous effort and determination. It will take all of us, working together, praying together, standing together, with one another and with God. There is no time to waste. So let us begin.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

***"A detour I didn't expect sent me down a dark road I'd never been on before. I didn't know the way out. I didn't feel safe. I wondered when I got to the end of the detour, 'Which way do I go?'"***

***Eventually I got back to a familiar road and knew where I was."***

C.P., a lay leader from Auburn, describing her experience driving home during the lockdown

In the wake of the shooting, we are all taking "a detour we didn't expect" down a strange, dark road where we don't feel safe, and don't know the way out or which way to go. But our faith offers the assurance that we will be able to find our way home.

***"Don't give fear more than it deserves. Defuse it. Examine it. Keep it in perspective. Create what theologian Howard Thurman called 'islands of safety and peace.' Seek that peace which passes all understanding. That's what we in the churches have to offer."***

Bishop V. M. McKenzie, General Secretary, National Council of Churches

Courage is not the absence of fear—it is the recognition that there is something more important than our fear; it is the capacity to move forward faithfully even when we are afraid.

## NEXT STEPS

Praying and offering comfort is absolutely the right first thing to do, but it is not enough without efforts to prevent future violence. "Compassion without justice can mean caring for victims while quietly acquiescing to a system that creates even more victims," Marcus Borg once said. For years, MCC has advocated for sensible gun safety legislation and we urge you to join us. For more information: [MCC website resource page](#) and [The Maine Gun Safety Coalition](#).



NCC General Secretary Bishop McKenzie pays her respects at the memorial outside the first shooting site in Lewiston.



## LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY UPDATE

This year's legislative session in Augusta was the longest that our Public Policy Committee co-chair, John Hennessy, can remember in his more than 20 years of working at the State House. Despite challenges, we were able to achieve most of our goals and deliver effective, faith-based advocacy that aligned with the compass of our [Moral Agenda](#).

We **opposed** a number of bills that were **successfully defeated**, including:

- An act that would have permitted schools to arm teachers and staff with guns

- A bill that proposed eliminating “critical race theory” and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion from school curricula

- A number of bills that would have permitted discrimination against transgender youth and adults



- Three bills that attempted to reinstate the religious exemption for vaccines

Among the bills we actively **supported** and that were **passed and signed into law** were:

- The Paid Family and Medical Leave Act

- A bill that increases eligibility for the Maine Medicare Savings Program for marginalized older Mainers

- The Maine Indian Child Welfare Act

- The Governor's bill to improve reproductive privacy laws and allow patients to receive necessary medical procedures, including abortions, from Maine doctors

As a proud member of the [Wabanaki Alliance Coalition](#), MCC supported Question 6 on the November ballot and it passed by a resounding majority. Now Maine's treaty obligations to the tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy will once again be visible. It is a small but significant step in truth-telling and repair by the State and its non-indigenous citizens, who have too often, through willfulness and/or ignorance, perpetuated harm by preserving invisibility of these obligations and even of the tribes themselves.

## THE WINDING ROAD

From Divinity School...

...To The State House



Senator Anne Carney  
Harvard Divinity School



Representative Charles Skold  
Harvard Divinity School



Representative Mark Worth  
Meadville Lombard  
Theological School

The three Maine legislators who hold advanced theological degrees—Senator Anne Carney (District 29) and Representative Charles Skold (District 119), who each hold an MTS from Harvard Divinity School, and Representative Mark Worth (District 13) who received an MDiv from Meadville Lombard Theological School—joined MCC for a lively online panel discussion November 14 ([recording available on the MCC YouTube channel](#)). They spoke of their own spiritual journeys, and described key values that inform their approach to legislating: peacemaking, inclusiveness, and listening to voices from the margins. Each affirmed how much they value hearing faith-based advocates speak in State House Committee hearings.

## FRED PEASE: A Lead Voice in the Choir for Social Justice

Maine's faith community has lost a beloved social justice advocate with the passing of the [Reverend Frederic A. Pease Jr.](#), a former member of the Maine Council of Churches Board of Directors who led MCC's public policy work in Augusta in the 1990's and "lent his powerful and persuasive voice for the good of all," recalled colleague Christine Hastedt, senior policy advisor with Maine Equal Justice.

"Fred's testimony was persuasive because he spoke in term of values; values that clearly came from his faith but were framed in language that all could understand and hear. Who could not understand his point that 'the budget is a moral document,' especially as budget cuts fell so disproportionately on the most vulnerable?" she said. "The fact that he was speaking for the Council, a trusted and respected organization, brought even greater credibility to his remarks."

Fred, who died at age 96 in July, represented the United Church of Christ on the MCC board for more than a decade. He and his late wife, Lillian, were beloved members of the First Congregational Church of Wiscasset, and he of First Parish Church UCC in Brunswick.

Those who knew him described Fred as a passionate and kind man, who treated others with respect and dignity even when he strongly disagreed with them. When his colleagues were distraught over the right-wing and social program cuts, he lifted them up.

He and Lillian raised their family in Andover, Massachusetts, where he was a school chaplain at Phillips Academy, and served as Interim Conference Minister for the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC. Fred and his family enjoyed idyllic summers in Maine on Swan's Island, and he could often be seen sailing his Rhodes 19, Windfall, in and around the waters of Burnt Coat Harbor.

Fred is survived by his children, Ted Pease (Brenda Cooper), of Trinidad, California, David Pease (Julie Keller), of Topsham, Ruth Pease (Greg Blanchette), of West Bath, and Rebecca Pease, of Bowdoinham; seven grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

We are grateful for the family's choice to designate the Maine Council of Churches as the recipient of donations made in Fred's memory, and we hope that their model of generosity might inspire others among our supporters to do the same at the time of loved ones' passing, or to consider including MCC in their estate plans.

In the way he lived his life, and in the way his family honored him at his death, Fred Pease has been a gift to MCC and to the State of Maine. Well done, good and faithful servant.



## YOUR TAX RETURN CAN HELP END HUNGER IN MAINE



Five years ago, lay leader Sara Bloom helped organize an event for her congregation, Union Church in Biddeford Pool (an MCC associate member): "Ending Hunger in Maine: Creative Solutions," moderated by MCC Executive Director Jane Field, and was inspired to submit a bill to the Maine Legislature. Her ally, Representative Maureen Terry (D-Gorham, House Majority Leader), helped shepherd LD 1046, The Hunger Prevention Act, into law. It establishes a checkoff provision on Maine income tax forms (Line #8) that allows taxpayers to contribute to the emergency food assistance program fund that supports grants to food pantries and community hunger prevention programs all around the state. We applaud Sara Bloom's example of effective faith-based advocacy and encourage everyone to check the box on their Maine income tax form.



## THANK YOU TO OUR FALL 2022-FALL 2023 DONORS\*

Would you like to see YOUR name and your church's name on this list next time? Our ministry doesn't happen without a community of supporters. We rely on donations to keep our progressive faith-based witness thriving in Maine. You can donate online at our website, or use the enclosed envelope.

### Denominations and Associate Members

Episcopal Diocese of Maine  
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  
Union Church Biddeford Pool  
Unitarian Universalist Association of  
Congregations  
Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting

### Churches and Organizations

Acadia Friends Meeting  
Brunswick Friends Meeting  
Congregational Church in Cumberland UCC  
Durham Monthly Meeting of Friends  
Episcopal Church of Saint Mary  
Farmington Friends Meeting  
First Congregational UCC Wiscasset  
First Parish Church UCC Brunswick  
First Universalist Church of South Paris  
Hammond Street UCC  
National Council of Churches  
Narramissic Valley Friends Meeting  
Portland Friends Meeting  
Raymond Village Community Church UCC  
Second Christian Congregational UCC  
Second Congregational Church Newcastle  
Somesville Union Meeting House  
Southern Maine Friends Meeting  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
United Parish Congregational Church of  
Harrison/No. Bridgton  
UU Church of Brunswick  
Vassalboro Friends Meeting  
Williston-Immanuel United Church  
Winthrop Center Friends Church

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## COMING THIS WINTER:

- January 15 MLK Day “Committed to Listen” online service of prayer, readings and song
- May 2 documentary film premiere and panel discussion: “Building Hope: Rural Poverty in Maine”
- “Edifice Complex” webinar on creative and nontraditional uses for church buildings (Date TBD)

