



Episcopal Diocese of Maine • Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ • New England Conference of the United Methodist Church
New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Presbytery of Northern New England, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Religious Society of Friends • Unitarian Universalist Association

The Episcopal Diocese of Maine and MCC: Blest Be The Tie That Binds

For over 40 years, the Episcopal Diocese of Maine has been an integral and valued member of the Maine Council of Churches. In just the past 5 years, no fewer than six Episcopalians have served on our Board of Directors—two as President, and two as Treasurer: Richard Berman, Bonny Rodden, Ed Rea, Mac McCabe, Charlie Priest, Lad Taylor and Marge Kilkelly. Two Diocesan staff have held key leadership roles on our Public Policy Committee: John Hennessy (current co-chair) and Heidi Shott. The ties that bind us together are indeed blessed.

The Diocese is one of seven member denominations of the Council. Together, our seven denominations represent 437 congregations with 55,000 church members across the state. Rooted in Hebrew and Christian scripture, the Council's mission is to inspire congregations and people of faith to unite in building a culture of justice, compassion and peace as together we work for the common good. We accomplish this mission by:

- fostering communication, connections and collegiality among our member denominations, their churches, clergy and parishioners
- creating and hosting programs
- advocating for just and moral public policies at the state and federal level.

The Council frequently takes responsibility for convening all seven judicatory leaders together for collegial support, input to the Council's work, and to issue statements and other documents when a unified voice is needed. For example, during the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, we convened such a meeting and out of that (virtual) gathering came a joint statement signed on by all seven judicatory leaders. Our denominations also indicated that a need the Council was best positioned to meet would be hosting statewide webinars for two groups: churches who house social service programs (like food pantries) and clergy and funeral directors. We produced both webinars, which remain available online as recorded resources. It was also decided by the judicatory leaders that MCC would take the lead on working with Maine's CDC on behalf of all seven denominations to produce a document describing best practices for congregations during the pandemic ("At The Threshold" published in early May and available as a free, downloadable resource). In conjunction with compiling that guide, MCC issued an open letter to Governor Mills and CDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah, applauding their work to keep Mainers safe and pledging to do all that we could to keep Maine's churches safe. Governor Mills quoted from our letter at length in one of her press conferences.

MCC also looks outward, beyond the church walls. We represent the ecumenical faith community in statewide coalitions, including Maine Together, UnifyMaine, and the Environmental Priorities Coalition. We work closely with twelve partner organizations who have come to know us as trusted allies who can mobilize faithful Mainers across denominational lines. Our official partners include Bread for the World, Restorative Justice Institute, Maine Prisoners Advocacy Coalition, Maine Equal Justice, Sensible Drug Policy Coalition, Preble Street Faith Action Network, Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition, Faith Leaders Against Gun Violence, National Religious Coalition Against Torture, Maine Council on Aging, and Maine Military Family Commission.

Ecumenical bodies like MCC provide "economies of scale" for our member denominations, making it possible for us to accomplish much more together than any one of our denominations could accomplish on its own. For

example, the seven-denomination consortium translates to a deeper pool of faith-based advocates than just one denomination would have. The Council is able to convene these people of faith by interest areas (health care, housing, poverty, LGBTQ rights, environmental protection, immigration, criminal justice, racism, etc.) to speak with state and federal legislators, including providing some with opportunities to travel to Washington DC. We are able to mobilize congregations across denominations statewide for rapid responses such as the prayer vigil following the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue shooting and the collection of desperately needed funds to provide security for that event.

Examples of the statewide symposia and programs we have offered in recent years include: a day-long workshop on how churches can effectively respond to the opioid crisis; a lecture on politics and civility given by Senator George Mitchell; our biennial two-day Faith-Based Advocacy events to equip and empower clergy and laity to speak with the voice of faith to legislators; an Interfaith Climate Justice Summit at Bowdoin College.

The Maine Council of Churches provides a united, progressive voice of faith in the public square that offers an important contrast to the strident, fundamentalist version of Christianity that receives attention in mass media and in the legislature.

All of this work would not be possible without the extraordinary and generous support from the Diocese, and our other member denominations. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for our 40+ year partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. We pray that our ministry and mission together will continue to flourish for the next 40 years!

Rather than just end by tooting our own horn, we thought you might like to hear what others are saying:

Retired Bishop Stephen Lane: “If the Maine Council of Churches didn’t exist, we would have to invent it! Because, as churches we need to find ways to make our voices heard. Some denominations might pull it off some of the time by themselves, but they would not be able to be a consistent presence the way the Council is. They speak with our common voice, amplified. There is great power in being able to speak with one voice to the larger community about how faith intersects citizenship, and to bring the weight of theological reflection and moral commitment to the public square.”

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Brunswick: “The community of St. Paul’s, Brunswick is a proud supporter of the Maine Council of Churches. We are deeply committed to MCC and its advocacy for justice, peace and care of the earth in Maine and are proud of the high commitment that our bishop has made to MCC. Our St. Paul’s member, Charlie Priest, a former Maine legislator, served the MCC board as the appointed representative of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. In these times of deep divisions, we are particularly inspired to be working closely with the variety of faith community members of MCC to promote justice, peace and the protection of the environment.”

The State Street Church (UCC): “We need MCC because it unites the faith community to be a voice of justice and compassion, standing up for our core values.”

Rev. Dr. Ted Campbell, renowned biblical scholar and former MCC Board member: “Central to hundreds of biblical verses is something nuclear to our calling as humans and basic to what we do at the Maine Council of Churches: to reflect about why we act and to strive to put faith into action meeting our neighbors’ needs and fostering justice, caring for orphans and widows, resident aliens, the enslaved, the ignored, oppressed, powerless, impoverished. Caring with and for persons is the veritable test of our faithfulness.”

Retired Methodist Bishop Rev. Clif Ives: “I’ve made a lifetime commitment to The Maine Council and to National and World Councils of Churches. As a United Methodist pastor, I have appreciated how Councils of Churches have consistently amplified our voices of concern for justice, compassion, and peace. I appreciate and support the voice and witness of the Maine Council of Churches throughout our state and beyond.”

Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison: “In trying times, when social insanity is rampant and keeping hope alive is an ongoing challenge, I’m grateful for the Council’s persistent voice calling for justice and compassion in all things. The Council bears witness to a truly different church and world, and that’s the kind of good news worth our support.”