

## Report from the Mission Council of the Maine Conference

On October 18, 2014, the delegates to the 2014 annual meeting adopted a new strategic plan for the Maine Conference called Moving Forward Together: moving to a networking/community based model of governance and staffing. At the October 2015 annual meeting we welcomed Deb Blood, our new Conference Minister, into the life of the Maine Conference. Deb wasted no time in getting out and about, hosting 12 “coffee and conversation” gatherings around the Conference in early 2016. Together we are equipping ourselves to find new ways to be the church for our times and needs. No one congregation or group needs to do it alone but instead can find its place in a network of mutual support: one Body of Christ in the creative unity of the Holy Spirit with spontaneity and experiments and thinking outside the box. That’s really what we want to encourage everywhere – in all facets and places of church life and practice. We want to light that creative fire.

The year 2015 of Moving Forward Together was a flurry of meetings, planning sessions, and activity. The Mission Implementation Team and Communications Team in particular were very busy. Among the outcomes was an initial and still growing group of Resource Teams. Again, we don’t have the 3 large commissions anymore that were each responsible for a broad segment of church life; we have Resource Teams. They can be large, but they can be as small as 3 people, too. And they need only have one ministry – one passion – that brings them together. So far the Mission Council has approved the following Resource Teams:

- Anti-Racism
- Clergy Communities of Practice
- Communications
- Earthcare and Spirituality
- Faith Formation
- Honduras Partnership
- Maine School of Ministry
- Mission Implementation
- Musicians Resource Team
- Outdoor Ministries
- Pilgrim Lodge Advisory Team
- Resourcing the Local Church
- State Youth Council

If you want more information about the Resource Teams or help creating a Resource Team, please visit the Conference website or talk to Darren Morgan.

Some of our 2015 efforts to implement Moving Forward Together also helped identify particular challenges or needs for greater development and clarity. Communications is one such area. In 2016 we came to the realization that “technology and a communications director” was not in and of itself going to meet our needs or be sustainable. Yes, we have begun to use technology more in facilitating meeting attendance via Zoom.

Communication also involves reporting skills, writing skills, editing skills, and publishing skills. It involves rebuilding the Conference web site, compiling an email database of church clergy, the use of document storage and sharing over the internet, livestreaming events and conferences. It's about facilitating community where folk get together on a regular basis as a network of mutual friends who care what is going on in each church and want to support each other: share what's going on, what the needs are, what's working well. We are looking for sustainable ways to do that hoping it will enhance the vitality of our congregations. So this is not just an IT question, it's about skill sets, timely use of the resources we already have available, communications content, and community building.

One thing the Mission Council has been working on over the past year is the area of "governance," including the recruiting of eager volunteer leaders for positions in the Conference. Association leaders have asked how Moving Forward Together affects them and the Associations. We did have a meeting with Association leaders in Augusta in November 2015 and still need to work on this. One thing for sure is that we need Associations to remain involved in the nominating process so we can ensure broad participation and input from across the Conference. We have an interim nominating committee in place but are looking to give this committee a permanent and ongoing role. We need new Mission Council members and volunteers for various committees. Some of these committees are familiar to us, such as Finance, Trustees, and Personnel. Others are brand new, such as Development, Governance, and (most importantly and visionary!) New Opportunities.

I write this report at the close of my two years as the Chair of the Mission Council. Our Vice-Chair, Susan Reisert, will become Chair following the Annual Meeting. I will stay on Council as the immediate-past Chair. It has been a pleasure and reward to work with Deb and Susan, and with everyone on Mission Council. Some are going off but I know will transition into other ways to help us move forward together. I look forward to the energy, ideas, and leadership of those coming on.

Shalom,

Stephen Hastings  
Chair, Maine Conference Mission Council (2014-2016)