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A Just Peace, Open and Affirming Conference



Maine School of Ministry

theological education for the life of the church

Annual Report – September 2026

Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himschoot



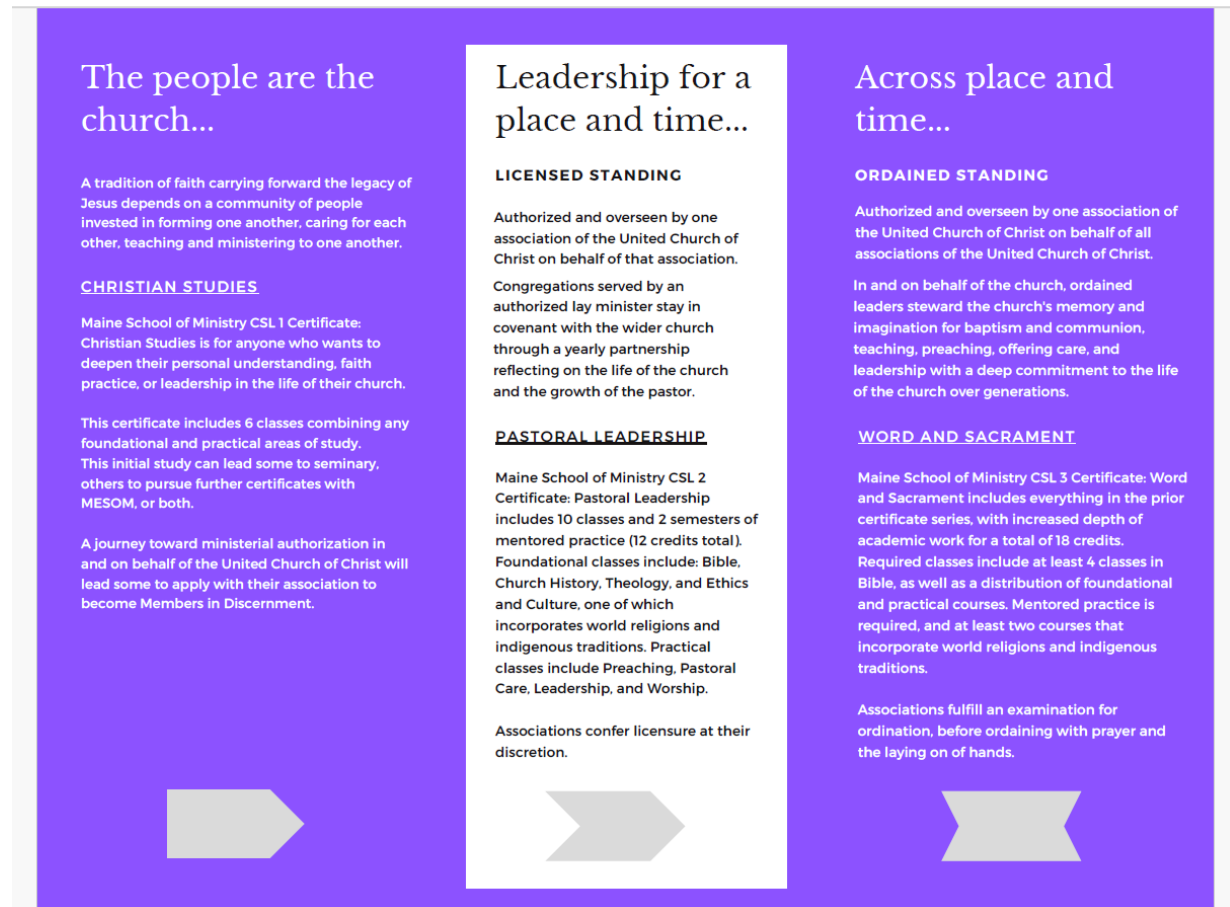
PHOTO: For its 15th school year, MESOM is moving into the Conference office and learning center at The Farmhouse.

The Maine School of Ministry is now entering its 15th school year, carrying forward the vitality and energy of United Church of Christ leaders to promote lifelong learning and leadership education. Shared resources and passions in the Maine Conference UCC make it possible for this regional theological education program to flourish. Each semester new learners approach study related to Christian faith and congregational life, while certificate students earn credits via an established curriculum.

More and more people are responding to 21st century theological questions related to faith and spiritual life. Some are responding to the call of God toward pastoral ministry. MESOM offers the support of collegial practice and theological reflection through classroom and contextual education. MESOM's curriculum is intentionally

streamlined for Christian Studies and Leadership. Part-time students may earn an intro certificate in Christian Studies, a secondary certificate in Pastoral Leadership, and a tertiary certificate in Word and Sacrament.

As one of the 21st century's multiple paths to authorized ministry, MESOM's curriculum is a resource to UCC Members in Discernment and Committees on Ministry. MESOM reduces barriers for those in place-based livelihood and ministry, especially in rural and remote locations across the economic and physical landscape of Maine.



A student's 18 credits from MESOM are among the experiences and educational opportunities that equip them to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities to satisfy "The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministry" for those led to represent the UCC through authorized ministry in and on behalf of the church.

Hundreds of unique participants have taken MESOM courses over the past fourteen years. Some are working toward a MESOM certificate, but many more seek for personal reasons a deeper dive in areas of practice and reflection. Fall enrollments to date show 20 enrolled in semester classes, plus 3 Student Pastors assigned to Mentored Practice, with another 3 learners referred by their Committee on Ministry to a year-long Special Course called "Parish Ministry Experience." Most MESOM students begin their studies prior to a formal Member in Discernment process. Some are already in roles of lay pastor leadership. MESOM's certificate education accompanies a variety of working adults and retired people responding to bi-vocational leadings.

Throughout the Maine Conference, 13 congregations are presently served by MESOM certificate students and graduates. In more than one way, the church calls forth faithful leaders – to call forth the calling of the church!

Instructors

A generous and collegial spirit characterizes the culture of teaching and equipping at the Maine School of Ministry, honoring the call of God and applying critical thinking as well as imagination to foundational and practical areas of study. United Church of Christ ministers and ecumenical partners joined with MESOM to deliver courses at the intersection of theory and practice. Their contribution was an investment in the learning and spiritual journeys of passionate and gifted students. It was also an investment in their own ministry of research, teaching, or scholarship. Living into this part of a minister's calling – lifelong learning and leadership development – makes an invaluable contribution to theological education for the life of the church.

Rev. Dr. AbbyLynn Haskell
Rev. Dr. Jim Gertmenian
Rev. Chrissy Cataldo
Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himschoot
Dr. Marvin Ellison
Rev. Deb Gline-Allen

Rev. Dr. Beth Hoffman
Rev. Leslie Foley
Rev. Shernell Edney
Rev. Dr. Paul Day
Rev. Dr. David Cleaver-Bartholomew

Thanks to the Winthrop Congregational UCC and to Pilgrim Lodge, students added in-person sites and connection to their online Zoom classes last year. MESOM partnered with another regional theological education program to co-sponsor a semester course with the New York School of Ministry, and collaborated with the Maine-based Wabanaki REACH collective to offer “Preparing the Soil: Decolonizing and the Faith Community.”

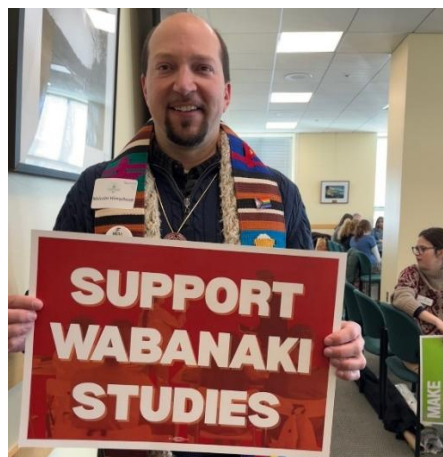


Photo: Dean Malcolm Himschoot represents MESOM at a 2026 Wabanaki Alliance lobby day.

Foundations

Throughout Maine, and in neighboring states, MESOM has an excellent reputation and capacity for its 15-year mission and purpose:

- To prepare competent and educated pastors for congregations by supporting pathways to ministry for committed persons responding to the call to ministry.
- To provide opportunity for education and spiritual growth to interested persons.
- To provide opportunities for education and spiritual growth in local church settings.

The 2025 book *A Little One Shall Lead*, by Susan Craig and Doug Dunlap, describes the changing landscape for ministry and the challenges faced by small-town congregations. Even before the closing (2013) of Bangor Theological Seminary, the Maine Conference UCC was already working toward meeting the educational needs of members and congregations to engage in spiritual formation and preparation for authorized ministry. Economic constraints faced by working people and their families and by our less resourced and smaller churches across the state, unable as these are now to support a full-time pastor, as well as Maine's geographic distances, call for a new, creative approach to the preparation of pastoral leaders. MESOM seeks to embody this approach.

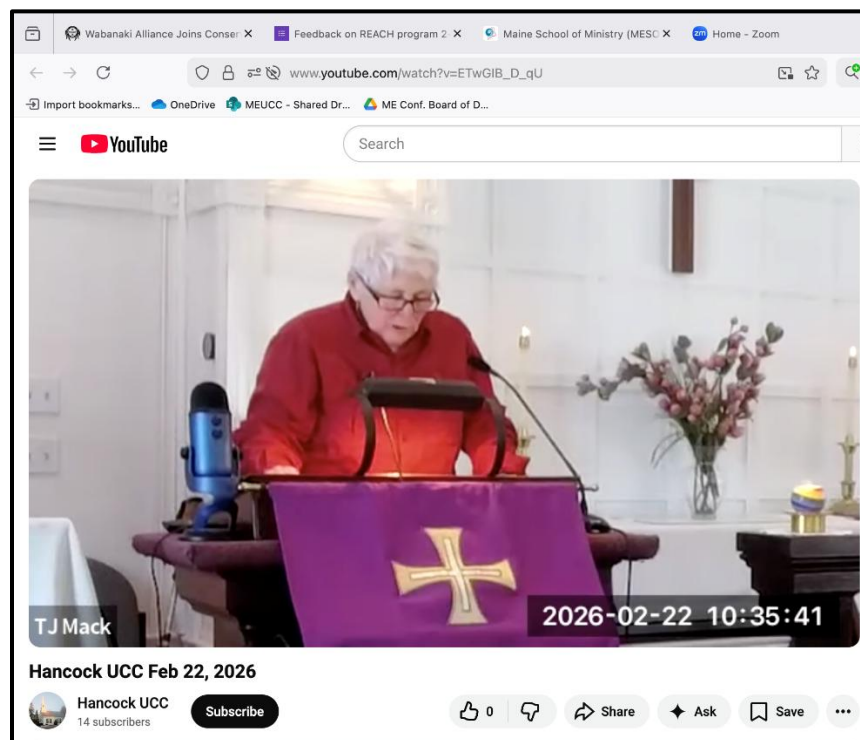


Photo: YouTube captures MESOM student Ann Boudreaux offering a guest message at Hancock UCC.

Programs

Classroom Education

In the 2025-26 academic year MESOM offered **Preaching as Prayerful Communication**, led by AbbyLynn Haskell with Jim Gertmenian, and a survey of **Old Testament II: Psalms, Wisdom Literature, and Prophets** with David Cleaver-Bartholomew of the New York School of Ministry.

In the spring MESOM offered two courses incorporating both semester academics and single-session workshops: **Intergenerational Spiritual Care and Nurture**, and **Organizing for Relationships and Repair**. The latter featured collaboration with the indigenous co-led organization Wabanaki REACH, creating a history-based curriculum for adults in Maine, and the Center for Sustainable Justice, generating a research-based national resource called *Sacred Reckonings*.

MESOM again offered Shernell Edney's course in **UCC History, Polity, and Theology** over Zoom during January Term.

The current 2025-26 academic year now begins with Todd Weir offering a leadership and family systems theory course in **Leading with Clarity in Anxious Times**, and Paul Day offering **Intro to New Testament I: Gospels and Acts**.



Photo: Students in a Preaching as Prayerful Communication class enjoy a light-hearted moment.

Contextual Education

The '25-'26 academic year featured Paul Shupe teaching MESOM's **Special Course: Ministry in Your First Parish** with four participants from two different associations. Each lay pastor continued serving at their church while participating in facilitated group meetings where they benefitted from peer relationships, formative theological questions, and prayer.

MESOM is supporting three students involved in a '26-'27 **Special Course: Parish Ministry Experience** taught by Donna Schaper. The instructor facilitates collegial space for reflection and experiential lessons over the course of a year. This course adds educational support to those referred by a Committee on Ministry who are lay or licensed ministers already leading in a congregation. The Special Course does not involve placement.

The coming year will again feature MESOM's **Mentored Practice**, a structured program of congregational assignments, mentors, peer group homework, and reflection together with a volunteer learning committee at each church. Three churches and three student pastors are participating in the '26-'27 Mentored Practice.

Communications

The Maine Conference UCC champions MESOM Sunday once each year in February. Congregations lift up MESOM materials and ask for a special offering, or they add MESOM into their line-item mission giving. Several churches hosted speakers and guest preachers relating to MESOM. These churches' contributions are deeply appreciated.

MESOM maintains a Facebook/Instagram presence and generates a quarterly newsletter to email subscribers:

Newsletter:

[MESOM Summer News](#)



Advisory Team

After helping to found the Maine School of Ministry and providing a crucial continuity on the MESOM Advisory Team for almost 15 years, John Lacey accepted retirement from his foundational role. We hope to express our gratitude to him at this year's conference Annual Meeting.

Continuing members of the MESOM Advisory Team are Nick Davis, Leslie Foley, Beka Choate, David Heath, Beth Hoffman, and Sarah Mills. Bill Bliss serves as an Advisory Team liaison appointed by the Conference Board.



Photo: John Lacey (right) among other Advisory Team members stuffs envelopes for the annual MESOM Sunday mailer.

Funding and Support

In-kind support comes from the Conference in the form of bookkeeping and HR support, technology, and classroom location. MESOM does not receive line-item funding from the Conference budget, but raises funds from tuition and scholarship dollars, grants and contributions. MESOM received a one-time bequest from the estate of Clifton Davis (Hella Davis, widow) to fund \$2,000 in upcoming scholarships.

Total operating budget for the year 2026 was \$72,000. Student fees are kept to a minimum, offsetting approximately \$15,000 in instructor fees. In 2026, the Carpenter Foundation provided MESOM a grant of \$25,000 toward the Dean's ½ FTE staff salary. The remaining \$32,000 is to be fund-raised each year from individual gifts and member

churches of the Conference. Financial support for MESOM is sought from congregations, associations, and individuals. If your passion and purpose involves theological education and church vocation, please consider a gift to the Maine School of Ministry.



Photo: David Heath receives a CSL 1 certificate in the Christian Studies and Leadership program, representing study with six different instructors over the course of several years.

Conclusion

Sacred leadership is a covenant one generation makes with another. Equipping people who are listening for the call of God with skills, knowledge, and abilities for ministry in the 21st century requires the Spirit activating many partners. Scholars, songwriters, grandmothers, pastors, instructors, and mentors all have a role in nurturing individuals' passion, teaching and discovering important lessons, and cultivating communal discernment. Committees on Ministry are living into this era using "The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministry" across many different contexts in the United Church of Christ. The Maine School of Ministry serves as an excellent partner in theological education for the life of the church, mobilizing the gifts of God for the people of God.