Mission and Ministry Board concerned for immigrants

Among a series of recent actions, the Mission and Ministry Board expressed concern for those of migrant, immigrant, or refugee status who may be affected by presidential executive orders. The board cited Matthew 25:35, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," among other scripture texts.

"These renewed threats of deportation are already affecting the lives of many in our denomination's congregations," said the board's statement, in part. "Our concern is for all people—undocumented and documented—who are under threat. Our congregations and districts are urged to extend support to people in their communities who are living in fear for their own safety and that of family members and loved ones, as well as fear of possible losses that may include homes, jobs, livelihoods, and more."

The board designated Jan. 16 as a day of prayer and fasting for immigrants, at the request of Atlantic Southeast District, inviting all Church of the Brethren congregations, projects, fellowships, and the denominational staff to participate.

2025 budget

On Dec. 5, 2024, the board approved a 2025 budget for denominational ministries in a special Zoom meeting led by chair Colin Scott assisted by chair-elect Kathy Mack. The board approved a 2025 budget proposal brought by general secretary David Steele and treasurer Ed Woolf and recommended by the Executive Committee.

A Core Ministries budget of $5,291,000 of income and $5,311,720 of expense represented budget reductions across various departments amounting to $395,280 in total. Other measures to offset expenses included a $125,000 transfer from designated funds and an additional $33,000 transfer from the Brethren Service Center quasi-endowment intended to help staff provide language interpretation and translation, among others.

The grand total 2025 budget for all denominational ministries—Core Ministries and the four self-funded units of Brethren Disaster Ministries, the Conference Office (Annual Conference), the Global Food Initiative, and Material Resources—is $8,019,400 of income and $8,163,470 of expense, representing a total net expense of $144,070.

Steele told the board that the 2025 budget is a framework and more is to be done in 2026. Adoption of the 2025 budget in early December followed closed sessions during the board's October meeting. Find a link to the 2025 budget at www.brethren.org/mmb/meeting-info.

Fall meeting

In its regularly scheduled meeting in October 2024, the board approved a new Global Mission Development Fund and a revision of the Health Education and Research Fund; named new board leadership; named Ben Barlow and Thomas R. Lauer to the Germantown Trust; held a board growth session on the Strategic Plan's goal of "Seeking God's Racial Justice"; and engaged in a discussion of "The Church of Tomorrow."

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Board chair Colin Scott (at center) leads the Mission and Ministry Board's Fall 2024 meeting. At right is chair-elect Kathy Mack. At left is general secretary David Steele.

Josiah Ludwick, a pastor at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, was named chair-elect as of July 2025, when current chair-elect Kathy Mack will begin as chair.

Daniel Butler of Ivester Church of the Brethren in Northern Plains District, who is filling an unexpired term on the board, was named an at-large member pending affirmation by Annual Conference.

Denomination supports Hillcrest investigation

The Church of the Brethren is supporting an independent investigation and assessment of allegations of multiple forms of abuse that may have occurred at Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria. The investigation is being carried out by the Zero Abuse Project. Contact Zero Abuse at Hillcrest@zeroabuseproject.org.

Hillcrest was founded by the Church of the Brethren in 1942 but for many decades has been an ecumenical endeavor. The Church of the Brethren is one of the churches and mission agencies cooperating with the investigation and is contributing some $63,000 toward the total cost sharing for both the investigation and victim advocacy services carried out separately by an organization called Accord.

Brethren Disaster Ministries, 2 districts respond to fires

Give now to support California wildfire response through Brethren Disaster Ministries," said an appeal. "Children's Disaster Services is already responding to the needs of children and families. Working with the Pacific Southwest District and partner organizations, Brethren Disaster Ministries is planning to address short- and long-term needs of vulnerable people impacted by the fires." (See www.brethren.org/giveEDF-Wildfires.)

Pacific Southwest District, which includes the Los Angeles area, and Virlina District, on the East Coast, both announced special collections to aid people affected by the fires.

The Pacific Southwest District board created an emergency fund to support Brethren who have been affected and gave an initial $2,500 of districts funds.

At least three Church of the Brethren families lost their homes in the Eaton Fire, and several others had to evacuate or suffered other losses, including loss of employment.

The district asked for prayer for the Conexiôn Pasadena congregation and pastors Juan Pablo Plaza and Adriana Rios and their children. Their church parsonage was destroyed, but the Pasadena church building and the second parsonage were not damaged.

Two volunteer teams from Children's Disaster Services (CDS) began work in the L.A. area in mid-January, caring for children and families, at the request of the Red Cross. At least two teams of seven volunteers each served in shelters and other sites, with one team continuing its work through early February.

In another recent CDS response, the Critical Response Childcare team served in New Orleans, La., following the truck attack of Jan. 1 that killed 14 people and injured 35 others in a crowd on Bourbon Street. The Critical Response Childcare program offers specially trained volunteers following mass casualty events.

courtesy of Kathy Howell

The CDS Critical Response Childcare team at work in New Orleans.

Personnel

National Youth Conference coordinators **Rachel Johnson** and **Anna Schweitzer** will work with the National Youth Cabinet to plan the event to be held at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colo., July 18-23, 2026. Johnson is in Brethren Volunteer Service as assistant coordinator for FaithX. She is a 2024 graduate of Messiah University with a bachelor's in youth ministry and grew up in Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren in Atlantic Northeast District. Schweitzer is a freshman at Indiana University and will serve part time as assistant coordinator while continuing college coursework. She grew up in Cedar Grove Church of the Brethren in Southern Ohio and Kentucky District.

Virginia Rendler has been promoted to volunteer coordinator with BVS after serving as interim since July 17, 2023.

Marcia Sowles has joined the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy as a volunteer Policy and Governmental Affairs associate with a focus on immigration. She holds a bachelor's from Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind.; a Juris Doctor from Valparaiso University School of Law; and a Master of Laws (L.L.M) from Yale Law School. From September 1987 she was a trial attorney with the Civil Division of the US Department of Justice. Previously she was a trial attorney with the US Department of Energy and an attorney with the Legal Services Program of Northern Indiana.

Leah J. Hileman began Dec. 10 as half-time West Marva District executive minister, continuing as part-time pastor of Robinson Church of the Brethren in Seward, Pa. She has been a pastor in several districts; is a musician and composer who has been a member of the Bittersweet Gospel Band; has served on Standing Committee and on a previous Review and Evaluation Committee of Annual Conference. She holds a bachelor's in music from Harding University, has studied at Ashland Theological Seminary, and holds a Training in Ministry Certificate from the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

Peggy Moylan began Dec. 9 as administrative assistant for Illinois and Wisconsin District. Outgoing administrative assistant **Andrea Garnett** ended her work for the district on Dec. 13, with plans to complete a graduate program in social work.

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