Church of the Brethren joins lawsuit to protect religious freedoms

The Church of the Brethren was one of two dozen Christian and Jewish religious groups who are plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed in early February by the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP) at Georgetown Law.

The case "Mennonite Church USA et al. v. United States Department of Homeland Security et al" responds to the federal government's rescinding of the Department of Homeland Security "sensitive locations" policy that had restricted Immigration and Customs Enforcement from conducting immigration raids, arrests, and other enforcement at churches and other houses of worship.

"We feel grave concern for those who are of migrant, immigrant, or refugee status within our congregations and in our communities who are threatened with deportation," said Church of the Brethren general secretary David A. Steele. "The prospect that raids may bring that violent threat into our very church sanctuaries is already affecting the lives of many people in our denomination. God's love is our greatest command, and we believe this divine love is not delineated by political borders nor limited by national origin, ethnic identity, race, skin color, or other characteristics that often divide us."

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

More than 70 clergywomen from 16 districts— *including ordained, licensed, and commissioned clergy—attended a Clergywomen's Retreat offered every five years by the Ministry Office. The event held Feb. 10-13 at the San Pedro Spiritual Development Center in Winter Park, Fla., was led by Meghan Larissa Good, lead pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Phoenix, Ariz. Clergywomen also enjoyed small group and worship experiences with the opportunity for intercultural fellowship. Translation into English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole was available with equipment provided by Atlantic Southeast District.*

Church of the Brethren signs declaration defending refuge

The Church of the Brethren signed an ecumenical declaration defending refuge as one of the Covenant Members of Church World Service. Additional organizations that signed the declaration released on Ash Wednesday, March 5, included the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, Mennonite Central Committee US, and Friends United Meeting, among many others.

With 45 initial signers, the declaration followed presidential executive orders that opposed longstanding US traditions of welcome and create uncertainty for the US Refugee Admissions Program.

"This is a critical moment in the history of our nation and our world," the declaration said, in part. "Guided by our faith, we stand together against the sweeping measures that are devastating vulnerable families and jeopardizing their futures."

The declaration cited "misinformation, cruelty, fearmongering and criminalization" targeting refugee and immigrants communities as well as government policies that "seek to decimate our nation's long-standing commitment to welcoming and protecting those seeking safety" including efforts to "ban refugees from entering our country, revoke temporary protected status for immigrants unable to safely return home, undermine the 14th Amendment's right to birthright citizenship, suspend foreign assistance to at-risk families around the world, erode the sanctity of places of worship, and dismantle our national capacity to assist refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants both at home and abroad."

The declaration is open for additional signatures by individuals, congregations, and other groups at https://cwsconnect.org/ecumenical-declaration.

Beckner and Bollinger head 2025 ballot

Moderator-elect nominees Dennis Beckner, pastor of Columbia City (Ind.) Church of the Brethren in Northern Indiana District, and **Glenn E. Bollinger**, pastor of Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Port Republic, Va., in Shenandoah District, head the ballot for the 2025 Annual Conference.

Also on the ballot:

Program and Arrangements Committee: **Amber T. Harris**, Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C.; **Marty Keeney**, Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 1: **Donna Parcell**, Indian Creek Church of the Brethren, Harleysville, Pa., Atlantic Northeast District; **Eric Ramirez**, Ebenezer Church of the Brethren, Lancaster, Pa., Atlantic Northeast District; *Area 4:* **Sarah Mason**, Monitor Church of the Brethren, McPherson, Kan., Western Plains District; **Samuel Gahm**, Messiah Church of the Brethren, Raytown, Mo., Missouri and Arkansas District.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: **Harry Biddle**, Oakton Church of the Brethren, Vienna, Va.; **John R. Hipps**, Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren.

Review and Evaluation Committee (five people will be elected): **Ilexene Alphonse**, Miami (Fla.) Haitian Church of the Brethren; **Lupita Ortiz Cruz**, Mount Hermon Church of the Brethren, Bassett, Va.; **Chris Douglas**, Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.; **Anna Lisa Gross**, Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, Fort Wayne, Ind.; **Gene Hollenberg**, Union Center Church of the Brethren, Nappanee, Ind.; **Del Keeney**, Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren; **Deb Oskin**, Living Peace Church of the Brethren, Powell, Ohio; **Daniel L. Rudy**, Monte Vista Church of the Brethren, Callaway, Va.; **Carol Scheppard,** Lebanon Church of the Brethren, Mt. Sidney, Va.; **Paul Schrock,** Northview Church of the Brethren, Indianapolis, Ind.

Complete biographical information is at www.brethren.org/ac2025.

Dennis Beckner

Glenn E. Bollinger

Personnel

Tim Button-Harrison retires as Northern Plains District executive minister at the end of 2025. He has served the district for more than 19 years, since he began as an interim in November 2006. During his tenure he has served multiple roles in the Council of District Executives, including vice chair and secretary, and has been a CODE representative on the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee and the On Earth Peace board. He has been active regionally with the West-of-the-Mississippi District Executives, and ecumenically with Iowa's middle judicatory leaders and on the board of the Minnesota Council of Churches. Along with his spouse, Mary Jane, he also has been a minister at Ames (Iowa) First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Claire Flowers on Jan. 27 concluded her work as director of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives. She had been in the position since July 15, 2024.

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey begins May 1 as director of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center (SVMC). She has served two years as coordinator of English-Language Ministry Training Programs at the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. She previously taught for SVMC's ACTS program. In 2023, she completed a doctor of ministry through Wesley Theological Seminary, and in 2014, she completed a master of divinity at Bethany Seminary. She has spent 10 years in pastoral ministry in Mid-Atlantic District, and has served on the board of Bethany Seminary

John D. Miller is joining the board of Bethany Seminary. He previously served two terms on the board beginning in 2004 and concluding in 2014. He is an attorney/partner with MPL Law firm, LLP in York, Pa.

Randi Rowan retires June 20 as program assistant for the Church of the Brethren's Discipleship and Leadership Formation department, where she has worked since January 2012. She has held responsibilities for day-to-day administrative tasks, managing various aspects of conferences, responding to inquiries, and helping to publicize programs.

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