## Team requests help with legal funding, expertise

**The Deportation Defense Response Team,** an initiative of church districts, has received many requests for legal expertise and funding to support immigrants in local communities. Recognizing this as a great need for vulnerable church members and neighbors, the team is making two requests:

- For congregations to take up special offerings and do fundraising to support church members and others who face immigration challenges and are in need of legal support. Donations can be sent through the Atlantic Southeast District office. Contact atlanticsoutheastcob@gmail.com.
- For connections with Church of the Brethren lawyers willing to help people navigate immigration forms and situations, and also people who are not lawyers but who are familiar with immigration law and forms. This involvement may range from consultation to representation, pro bono or at reduced cost. The team wants to organize a legal orientation session for lawyers who want to help. Contact migrantjustice@onearthpeace.org.

## Bethany celebrates 2025 commencement

**Bethany Seminary held commencement** for its class of 2025 on May 10. The keynote address was given by Dr. Kathy Melhorn, a retired board-certified child abuse pediatrician in Kansas and a former member of the Bethany board.

The seminary this year awarded 11 master's degrees. Masters of divinity were awarded to Liesl Eliana Higgins of Bellevue, Ohio; Connor Ladd of Columbia City, Ind.; Phillip Matarese of Fort Wayne, Ind.; and Joey Moss of Sterling, Va. Masters of arts in Theopoetics and Writing were awarded to Deborah Beddoe of Poulsbo, Wash.; Betty Ann Miskowiec of Charleston, W. Va.; Courtney O'Banion Smith of Houston, Texas; and Lauri Sorenson of Logan, Utah. Masters of arts in Spiritual and Social Transformation were awarded to Julie Avila of Indianapolis, Ind.; Matthew Adam Fulk of Broadway, Va.; and Hayden Hobby of Richmond, Va.

Bethany awarded five graduate certificates. Certificates in Theopoetics and Theological Imagination were awarded to Deborah Elena Baumgartner of Cincinnati, Ohio; Kristine Grace of Austin, Texas; and Nathan Thomas Wheeler of South Lake Tahoe, Calif. A certificate in Peacebuilding and Neighborhood Engagement, and a certificate in Peacemaking, Violence, and Power, were awarded to Connor Ladd of Columbia City, Ind.

In the program based in Nigeria, postgraduate diplomas in Biblical Peacemaking were awarded to Chuckle Raymond Chifwang, Samuel Nggada Daniel, Jonathan Manya Dogo, Patricia Ezekiel Gwom, Yahaya Lazarus, Victoria Yemisi Olaniyan, Fubure Sati, Dominic Isaac Sauri, and Bambiko Markus Wagereng.

## Letter supports multicultural welcome at Conference

**The Inter-Agency Forum** (Annual Conference officers and director, general secretary, representatives of the district executives, and leadership of the Conference agencies) in May issued a letter announcing measures to ensure multicultural welcome at the Conference in Greensboro, N.C.

Citing Romans 15:5-7, the letter said, in part: "Our desire, as church leaders, is for all people to feel safe and welcome at the Annual Conference." The letter celebrated cultural and racial diversity in the church but also acknowledged that international guests and certain racial and ethnic groups within the Church of the Brethren in the US may find traveling to this year's Conference particularly challenging. It announced creation of an action plan for Annual Conference to support multicultural commitments and ensure the widest welcome to those traveling to Greensboro.

**Mary Abraham of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy represented the denomination at an ecumenical prayer vigil in Phoenix, Ariz.,** *expressing solidarity with the San Carlos Apache Tribe's effort to protect the sacred site Chí'chil Biłdagoteel—known in English as Oak Flat, part of the Tonto National Forest land. The event affiliated with Creation Justice Ministries coincided with a federal court hearing on the Trump administration's effort to transfer the land to Resolution Copper, a foreign-owned mining corporation. Lawsuits on behalf of the Apache people argued the destruction of Oak Flat will violate federal protections for religious freedom. However, on May 27 the Supreme Court made a decision allowing transfer of the land to the copper mining company.*

## Disabilities network renews partnership

**The Anabaptist Disabilities Network** (ADN) and the Church of the Brethren through its Discipleship and Leadership Formation unit have renewed the partnership that supports congregations in becoming more inclusive of people with disabilities and mental illness.

A memo of understanding outlines a collaborative partnership focused on disability inclusion and accessibility throughout the denomination. ADN continues as the primary provider of disability ministry support for the Church of the Brethren, offering education, consultation, and resources for congregations and districts, as well as accessibility services and continuing education at denominational gatherings.

In return, the Church of the Brethren contributes annual financial support to ADN and supports its mission by contributing articles to ADN publications and inviting churches to become ADN partner congregations. The Church of the Brethren continues to hold an ex officio seat on the ADN board.

## District disaster coordinators trained

**Brethren Disaster Ministries** recently oriented new district disaster coordinators, welcoming seven into the role: Troy Barnhart as a co-district disaster coordinator in Middle Pennsylvania District; Gary Benesh in Southeastern District; Wendy Russell in Michigan District; and the South Central Indiana District team of Bill Baxter, Bill Gay, Seth Hendricks, and Kay Theel.

Several district disaster coordinators have "retired" from the volunteer position: Cliff Kindy in South Central Indiana District, Bob Schnepp in Michigan District, and Pam and Rick Brady in Southeastern District.

## Personnel

**Keith Call** began June 2 as director of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives (BHLA) at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. He most recently was an archivist for the College Church of Wheaton, Ill., but spent the bulk of his career as assistant archivist at the Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections, Buswell Library.

**Darlene Johnson** has retired from On Earth Peace after serving nearly 25 years in positions including co-executive director and administration director. During her tenure at the On Earth Peace office at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., the agency shifted from a fully staffed in-person office to a remote, decentralized workplace, and also made programmatic shifts.

**Andrew Duffy** has begun as interim transition director for On Earth Peace to help update and develop processes for its decentralized workplace and plan for future staffing. His career spanning 15-plus countries has focused on people and organizations navigating conflict and change.

**Kevin Daggett** and **Rebecca House** begin Sept. 15 as co-district executive ministers for Shenandoah District. **Daggett** has served in pastoral ministry for more than 30 years in Shenandoah, Southeastern, and Virlina districts, and is currently pastor of Dayton (Va.) Church of the Brethren and chair of Shenandoah's leadership team. He will also direct ministerial services, an eighth-time district position. **House** has served in pastoral ministry for 17 years in Shenandoah, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern Ohio and Kentucky districts and currently is associate pastor of Staunton (Va.) Church of the Brethren. She will continue quarter-time as director of district conference and youth services.

**Charlotte Bear** and **Rusty Curling** began May 1 as regional ministry associates for Mid-Atlantic District, a new role at the district level. The need for better connections between the district and congregations was identified during the interim period between the retirement of Gene Hagenberger and the call of Doug Veal as district executive minister.

**Betty M. Wills** retired June 30 as Virlina District administrative assistant, after serving the district for 17 years and serving as a church administrative assistant for more than 30 years.

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