

# Upwelling

Connections and Reflections from The BTS Center

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Welcome to the Summer 2024 issue of *Upwelling*, The BTS Center's occasional print newsletter. We are delighted to connect with you in this way, and we hope that when you are finished reading, you might pass your copy along to someone else who might be interested.

## An Invitation to Claim Your Call: Vocational Discernment for a Climate-Changed World



On one of the hottest days of one of the hottest summers on record, a group of about sixty people from various corners of New England made their way to the Schoodic Institute in Winter Harbor, Maine. There, on a wild and rocky coast molded over millennia by ice and storms and ocean, flora and fauna and indigenous inhabitants, this group of adventurous people of faith gathered to engage deeply in the vocational callings of their congregations.

Organized by The BTS Center in collaboration with Creation Justice Ministries and Anabaptist Climate Collaborative, the Claiming Your Call for a Climate-Changed World retreat brought together teams from twelve New England congregations for three days to explore the work to which their churches are being called in these times. With sessions led by theologians, scientists, and Indigenous leaders, as well as times for worship and deep sharing in small groups, the retreat allowed space for acknowledging the realities of the climate crisis and its impacts on particular watersheds, as well as the time and resources for these groups to dive deeply into their own vocational discernment processes.

Each of the congregations involved was selected through a competitive application process, with churches from throughout New England applying to send a team (including lay people and clergy) representing their community to the retreat. The intention of the Claiming Your Call retreat — as well as the ongoing community of practice in which the congregations are participating currently — is to offer a container for faith communities to understand and embrace their unique work in their particular place at this momentous time in history.

The twelve congregations selected to participate in the program already have been engaged in significant climate work in their local communities, and the retreat and community of practice are offering them time to reflect, integrate, and understand that work in new ways. For instance, Cape Elizabeth United Methodist Church in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, has worked over the past years to foreground climate chaos as the most important spiritual issue of our day. They have worked with the local land trust to conserve six acres of their property, have sponsored nature walks with local master naturalists, and have planted native gardens near the church. Steve Hill, one of the original founders of the CEUMC Eco Team and a participant in the Claiming Your Call retreat, notes, "For me, the interaction of science, theology, and justice was ever-present [at the retreat] and...made the retreat a profound experience. Many speakers stressed in different ways that everything we do is connected."

*"With faith and with love, I commit to renewing and calling forth in myself and others our sacred bond with all beings, human and other than human, seen and unseen."*

— a Claiming Your Call retreat participant

St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brunswick, Maine — another of the participating congregations — recently completed a 6,000-square-foot native species garden behind the church on land reclaimed from a wasteland of invasives. According to Dr. Rebecca McConnaughey, a church member and participant in the retreat, the congregation views the garden as "an outward sign of invisible grace."

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Rebecca reflects on the impact of the Claiming Your Call retreat: "Being part of the Claiming Your Call retreat brought us many steps further forward in our understanding and expanded our imagination of what might be possible. Meeting others of like mind, making new friends, and beginning to gain a deeper understanding of our trespass upon the land of the Wabanaki has made us long for a larger vision, which we live in hope will unfold before us as we grow."

*"It was fantastic and provided fresh vision, deep wisdom from the past and renewed hope for the future. A great balance of Indigenous wisdom, science, and Christian perspective on our relationship to the Earth."*

— a Claiming Your Call retreat participant

Participants from the First Congregational Church of West Tisbury in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, also experienced deep impacts from the retreat. The congregation already has a deep commitment to eco-spirituality and has engaged in projects ranging from planting beach grass with the local Wampanoag community to prevent beach erosion to hosting guest preachers focusing on eco-spiritual topics to creating a pollinator garden and hosting retreats on spirit and ecology. West Tisbury members Elliott Bennett and Jana Bertkau share, "The experience was truly impactful for our whole team. It reenergized us, brought us closer together as a team, and stimulated us to take action together rather than apart. Our minister created a three-session sermon series on refugia, which was based largely on what we had learned at the conference. Each member of our team spoke during the services and shared thoughts about refugia and our experiences...from the retreat."

The Claiming Your Call for a Climate-Changed World retreat and community of practice is part of a larger movement at The BTS Center toward offering spaces and resources for discernment of vocation — including individual calling but focused especially on collective or communal callings — in a climate-changed world. Recognizing that we are at a moment where understanding, embracing, and fulfilling our callings is essential to our showing up with grace and fortitude, The BTS Center seeks to offer programs of vocational formation uniquely suited to this moment in history.

"In a climate-changed world, there is important spiritual work for congregations to do in discerning who God is calling us to be and how we are called to respond to the pressing concerns of our day," says Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing-Merrill, Executive Director of The BTS Center. "When we wake up to the realities of the climate crisis, often we start with the question, 'What should we do?' I think there's an important first question, and that is, 'Who is God calling us to be?' Our deepening sense of identity and vocation in this moment will then lead us to faithful action."

This question — *who is God calling us to be?* — is a guiding framework behind much of the programming that The BTS Center is offering currently and that is being planned for the months ahead. From our Small Church Leadership Community to our EcoPreacher Cohort, from our Climate Conscious Chaplaincy Conversation Circles to our Group Spiritual Direction Circles, we

are committed to co-creating spaces where questions of vocation and call can be deeply and meaningfully engaged. Although vocational discernment is nothing new within Christian practice, this time of ever-increasing climate change and the immense challenges it is bringing — personally, politically, spiritually, and communally — demands a new perspective on what calling means for each of us as people of faith.

At the Claiming Your Call retreat, those present were able to explore questions of vocation while learning from a diverse group of wise presenters including indigenous leaders John Bear Mitchell and Jason Brough, as well as Dr. Chris Nadeau, Climate Change Adaptation Scientist at the Schoodic Institute. Coupled with worship, ritual, and theological frameworks offered by the three guiding organizations, these rich wells of knowledge offer a powerful container in which to ask and answer the question of who we are being called to be.

As heavy as the realities of climate change are, The BTS Center team is hopeful that the programming we are offering will allow individuals and congregations a sense of joy and purpose in discovering and deepening the work they are called to undertake in this time. The Claiming Your Call retreat and community of practice offers a glimpse into the delights, depths, and possibilities that we can explore while doing this work of discernment within the context of community.

As Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing Merrill says: "I'm really proud of this program that we and our partners co-developed, weaving together climate science, traditional ecological knowledge, and theology. These twelve congregations have already demonstrated deep commitment to responding faithfully to the challenging realities of our climate-changed world, and I know they will continue to embrace new opportunities to nurture climate resilience within their communities in the years ahead. As we deepen our vocational clarity and our sense of connection with other congregations, we always find our imaginations expanding to perceive the possibilities God is placing before us!"

*"I LOVED everything about the retreat — the leadership team, the venue, the format, the schedule, the content, the mix of participants. This was, by far, the best retreat in recent experience; it was truly superb!"*

— a Claiming Your Call retreat participant





## Two New Learning Cohorts Beginning Fall 2024

The BTS Center is pleased to be offering two unique opportunities to engage in a learning community beginning this fall. Each cohort is tailored to suit the specific needs of those enrolling — visit [thebtscenter.org](http://thebtscenter.org) for more information on each program!

**Navigating Climate Spiritual Care: A Learning Community** is a 6-month community intended for chaplains, pastors, educators, lay leaders, and spiritual seekers who are working or are interested in working in spiritual care settings. Utilizing materials developed by Blair Nelsen and Jessica Morthorpe, this learning community will engage in conversation and assignments designed to inform and deepen the practices of spiritual care in a climate-changed world, whether in health care, congregational, community, or other settings.

**EcoPreacher Cohort**, presented in collaboration with Lexington Theological Seminary and Creation Justice Ministries with generous funding from Lilly Endowment Inc., is a 9-month cohort intended for clergy or lay people who preach regularly and who are interested in learning new skills around climate-engaged preaching (as well as honing existing skills). With guest presenters and opportunities for communities of practice, this cohort aims to equip preachers with a robust skillset for engaging in the prophetic work of preaching in a climate-changed world.

We hope one of these offerings will resonate with your work and that you will consider joining us this fall — learn more and apply at [thebtscenter.org](http://thebtscenter.org).



## Join us for Convocation 2024

**Hope in Small Places: Becoming People of Refugia Faith**

**Thursday & Friday, September 26 & 27, 2024**

**In-person in Hallowell, Maine and an Online Companions Track**

The BTS Center invites you to **Convocation 2024** — which will once again be held in person at the beautiful Maple Hill Inn and Conference Center in Hallowell, Maine.

Over the course of two days, we will gather to learn and explore, to nurture a sense of community, and to seek respite and renewal.

We look forward to welcoming **Debra Rienstra**, author of *Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth*, who will inspire us with wisdom and ways in which we can reimagine our places as refugia for one another. **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond**, activist, pastor, and leader, will join us as our Opening Preacher, and recording artist **Joshua Long** will be with us as our Convocation Musician.

**Convocation 2024** will include music, poetry, and ritual; plenary sessions and small-group conversation; opportunities to engage with nature; and contemplative practice. Register now at [Convocation2024.org](http://Convocation2024.org).



Co-hosted by Nicole Diroff and Ben Yosua-Davis, with producer Peterson Toscano, Season 3 of The BTS Center's podcast, *Climate Changed*, will premiere in September 2024. Guests include Brian McLaren, Elizabeth Rush, Joelle Novey, Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, Terry LePage, and Jose Aguto. We are looking forward to another powerful season filled with insightful conversations! Listen at [ClimateChangedPodcast.org](http://ClimateChangedPodcast.org) or on your favorite podcast listening platform.

# CLIMATE CHANGED





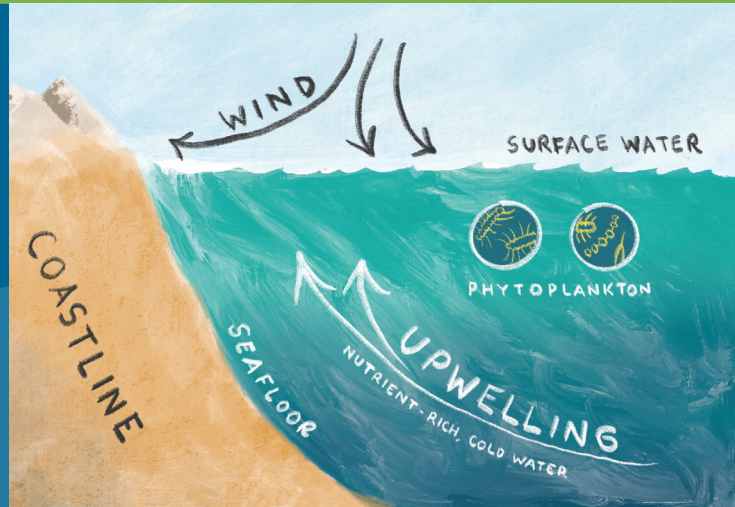
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## About this publication's title, *Upwelling*

In ecological terms, an upwelling is an oceanographic phenomenon in which winds blow strongly and frequently across the water's surface near the coastline, displacing surface water and causing deep, cold, nutrient-rich water to "well up" toward the surface, allowing for a complex, diverse ecosystem to thrive. Now, perhaps more than ever, we need creative movement and imaginative regeneration to meet the spiritual challenges of our ecological crises, and we need the communal work of bringing forth new life from the depths of our traditions. We think of The BTS Center's work as a kind of upwelling, existing at the confluence of spirituality and ecology, as we seek to catalyze spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership.

Illustration by David Bruggink, 2022



## You are invited.

As we continue to focus on spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world, we are grateful for our many friends, program participants, partners, and donors, and we extend a warm invitation to join in this work.

- Visit [thebtscenter.org](http://thebtscenter.org) and explore Upcoming Programs.
- Check out our Leadership Commons, Video Library, *Climate Changed* Podcast, and Earthbound Practices — all at [thebtscenter.org](http://thebtscenter.org) — for resources you can use within your faith community or for your own personal growth.
- Support the work of The BTS Center with a financial gift.
- Share this newsletter with a friend or colleague.

## Our Mission

To catalyze spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership.