



THE **BTS** CENTER

2025 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

TENDING THE HOLY

i must tend the Holy . . . in my own nature, too.
grow some poetry and joy . . . from the ground of my soul,
from this midnight drum.

worthy

by trying to feed the Holy in Nature ...
we might become ancestors
worth descending from
and possibly grow a place of hope
for a time beyond our own.

— Martín Prechtel

i must go out then,
refill the bird feeders,
prepare the soil for seeds,
and prune the trees
to carry a rich harvest.

i must put my hands
into the ground and plant,
spread the dark compost
on the strawberry beds,
grow a meadow for the bees.

i must tend the Holy
in my own nature, too.
grow some poetry and joy
from the ground of my soul,
from this midnight drum.

listen, weary ones! the full moon
is pink, if hidden behind clouds,
but it is steady on its course.
plant a garden in this night
to grow a crop of light.

— Susi Moser



DEAR FRIENDS



WHAT a delight to share with you our 2025 Report to the Community.

I'll be honest: It feels like we are living through precarious times. The challenges we face are complex and confounding — daunting, even. So much that we cherish — so much that is essential for life — is under attack, and nearly every day brings new losses, new fears, new reasons to despair.

Precisely because all of that is true, it feels like the work of The BTS Center has never been more important. More than ever, we need spiritual leaders who are awake to the intersecting crises we face, who know what it means to speak the truth and still persevere in love, who are sustained by spiritual practice and connected in their own communities of support and practice. If we are to confront all that is broken and still remain whole, we must take up the work of nurturing all that is good and true and beautiful — of tending the holy.

Steven Charleston, retired Episcopal Bishop and Choctaw Elder, says it this way: "Our assignment is: to hold the line of love, to not let fear or despair beyond this point, to push back against injustice, to uphold the voice of truth, to establish a firm ground of hope, to create community even as we walk through struggle." May we be faithful to the task.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allen".

Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing-Merrill
Executive Director



ON behalf of the Board of Trustees of The BTS Center, I'm happy to welcome you to our 2025 Report to the Community. The role of any non-profit organization's board is to provide governance and oversight, ensuring the organization pursues its mission effectively, ethically and legally. Our Trustees have worked together with Allen Ewing-Merrill, our gifted Executive Director, and our talented and energetic staff team to move The BTS Center forward towards realizing our vision, mission, and values.

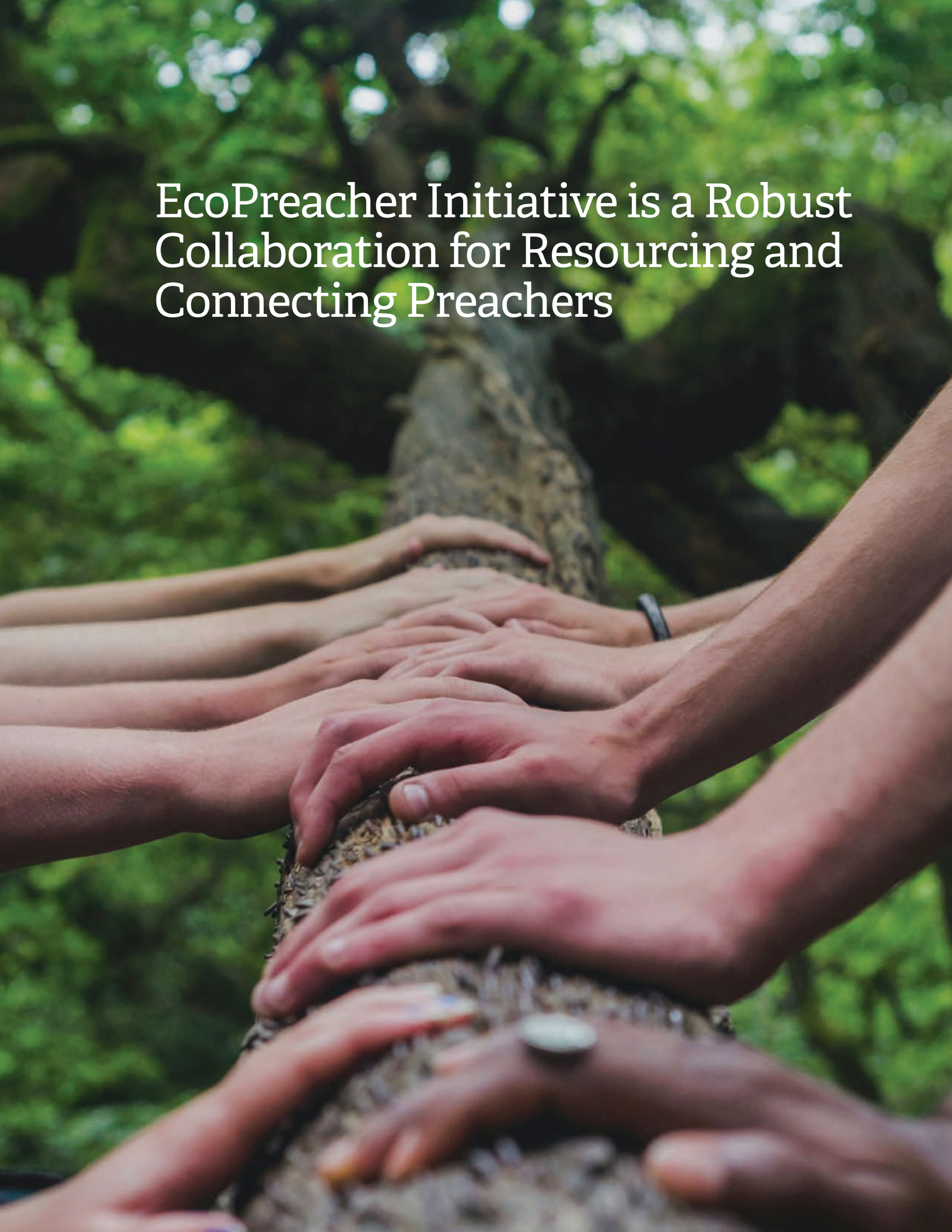
Our biggest challenge of the past year came with the result of the November Presidential election. The ensuing shift in our federal government's attitude and actions toward climate change and environmental justice deepens our commitment to our mission of catalyzing spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership. Facing the climate crisis calls for spiritual leaders equipped to guide communities through a time of profound change. The BTS Center's programs aim to provide resources, perspectives, tools, and companionship for this work.

I have had the opportunity to participate in a variety of The BTS Center's programs over the last eight years. They have given me ways to think about how to live as a person of faith in a time of climate crisis, and they have given me space to share authentically about my fears and uncertainties. I invite you to join your voice to the conversation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra".

Debra Coyman
Chair, Board of Trustees

EcoPreacher Initiative is a Robust
Collaboration for Resourcing and
Connecting Preachers



In a world of climate chaos and constant change, collaboration is a profoundly important component of any resilient community. With that in mind, The BTS Center has spent several years building an EcoPreacher Initiative alongside our partners, Creation Justice Ministries and Lexington Theological Seminary — a hub of learning and resourcing for preachers who are eager to bring climate consciousness to their pulpits.

Having already established a yearly EcoPreacher Cohort, a monthly gathering of preachers learning and practicing together, this year the EcoPreacher Initiative was the recipient of a \$1.25 million grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. Compelling Preaching Initiative. Entitled “Compelling Preaching for a Climate-Changed World,” this collaborative project brings together

grant recipient Lexington Theological Seminary, along with partners, Creation Justice Ministries and The BTS Center, for a series of programs under the umbrella of the EcoPreacher Initiative. These programs include a continuation and expansion of the EcoPreacher Cohort in addition to workshops, coaching and mentorship programs, preaching resources, and research.

All of this programming is oriented towards fostering a deep-spirited community of preachers who are committed to addressing the spiritual implications of climate change in their own communities as part of their own practices of tending the holy. As Rev. Nicole Diroff, Associate Director at The BTS Center and co-facilitator of the EcoPreacher Cohort says: “The topics covered in our

EcoPreacher program are incredibly rich — from climate science for faith leaders to green exegesis to kinship theologies for environmental justice. But what participants say is the best part, again and again, is the colleagues and companions they meet as they share experiences and ideas.”

PARTNER PROFILE: Derrick Weston

Derrick Weston, Director of Theological Education and Formation at Creation Justice Ministries and co-facilitator of the EcoPreacher Cohort, reflects on the impact of the EcoPreacher Initiative:

“EcoPreacher has clarified for Creation Justice Ministries that the churches who will have lasting impact in doing work on climate justice will be those who are addressing the issues in worship. For me personally, the task of equipping preachers to give well informed and courageous sermons on the climate crisis has become one of the central foci of my work. The cohort has also given us a sort of built in focus group of preachers to listen to and learn from.

“It’s odd to say, but I have been deeply impacted by the level of sharing that happens in the chat during our cohort meetings. This was specifically true in the aftermath of the election. Members of the cohort were raw, scared, confused, and looking for hope. People took the time to encourage each



other and to share resources, to be bolstered by being a part of a group of like-minded preachers, each gearing up for the task ahead.”

Derrick adds, “I am ambitious when I think about the future of EcoPreacher. I think that whole congregations will be changed by preachers finding the courage to activate them around their climate concerns. I believe we’re already starting to see the beginnings of a community of support that will hold preachers up when their voices shake. I’m hopeful that the work that we do will begin to influence homiletics classes and theological education in general.”



Creation Justice Ministries' mission is to educate, equip and mobilize communions and denominations, congregations, and individuals to protect, restore, and rightly share God's creation.

The BTS Center has been thrilled to cultivate an ongoing partnership with Creation Justice Ministries, recognizing the intersections of their incredible work with our programs. As collaborators on our Claiming Your Call for a Climate-Changed World program, the EcoPreacher Initiative, and more, CJM has brought knowledgeable, passionate leaders to these programs who we are so happy to call our friends.



The mission of Lexington Theological Seminary is to prepare faithful leaders for the church of Jesus Christ and, thus, to strengthen the church's participation in God's mission for the world. Lexington Theological Seminary seeks to prepare people for ministry in congregations through innovative instruction, flexible curriculum, congregational experience, and compassionate engagement with the needs of society.

As a collaborator on our EcoPreacher Initiative, Rev. Dr. Leah Schade and others from Lexington Theological Seminary bring great wisdom and enthusiasm to our shared work. We are grateful to have the expertise of the LTS community as part of our dynamic ecosystem of partners!



The BTS Center takes Innovative Approaches to Applied Research

The climate-changed world in which we live requires new approaches to research.

Through our Applied Research Initiative, we aim to provide grounded guidance for leaders who wish to meet the unique challenges of this time by leading from a place of deep intention rather than from a place of anxious reactivity.

The BTS Center's Applied Research Initiative centers

the needs, knowledge, and wisdom of practitioners: the congregational clergy, laypersons leading within faith communities, and other spiritual leaders with whom we work. We believe that not only do practitioners need the support of research findings in order to better engage in their work, but also that these leaders possess invaluable wisdom that deserves to be cultivated and shared with others. Through our Applied

Research, we aim to surface this wisdom in ways that help to address important questions about leading spiritual communities in a climate-changed world.

We aim to bring a posture of rigorous and reverent curiosity to many of the programs we lead. The data that we collect and the findings that emerge inform our own work as an organization, the work of our partners, and the work of the congregations, communities, and individuals who are seeking to embody spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world. Recent foci of our Applied Research Initiative include the Claiming Your Call for a Climate-Changed World program, our Small Church Leadership Community, and our EcoPreacher Initiative, and we're publishing and

disseminating our findings in various ways in order to inform and inspire work in communities throughout the United States and beyond.

Recent publications include:

"Cultivating Earth-Shaped Leaders: Ecological Imagination in Organizations" authored by Ben Yosua-Davis, published in the *Humanistic Management Journal*, December 2024

"Pathways into Teaching Ecological Engagement in Congregations" authored by Ben Yosua-Davis, Leah D. Schade, and Marquisha Lawrence Scott, published in the *Religious Education Association Journal*, January 2025

PROFILE: Jessica David, Seminary Intern

During the 2024-2025 academic year, The BTS Center had the joy of hosting Jessica David, a student at Harvard Divinity School, for her field education placement. Although we referred to Jessica as our "intern," her depth of experience and wisdom belied that label.

Jessica brought with her an extensive background in community non-profit work, including as the founding president of Local Return, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community wealth through ownership and investment in Rhode Island neighborhoods that have experienced historical disinvestment.



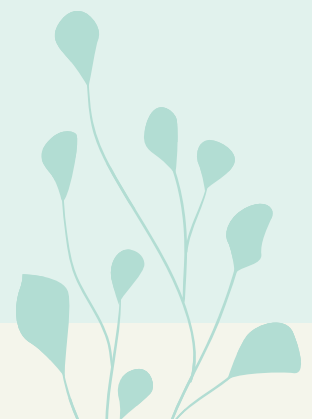
Over the course of her academic year with The BTS Center, Jessica brought her curiosity, thoughtful reflections, and enthusiasm to our team. She reflects on one particularly impactful experience, when she attended the presentations by congregations participating in the Claiming Your Call community of practice:

"The collaboration within the groups, the ways they each uniquely aligned their congregation and place, and their thoughtful reflections were striking. Conversations like this stretched my imagination so many times during my months with The BTS Center!"

Jessica brought so much to the work of The BTS Center, including spearheading a special series of our podcast, *Climate Changed*, and inviting us into impactful conversations around organizational strategy. Of her time working with The BTS Center, Jessica says, "I am so very grateful to the staff and board of The BTS

Center for welcoming me so warmly and generously sharing their expertise, passion, and time with me. It was the richest and most humbling learning experience, and you have expanded my studies and work in so many ways. The BTS Center is a model for the kind of spiritual transformation that needs to happen. You're also a fun team!"

We are so grateful for Jessica's presence on our team this year, and we know that the work she has done will continue to ripple through The BTS Center's offerings well into the future.





CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE: Cape Elizabeth United Methodist Church

Cape Elizabeth United Methodist Church, located in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, has deep connections with both The BTS Center and with climate-focused ministry.

Members of the congregation have participated in The BTS Center's Small Church Leadership Community and Claiming Your Call programs, and the church hosted The BTS Center's inaugural Green Teams Gathering in 2024. Cape Elizabeth UMC embraces the stance that the root causes of climate change are selfishness, greed, and apathy and that the solutions to these issues are spiritual — so churches are well positioned to meet the challenges of this time.

The congregation and leadership at Cape Elizabeth UMC have nurtured a robust eco-ministry, with projects including climate-focused worship services and partnering with the Cape Elizabeth Land Trust to preserve and protect land on the church's property. As Steve Hill, a longtime congregant, leader, and participant in many BTS Center programs, shares: "Most recently, we have concentrated on welcome and hospitality to invite people to walk our trails, to sit and soak in the beauty of nature and be renewed by what they find there. In a world where many feel lost, neglected, and marginalized, offering welcome, hospitality, and comfort may be the greatest gifts of all."

Like many small congregations, the future of Cape Elizabeth UMC holds much uncertainty. Steve Hill shares that the learnings from programs with The BTS Center have helped bolster the resilience of the community and his own sense of resilience amidst the unknown: "I'm [using] the many learnings from my work with The BTS Center, which has been inspirational to me and also a great comfort. They have provided a strong connection to others, provided a spiritual basis for the work I try to do, nudged me to take care of myself, and helped me see that new life can come out of dying things." We look forward to our ongoing collaboration with the people of Cape Elizabeth United Methodist Church.

PROFILE: Rev. Andi Lloyd, PhD, Member of The BTS Center Board of Trustees

After a long career as a biology professor at Middlebury College, Rev. Andrea (Andi) Lloyd, PhD felt a call toward a different path — one that led her to Yale Divinity School and, eventually, ordination as a minister in the United Church of Christ. As the pastor of a congregation in Castine, Maine, Andi says that she "sought The BTS Center out as a resource, and as a community in which to find kindred spirits interested in thinking about climate change as a spiritual problem."

Andi's connection with The BTS Center has grown steadily over the past few years, from being a participant in our programs, to leading workshops at Convocation, to becoming a member of our Board of Trustees. When asked to share about a particularly impactful program at The BTS Center, Andi reflects on being a part of the book study on Margaret Wheatley's *Who Do We Choose To Be?* in the fall of 2023:

"A friend had recommended that book to me a while back — and I just wasn't ready to take seriously the idea of collapse. Too scary, too overwhelming. But when the opportunity came along, through The BTS Center, to read it in community, I jumped at the chance. Reading that book with other people — wrestling with other people — made it possible to stand in that place of accepting that this time of great transition is a time of collapse. And it made it possible to begin to find the great hope that lives in moments like these."



Andi says that she "sought The BTS Center out as a resource, and as a community in which to find kindred spirits interested in thinking about climate change as a spiritual problem."

We are grateful for Andi's thoughtful, steady guidance as we move through these uncertain times. Her background in both biology and theology, her poetic capacities to hold uncertainty and nuance, and her kindness and humor bring such richness to our work. As Andi says, "Exploring the what, the how, and the why of spiritual leadership in a climate-changed world is necessary work — critical work." Work that is only possible with the contributions of Board and community members.

Claiming Your Call for a Climate-Changed World

“If climate change was easy to fix with purely technological solutions, churches would have little role in saving the world. But long-term solutions need so much more than just technology — they need changes in thinking, culture, society, religion, politics, and governance. These are areas our tradition equips us to help with. As the climate crisis forces us to reassess our values and decide what foundations we want to build a new world upon, we can be the voices for love of our neighbor, love of the poor, the image of God in every person, and the sacredness of creation.”

— Blair Nelsen & Jessica Morthorpe, *Climate Pastoral Care course*



Twelve New England congregational teams participate in a three-day retreat

Over three days in June 2024, teams from twelve New England congregations gathered at the Schoodic Institute in Winter Harbor, Maine, for learning, fellowship, and sharing. As the first part of the Claiming Your Call for a Climate-Changed World program, this retreat offered participants the opportunity to engage with theologians, climate scientists, and Indigenous leaders, while also forging bonds around their shared desire to respond transformationally to the challenges of climate change within their local contexts.

Organized and hosted by The BTS Center, Creation Justice Ministries, and Anabaptist Climate Collaborative, the retreat portion of Claiming Your Call featured plenary sessions weaving together climate science, Indigenous wisdom, and theology; small group sharing in vocational discernment groups; worship and lively singing; and time to savor the gorgeous environs of Acadia National Park — all while being led in a process of discernment focused on understanding and embracing congregational vocations. Over the following months, the participating teams developed “small experiments with radical intent” within their local communities, eventually coming together to share the process and results with the larger group.

Convinced that responding to the climate crisis is not just the work of scientists, policymakers, and advocates, The BTS Center is committed to equipping leaders and congregations with resources and formation opportunities, encouraging and equipping



them to become communities of refugia and resilience in a time of societal and planetary upheaval. Foundational to this work is the conviction that faith communities bring spiritual resources to this moment that are desperately needed, many of which cannot be filled by any other sector.

Our world is crying out for bold, prophetic moral leadership that can truthfully name the predicament and transform the misguided priorities that have brought this crisis to our doorstep. With rich histories of advocating for justice and providing care for those most in need, faith communities have the opportunity to envision and nurture a world in which people turn towards one another rather than against each other in the face



of intensifying challenges. It is this ethos that has made the Claiming Your Call program so powerful: bringing together congregational leaders — both ordained and lay — to share, learn, and resource one another to meet the spiritual challenges of this climate-changed moment. As evidenced by our research with these congregations, the Claiming Your Call program already has had a profound impact on those who participated — and we look forward to seeing what ripples of wisdom and practice continue to emerge.

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Green Teams Gathering

Congregational Teams connect, learn, and share

In May of 2024, The BTS Center convened our first Green Teams Gathering. Held in person in Southern Maine, this day-long program offered an opportunity for members of congregational Earth Care teams to gather and share insights and questions from their work, while also supporting that work and encouraging collaboration. Growing from the enthusiasm of this first gathering, we hope to nurture an expanding network of Green Teams throughout northern New England.

This summer, The BTS Center built on the success of this program, welcoming Rev. Katie Mears, Senior Technical Specialist for U.S. Disaster Relief & Development, as our keynote speaker as well as Kat Logan as our musician. The second annual Green Teams Gathering took place on the summer solstice at Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, an

innovative farm and learning center in Freeport, Maine. We offered a robust program with a variety of workshop and immersion sessions, each designed to offer nourishment and inspiration for participants to take back with them to their congregations and communities.

Rev. Nicole Diroff, Associate Director at The BTS Center, says of the gathering: "Through our annual Green Teams Gathering, we have an opportunity to serve our bioregion — and the legacy constituency of the Bangor Theological Seminary — in a really special way. The ripples from the gathering's learning and relationships are vibrant and inspiring and continue long after the day itself." The relationships strengthened through these gatherings form the foundation for refugia in New England and beyond — deeply important components for resilience in a climate-changed world.

CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE: Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Congregation

As one of our congregational participants in the Claiming Your Call program, Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland, Maine



has felt the impact of the program in many ways. Learning how other congregations are relating to the challenges of climate change has enriched their work, which has included building "Earth Stations" on their property to deepen their connection with the natural world. Patricia Ellen, a member of the congregation at Allen Avenue UU Church, shares that "As we are planning and building Earth Stations, we are learning to be as the natural world, and move slowly as energy allows and reveals itself."

The congregation at Allen Avenue UU feels called to provide places of sanctuary that can offer grounding in these stressful times. The congregation sees the Earth Stations, as well as a Climate Café at the church, as spaces that are both informative and nurturing, helping those who participate to find community and connection to one another and to the larger earth community.

As Patricia shares, "These times have called for nurturing new congregational members, staying flexible, creating spaces for going deeper in many areas." She says the Claiming Your Call program offered support, encouragement, and resources which have helped Allen Avenue UU deepen their work while staying connected to a broader network of congregations.

Chaplaincy Initiative opens new frontiers for climate-informed spiritual care

Over the past year, The BTS Center's Climate Conscious Chaplaincy Initiative (CCCI) has collaborated with the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab to host a series of lunchtime conversations on various topics within the realm of chaplaincy and climate — and the registration has regularly surpassed two hundred or even three hundred attendees. Though numbers are just one way to measure the success of a program, clearly the CCCI has found an area of deep need and interest within the chaplaincy community.

In addition to these lunchtime programs, the CCCI has expanded and deepened its scope to include Chaplaincy Conversation Circles, a learning community called Navigating Climate Spiritual Care, and even a dedicated newsletter for chaplains. Under the careful direction of Rev. Alison Cornish, Chaplaincy Initiative Coordinator at The BTS Center, the CCCI has been shining a light on the incredibly diverse ways in which climate change shows up in chaplaincy settings. This spring semester, Alison was joined in her work by Lynn Trotta, a student at Hartford International University studying chaplaincy, as our first CCCI intern. Alongside a skilled group of facilitators and collaborators including Dr. Michael Skaggs, Director of Programs of the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, Alison is co-creating a network of chaplaincy professionals dedicated to nuancing the many ways in which climate change is impacting chaplains in all settings.

As we look to the future, The BTS Center recognizes that chaplains are now, and will continue to be, at the forefront of spiritual responses to the climate crisis. The work of the CCCI is essential to offering resources and connection to those who provide spiritual care services. As Rev. Alison Cornish says:

"In continuing to build out our programming for chaplains and spiritual caregivers, we think a lot about the choice of the word "conscious" in climate conscious chaplaincy. What does it mean for caregivers, witnesses, and all who *walk with* those



"My internship with The BTS Center has been a highlight of my Chaplaincy degree program. I longed to be an eco-chaplain before I even knew the role existed, and The BTS Center has helped me step into my calling. The staff has renewed my hope for the future and grounded me with faith, knowing an organization of such integrity is blazing a trail for spiritual leadership. Working on the climate chaplaincy newsletter, *Murmurations*, gave me the chance to ask big questions in this emerging field and connect with powerful, inspiring spiritual care providers who are shaping its future."

— Lynn Trotta, Intern, Student at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace

already experiencing the consequences of our climate-changed world, to hold an awareness of the causes of suffering — even if the climate crisis isn't actually part of the conversation? And, what does it mean for chaplains — and others serving in a public ministry role — to offer practices grounded in an understanding of our kinship with all beings, human and more-than-human, even if that worldview isn't universally embraced?"

Alison continues, "Those engaged in spiritual care have always needed to meet people where they are, and serve those of diverse religious or spiritual identities in ways that are respectful and appropriate. Doing this work, formed over centuries of practice, in quite literally a new climate, is what we are cultivating, alongside our program participants seeking to define this emerging field of ministry."

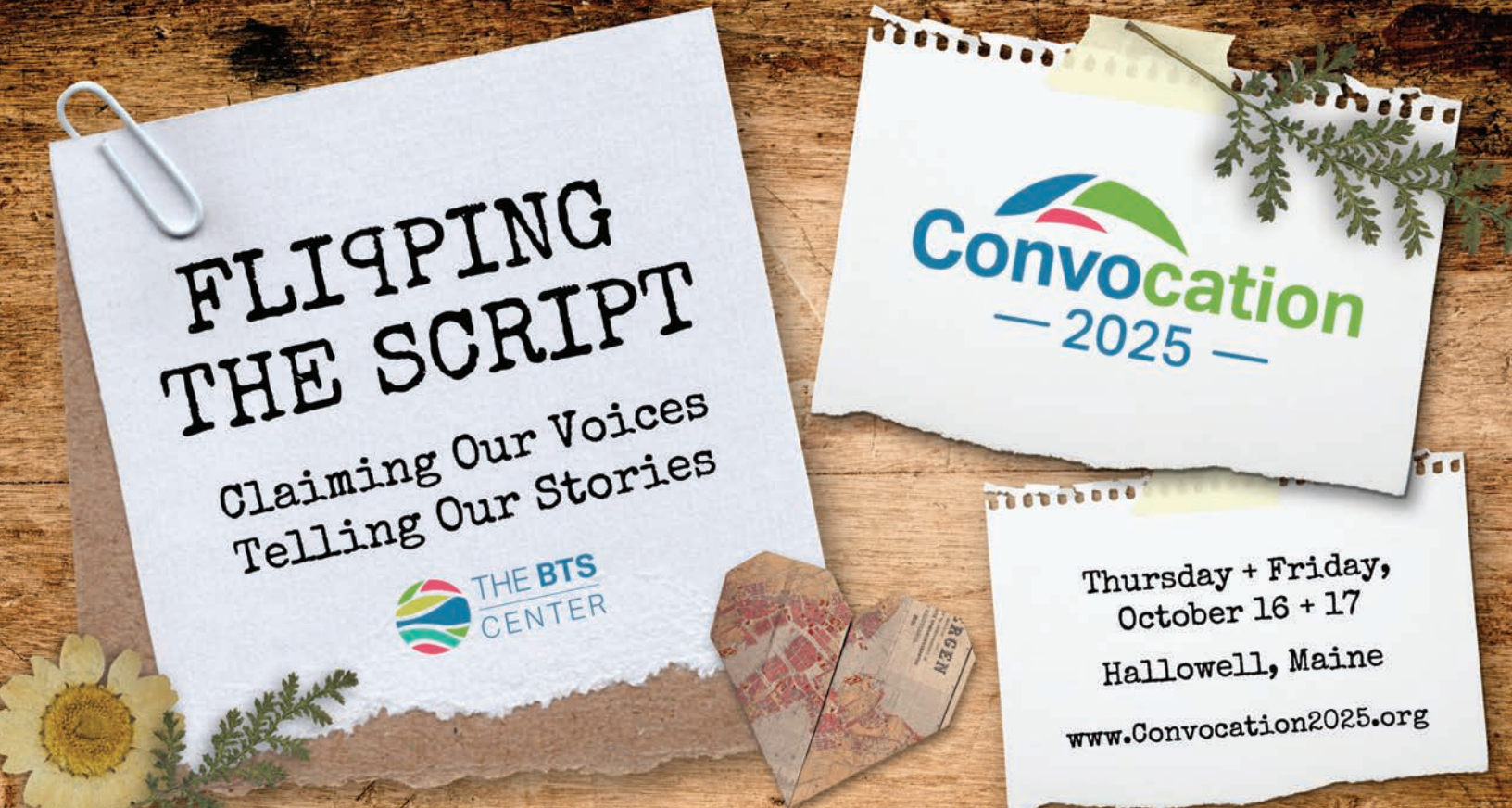
PARTNER PROFILE: Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

The Chaplaincy Innovation Lab (CIL) brings chaplains, theological educators, clinical educators, and social scientists into conversation about the work of chaplaincy and spiritual care. As religious and spiritual life continues to change, CIL sparks practical innovations that enable chaplains to nurture the spirits of those they serve and reduce human suffering.

Over the past several years, Chaplaincy Innovation Lab and The BTS Center have partnered on Conversation Circles and a host of lunchtime conversations, all of which have brought new insights and important conversations into the emerging field of climate conscious chaplaincy.



CHAPLAINCY
Innovation Lab



Join Us for Convocation 2025

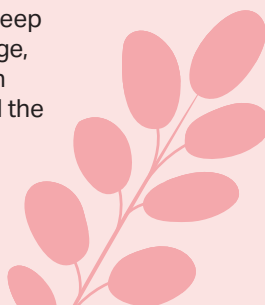
The BTS Center looks forward to celebrating 120 years of Convocation!

Join us October 16 & 17 • In person in Hallowell, Maine or Online

The BTS Center continues to carry forth the tradition of Convocation, a legacy of Bangor Theological Seminary, held annually since 1905. Over the decades, Convocation has drawn leaders and learners from near and far to engage in theological reflection, spiritual practice, and community connection together.

In our past two Convocations, held at the beautiful Maple Hill Farm Inn and Conference Center in Hallowell, Maine, we've hosted incredible keynote speakers, preachers, and thought leaders. As we look forward to Convocation 2025 in October, which will mark 120 years of Convocation, we are turning toward the incredible wisdom of our community to shape our programming.

Organized around the theme "Flipping the Script: Claiming Our Voices, Telling Our Stories," this year's Convocation will offer the opportunity for selected participants to share their own stories with our community. Along with music, opportunities for spiritual accompaniment, immersion sessions, and special guests, this Convocation gathering will draw together the deep wisdom of our community in ways that will inspire, encourage, and challenge. We hope you will consider joining us, or even submitting a proposal to tell your own story! You can find all the details at Convocation2025.org.



PROFILE: Marquisha Lawrence Scott, MSW, MDiv, PhD, Member of The BTS Center's Research Advisory Committee

How did you become connected with The BTS Center?

I initially connected with The BTS Center through my 2022 Jack Shand Research Grant project, which explored the potential for developing a curriculum and resource suite to support congregations engaging with climate-related challenges. I presented my early findings — grounded in interviews from Denver and Philadelphia — at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR), where I met Dr. Leah Schade. She introduced me to The BTS Center's EcoPreacher initiative. From there, I was invited to collaborate with the BTS team and have remained actively engaged ever since, contributing to research, publications, and congregational assessments on climate and environmental justice.

What is one example or story of a time when you were deeply impacted by the work of The BTS Center or your work on the Research Advisory Team?

One moment that continues to move me was during a conversation with Madeline [Bugeau-Heartt] from the Small Church Leadership Community project. She shared a story about a small congregation that had repurposed much of its church building but intentionally left a single pew intact — for “the stranger.” That simple, sacred decision struck me deeply. It reminded me that our research is ultimately about people enacting their faith in the world in practical, powerful ways. The BTS Center allows us to remain tethered to that truth, even amid data sets and theoretical frameworks. That pew is now a spiritual symbol for me — a call to value presence and sacred memory in all the work we do.



What are your hopes for the work of The BTS Center looking forward?

I hope BTS continues to lead with a clear-eyed commitment to context while helping congregations process what it means to live in a climate-changed world from where they are geographically, economically, and spiritually. I'd like to see continued work on regionally responsive models (e.g., watershed-based frameworks) and expanded support for clergy navigating eco-anxiety and climate grief. I also hope that BTS remains a model of what it means to reimagine institutional identity — having moved from a degree-granting body

to a resource-rich hub for spiritual innovation. That kind of institutional transformation inspires the type of congregational and theological reimagining that our research calls for.

Anything else you would like to share?

Yes! My time with The BTS Center has not only shaped my scholarship but has also enriched my pedagogy. I've brought the EcoPreacher research into the classroom at the University of Denver, where students from across the country (Baltimore, Michigan, Indiana, and Colorado) are engaging with environmental justice through a theological lens. We've explored the intersections of climate, belonging, and sacred space. The research has become a living curriculum — one that allows us to examine the future of congregational life while attending to spiritual, ecological, and communal wellbeing. I'm proud to be part of an organization that so deeply values action and imagination.

CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE: First Congregational Church of West Tisbury, MA

Located on the picturesque island of Martha's Vineyard off the coast of Massachusetts, the First Congregational Church of West Tisbury has a first-hand view of climate-change-induced sea level rise and its attendant impacts on the ecosystem of the island. As a participating congregation in the Claiming Your Call program with The BTS Center (in collaboration with Creation Justice Ministries and Anabaptist Climate Collaborative), FCC West Tisbury members had a chance to dive deeply into understanding their congregational call in their specific context.

Of the impact of this work,




FCC West Tisbury pastor Rev. Cathlin Baker says: “Debra Rienstra’s teachings about refugia faith really took hold in our congregation. Through a sermon series, we considered ways that our church serves as a little pocket of wisdom, hope and resistance.” This understanding led to a focus on food ministry to meet immediate needs in the community and to act as an emergency resource

in the event of a natural disaster. The connection of the congregation to their rootedness in a particular time and place has led to a deeper relationship with the land and the communities who live and work on the island.

Rev. Baker continues: “We feel called to be faithful stewards of the land where we live, the island of Martha’s Vineyard, known as Noepe by the native Wampanoag community. In a time of chaos and uncertainty, we remain focused on local food insecurity, food rescue, and minimizing food waste through our Sacred Grounds program” as well as a pollinator garden and other collaborations within their community and beyond.

The invitation from the Claiming Your Call program to engage in a “small experiment with radical intent” has led to a number of ripples within the FCC West Tisbury community, including a collaboration between the FCC West Tisbury Green Team and Time Lapse Dance, an organization which engages communities around environmental concerns and climate change, in creating a pop-up performance to begin in the churchyard during coffee hour and then move throughout the village. We look forward to seeing what continues to emerge at First Congregational Church of West Tisbury and the impact their work has on their local community.

A monarch butterfly with vibrant orange wings and black veins is perched on a bright yellow flower. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural habitat. The butterfly's wings are spread, showing the intricate patterns of orange, black, and white spots.

Having been active in the environmental movement for decades, I have grown increasingly concerned about our ability to slow or reverse climate change. There is a widening gap between the world being shaped by climate change and the world we are prepared to inhabit. The BTS Center is one of the few institutions actively addressing this gap.

— Rev. Eric Elnes, PhD

PROFILE: Rev. Eric Elnes, PhD, Member of The BTS Center Board of Trustees

How did you become connected with The BTS Center?

I was honored to be a featured speaker at one of the final Convocations held by Bangor Theological Seminary in 2012, before its transformation into The BTS Center. When I learned of the Seminary's bold decision to close and reimagine itself, I was deeply impressed by its innovative and forward-thinking spirit. As Christians, we are called to embrace the faith that death leads to resurrection. Yet, many religious institutions resist closure for so long that they lack the resources to foster new life. In contrast, the Seminary's choice to close while retaining the means to create something vital and new felt like a profoundly authentic and faithful expression of Christ's Spirit.

Soon after reopening as The BTS Center, it partnered with my church to develop a distinctive lay ministry training program that honored the sacred nature of secular vocations. Although this project ultimately did not align with the evolving vision of The BTS Center and ended before reaching full development, I was even more inspired by the Center's emerging mission. I resonated particularly with its focus on "cultivating and nurturing spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world."

Having been active in the environmental movement for decades, I have grown increasingly concerned about our ability to slow or reverse climate change. There is a widening gap between the world being shaped by climate change and the world we are prepared to inhabit. The BTS Center is one of the few institutions actively addressing this gap. For this reason, I enthusiastically accepted the



invitation to join its Board of Trustees.

What is one example or story of a time when you were deeply impacted by the work of The BTS Center?

I had the privilege of participating in The BTS Center's recent online book study of Brian McLaren's book, *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*. While the book's subject matter could seem heavy or discouraging, my experience was surprisingly joyful for two reasons.

First, we explored the challenges of a climate-changed world in community with others. Before this experience, I often felt isolated in my concerns or wondered if I was out of touch with reality. Reading McLaren's book and engaging with a diverse group of participants affirmed that I am neither alone nor delusional. Second, I was deeply impressed by the skill and sensitivity of The BTS Center's staff in facilitating these discussions. They created an environment where participants felt welcomed and valued, perfectly balancing the provision of enriching content with opportunities for meaningful input.

By the end of the study, my concerns about climate change remained, but I felt renewed confidence that the

Holy Spirit is stirring hearts to respond creatively and faithfully to the challenges ahead.

What are your hopes for the work of The BTS Center looking forward?

I believe The BTS Center is uniquely positioned to envision a climate-changed world where faith communities — Christian and otherwise — serve as catalysts for resilience in their wider contexts. By addressing the deeply spiritual dimensions of climate change's material effects, The BTS Center can nurture and connect like-minded communities that act as "imaginal cells" in the transformation of our society.

Much like the imaginal cells that carry the DNA of a butterfly during its metamorphosis, communities of faith may initially be seen as foreign or even threatening to the systems they challenge. Yet, as these communities come together, embracing their unique roles within a larger whole, they can become a transformative force. This process mirrors the collaborative and organic nature of a caterpillar's transition to a butterfly, where no single cell leads, but each contributes to the collective emergence of new life.

In this sense, The BTS Center's promotion of what Debra Rienstra calls "Refugia Faith"

communities is pivotal. By nurturing these spiritually grounded and interconnected groups, The BTS Center accelerates the vital work of transformation, offering hope for a sustainable and resilient future.

Anything else you'd like to add?

The work of The BTS Center is part of a much broader evolution within Christianity.

I believe the "butterfly" Christianity is becoming will fully embrace the path of Jesus while letting go of the idea that it is the only valid faith tradition on the planet.

Instead, Christians will act on the understanding that God's presence transcends human imagination and boundaries, remaining open to God's voice within and across all faiths.

This emerging Christianity "prays well with others," cultivating deeper partnerships with people of diverse traditions while fostering greater respect for the earth as a source of God's ongoing revelation and collaboration. As I see it, The BTS Center's commitment to addressing a climate-changed world as Christians while developing interfaith collaboration aligns beautifully with the movements of the Holy Spirit. I am thrilled to be part of this transformative journey and look forward to incorporating others into this vital work.



Group Spiritual Accompaniment Circles

Offering space for tending to discernment in a climate-changed world

With so much changing, so rapidly, in our world, The BTS Center is dedicated to offering spaces for individual and collective discernment — places in which people and communities can find support as they seek and discover their vocations in a climate-changed world. The holy work of tending to discernment requires an intentionally contemplative stance — to pay attention, to listen deeply, and to practice in ways which open the heart to the movements of the Spirit.

Over the past several years, The BTS Center has been offering Group Spiritual Accompaniment Circles, small groups which meet once a month over an eight-month cycle with a skilled facilitator to engage in contemplative spiritual practice and holding deep questions together.



For the 2025 cohort, eight groups are engaging in this intentional work together, and we are thrilled to have an incredible cohort of facilitators, all of whom are trained in spiritual direction and each of whom brings their

own unique perspectives to their groups. In addition to a number of groups open to all, an LGBTQIA+ group, a BIPOC group, and a climate activist / advocate group offer spaces for those with shared identities to engage together.

Rev. Ash Temin, a spiritual director on The BTS Center's staff team and coordinator of the Spiritual Accompaniment Circles program, says, "To be able to offer groups which explicitly hold space for things like climate grief and seeking one's vocation in the context of a climate-changed world feels particularly unique. The ways in which folks are showing up to these groups — with vulnerability, compassion, and true spiritual longings — make the groups such a powerful nexus for both contemplation and transformation."

The wisdom drawn from these contemplative spaces weaves through The BTS Center's programming and ethos, informing and imbuing our way of being as an organization in this climate-changed world.

PROFILE: Dr. Debra Rienstra

When friend of The BTS Center Rev. Doug Clark recommended the book *Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth* to The BTS Center staff, none of us realized what fruitful and exciting connections would bloom.

Dr. Debra Rienstra, professor at Calvin University and author of the book, noted that when she was invited to attend a session of a Lenten book study focused on the book in the spring of 2023, "It was clear...that I had found my people." Since then, Debra has joined our Research Advisory Committee, been a presenter at programs and, in 2024, joined us as our keynote speaker at Convocation.

Of her Convocation experience, Debra writes: "I came to Maine to be the keynote speaker, so I finally got to meet the amazing BTS staff in person. My husband was able to join me, and we had such great conversations with the BTS staff and



with many attendees. It was a rich and inspiring time of mutual encouragement — a bright spot in a tough year, for sure."

Debra's work continues to inspire congregations and communities who are seeking resilience and possibility in the midst of climate chaos and political challenges. As she says: "The next four years will be difficult, and the kind of networks that The BTS Center has been building among people of faith and conscience will be absolutely essential. We will need to strengthen those networks at the prophetic edge of faith communities and continue to demonstrate our communal call to deep transformation. The headwinds will be strong, and we will need to stick together to fight disinformation and apathy and to weather discouragement. We need each other's vision and joy!"

Besides showing up as a presenter for our programs and serving as an ongoing thought partner, Debra brings her abundant wisdom to The BTS Center as a member of our Research Advisory Committee.

Debra's vision and joy are a gift to The BTS Center as we all move forward amidst the swells of uncertainty. We look forward to continuing this co-creative work with Debra Rienstra and a growing ecosystem of visionary leaders.

Drawing Inspiration from Many Places

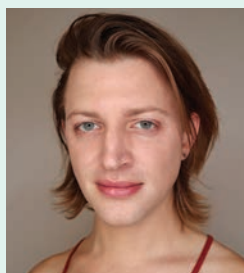
Here are just a few of the many wise and gifted leaders with whom we have had the pleasure of collaborating this year:



Brian McLaren, speaker, activist, public theologian, and author, most recently, of *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*



Sherri Mitchell — Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset, Indigenous attorney, activist, and author of *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change from the Penobscot Nation*



Pax Ressler, non-binary performer, music director, and composer working at the intersections of theatre and music as well as arts and advocacy



John Bear Mitchell, citizen of the Penobscot Nation, University of Maine System Office Native American Waiver and Educational Program Coordinator, University of Maine's Wabanaki Center Outreach and Student Development Coordinator, lecturer and storyteller

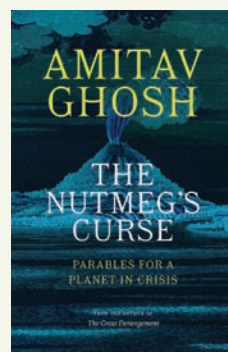
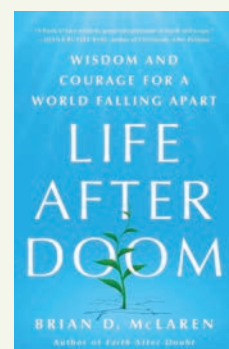
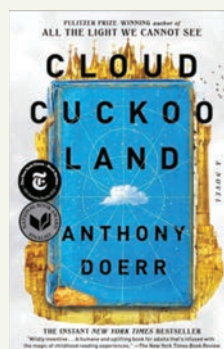
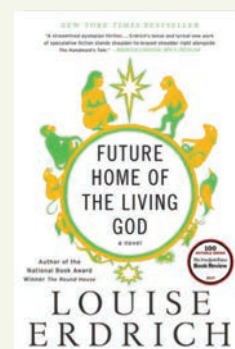
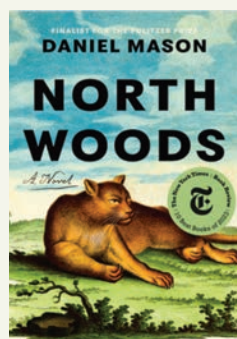


Jason Brough, citizen of the Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation and researcher in Indigenous sovereignty, food sovereignty, Indigenous archaeologies, and climate change



Rabbi Ora Nitkin-Kaner, chaplain and founder of Exploring Apocalypse, a non-denominational climate change chaplaincy practice

Some of the books with which we've engaged over the past year include:



Coming Soon: The BTS Center will unveil a new website!

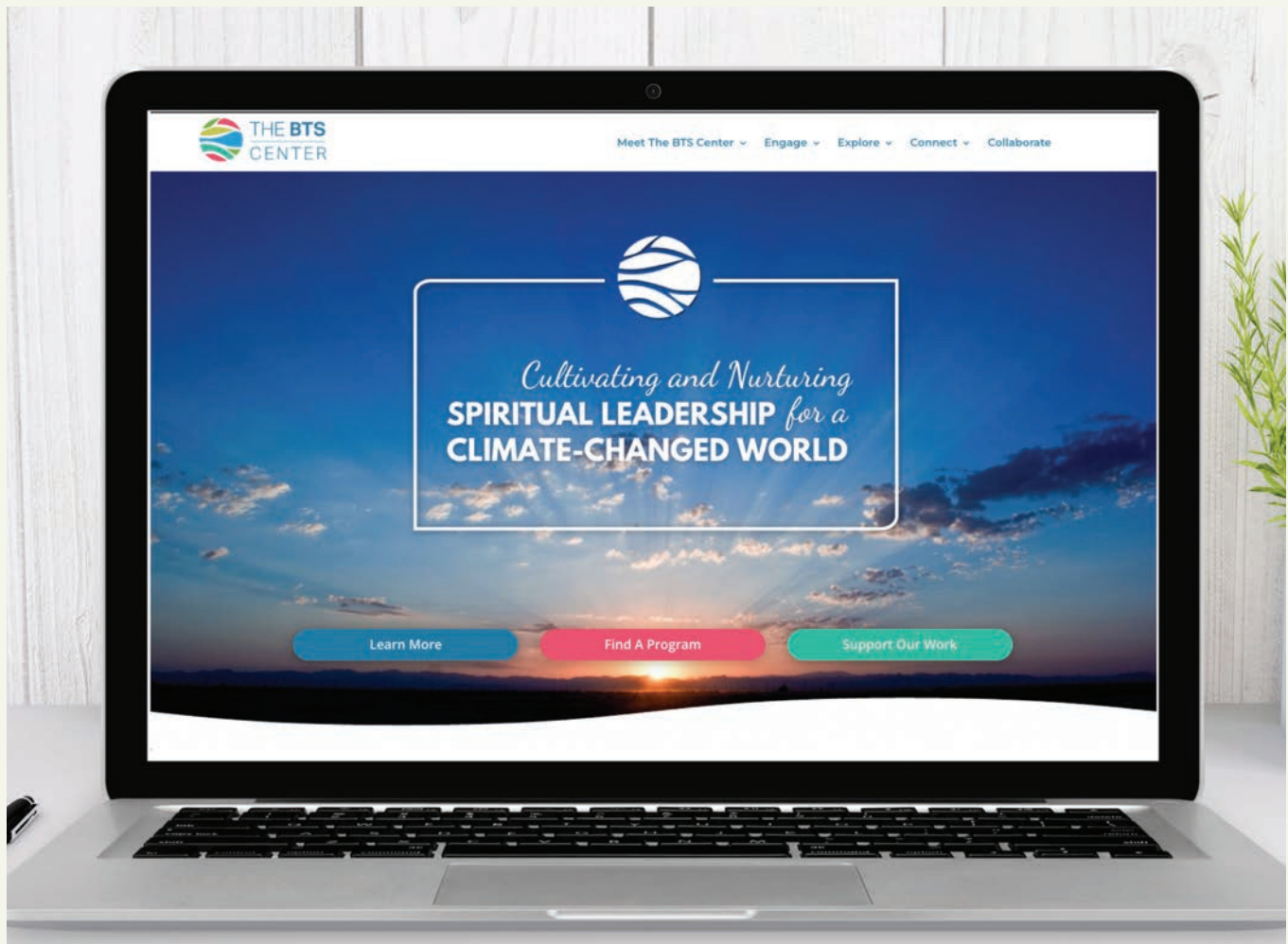
This summer, The BTS Center's website will be taking on a new look! We're looking forward to sharing with you this new aesthetically beautiful, user-friendly site, developed in collaboration with digital specialist Hazel Knight, who brings her wealth of technical skills along with her experience as a chaplain and certified forest therapy guide to her work with us. Hazel's commitment to our mission and vision as well as her collaborative work ethic have made the process, though intricate and complex, a meaningful one as well.

We are so grateful for all the time and energy both Hazel and The BTS Center staff have committed to this new website — truly a labor of love and one which we think will be a gift to our community and all who are connected to our digital ecosystem.

New and improved website coming soon at
www.thebtscenter.org

"Rarely have I served an organization that so thoroughly lives its values inside and out. As a contractor in The BTS Center's orbit, I have experienced the deep and authentic commitment to a kind of leadership that honors deep listening, equitable collaboration, and faithful creativity that allows all beings in their ecosystem to thrive and serve with grace and integrity. It is an honor and a privilege to support the vital work of The BTS Center in the world by helping tend their digital landscape through bringing a new website to life."

— Hazel Knight, *Digital Media Specialist*



Join Us! In person and online

Upcoming Events and Programs

The past year has been filled with a wonderful array of events and programs. With joy and gratitude for what we have shared with you, our incredible community, we are looking forward to many exciting programs over the coming months. We invite you to join us for one or more of these offerings:

Summer Fiction Book Club

June 26, July 24 and August 21 • 12.00 - 1.15pm (Eastern)
• Online

Three sessions, three books, and three great conversationalists! Join us for in-depth discussions of three novels which confront the climate crisis in unique ways.

Convocation 2025

Thursday, October 16 + Friday, October 17
• In person at Maple Hill Farm Inn and Conference Center, Hallowell, Maine + Online Companions

Join us for "Flipping the Script: Claiming Our Voices, Telling Our Stories," featuring stories from our community, music, immersion sessions, and more

Justice Together Camp

Sunday, July 20 – Saturday, July 26
• In person at Pilgrim Lodge, West Gardiner, Maine

A weeklong camp for high schoolers and recent graduates with a focus on intersectional justice along with all the usual fun of summer camp

EcoPreacher Cohort

Next Cohort begins September 2025
• Applications now open

A year-long cohort with monthly meetings and small groups for preachers seeking to engage the climate crisis in their communities, offered in collaboration with Creation Justice Ministries and Lexington Theological Seminary

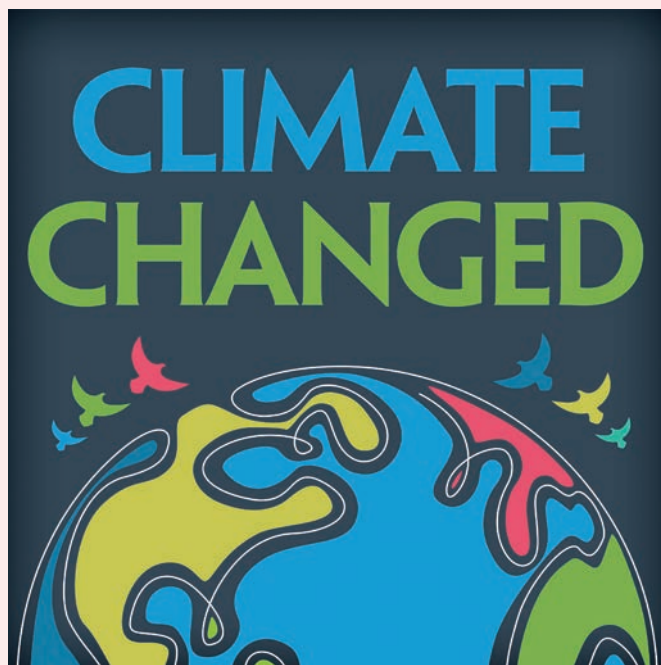
Climate Changed Podcast features conversations focused on living, loving, and leading in a climate-changed world

Over three-plus seasons and with a roster of incredible guests, The BTS Center's *Climate Changed* Podcast has offered a space for profound conversations about all facets of living, loving, and leading in a climate-changed world. By turns thought-provoking, funny, and heartbreaking, each episode has contributed to a rich tapestry of ideas and imaginings on topics ranging from the complicated nature of hope to parenting in a climate-changed world to the importance of art and storytelling in these times.

Hosted by Nicole Diroff, Associate Director and Ben Yosua-Davis, Director of Applied Research, and produced by Peterson Toscano, *Climate Changed* allows The BTS Center to collaborate with remarkable

leaders in many areas of climate practice. From Indigenous leader Sherri Mitchell to author Elizabeth Rush, from poet Craig Santos Perez to artist Rob Shetterly, so many luminous voices have been a part of *Climate Changed*, and we are excited by all the new possibilities on the horizon.

Before we launch into Season Four, our intrepid seminary intern, Jessica David, is bringing to life an interim series. "Behind the Scenes at The BTS Center," with new episodes being released throughout 2025, features conversations between staff and board members at The BTS Center. We hope you'll tune in, follow, share, and offer feedback on our episodes — we love hearing from our listeners!



With Enduring Gratitude

We are grateful for the financial support of the following individuals and organizations.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this list. Please email info@thebtscenter.org with any errors or omissions.

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Our Partners

Our work and vision rely deeply on collaborations with individuals and organizations. Over the past year, we have been fortunate to work with the following partners:

Anabaptist Climate Collaborative • Atlantic Black Box • Blessed Tomorrow • The Center for Spirituality in Nature • Chaplaincy Innovation Lab • Climate Psychiatry Alliance • COBALT (Collaborative for Bioregional Action Learning and Transformation) • Creation Care Alliance • Creation Justice Ministries • Damascus Project • Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary • Good Grief Network • Hartford Institute for Religion Research • Lexington Theological Seminary • Lutherans Restoring Creation • Maine Conference, United Church of Christ • Maine Council of Churches • The Many — Plural Guild LLC • One Home One Future • Pilgrim Lodge, Maine Conference UCC • Radical Joy for Hard Times • Schoodic Institute • Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ • Spiritual Care Services of Maine • Tir na nOg Farm • Waterspirit



You Are Invited!

Yes — you! As we continue to focus on spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world — as we aim to catalyze spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership — we are grateful for our many friends, program participants, partners, and donors, and we extend a warm invitation to join in this work.

Here are a few suggestions:

Visit thebtscenter.org and explore Upcoming Programs.

Check out our podcast *Climate Changed*, *Leadership Commons*, and Video Library — all at 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. We are grateful for your support.

Share our website or this report with a friend or colleague who may be interested in the work of The BTS Center.

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We are especially grateful for two outgoing Board members, Rev. Dr. Jim Gertmenian and Rev. Dr. Paul Shupe, who have served since 2016, and for Rev. John Edgerton, who stepped off the Board part-way through the year, having served from 2018-2025.



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And a gifted team of program consultants and spiritual directors who develop, lead, and facilitate the many programs of The BTS Center.

at the edge of wonder

i didn't know how
to remember everything.
so i remembered only
what wanted to stick.

i didn't know how
to live with so much loss.
so i resolved to carry that
which was missing, within.

i didn't know how
to love the wretched world
so i loved the lovely things,
now breaking, now gone.

i didn't know how
to face the unknown.
so i walked with my face turned
both ways: inward and out.

i didn't know how
to fear all that is sharp and dark
so i softened myself
until i became light.

each day i find more
of what i don't know,
gathering myself up
against the edge of wonder.

— Susi Moser

About the poet: A geographer by training (Ph.D. 1997, Clark University), Susi Moser works nationally and internationally as an independent scholar and consultant from a base in western Massachusetts, the ancestral and unceded homelands of the Nipmuc and Pocumtuc. Her work with government agencies, non-profits, foundations, other researchers, and consultants focuses on adaptation to climate change, science-policy interactions, effective climate change communication, and psycho-social resilience in the face of the traumatic and transformative challenges associated with climate change.

THE BTS CENTER 2025 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

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OUR MISSION:

To catalyze spiritual imagination
with enduring wisdom for
transformative faith leadership

OUR VISION:

Human hearts renewed,
justice established,
and creation restored



THE BTS

CENTER

Spiritual Leadership for a
Climate-Changed World

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