

Community For All
Interfaith Disability Inclusion
Weekend and Conference



Panel & Conference Presenter Bios
and Presentation Descriptions

Atkins, Ken

Presentation Title: The World Needs Your Story

Description: Acceptance. Respect. Inclusion. That's what we want for our children with special needs. The world at large does not always understand the world of special needs or even how to talk to individuals with disabilities or their caregivers. It is important that we share who we REALLY are as caregivers and parents of children with disability, and that starts with telling our story. The world will be better for it.

Bio: Ken Atkins life began in the bucolic surroundings of a small North Texas dairy farm in the late 1950s, and has wandered through experiences as a school teacher, newspaper writer and editor, magazine business manager, vice president of East Coast sales for a small Texas advertising company and construction sales.

In 1992, his son Danny was born, and within two years he would be faced with the life-changing reality that his son has a severe mental handicap that would cause him to require full-time care for his entire life.

In 2019, Ken and Danny moved to Newport News, Virginia, to live with his daughter and son-in-law, where he found a church with a Celebrate Recovery in need of a ministry leader. He has served in that role at Calvary Chapel Newport News since August 2019.

Bashir, Iman Nadim

Presentation Title: Special needs in the Muslim community: Past, present, and future

Description: In this presentation, we will discuss how the Muslim community is going through a paradigm shift from having false misconceptions and stigma about disabilities to becoming a more aware and inclusive community for all. We will discuss the history of disabilities in Islamic history, spiritual perspective on special needs parenting, and how to work toward more inclusive religious communities in the future.

Bio: Imam Nadim Bashir has been a religious leader in the North Texas community for over 10 years. He is a graduate of a prestigious religious seminary in the United Kingdom and is pursuing further education in Islamic Divinity and Chaplaincy. While serving in various capacities in the community, Imam Nadim recognized that Muslim special needs families were struggling to feel included and to find support. He has dedicated himself to building awareness of special needs and helping families in the Muslim community get connected with resources and education through his group, DREAM. DREAM stands for disability resources, education, and awareness for Muslims.

Blas, Howard

Presentation Title: The Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah: 50 Years of Inclusive Camping and Still Evolving

Description: The Tikvah Program started at one Jewish overnight summer camp in 1970. There was initial resistance to including people with disabilities in a typical summer camp. Now, 10 camps have robust Tikvah Programs with a range of inclusive approaches, vocational training programs and Israel trips. Presentation will describe the program's history, models of support and ongoing growth and evolution, and the current status of inclusive camping in the Jewish World. This approach is replicable and useful in all camps including faith-based camps.

Bio: Howard Blas is a social worker, special education teacher and writer (howardblas.com). He currently serves as director of the National Ramah Tikvah Network, a network of inclusive summer camps in the US and Canada, and leads Israel trips for people with disabilities. He recently climbed Mount Kilimanjaro with a delegation which included four people with paraplegia. Howard spends summers visiting Ramah camps and jobs sites/training programs for people with disabilities. Howard received the 2013 Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education.

Boyle, Catherine

Presentation Title: The Future of Discipleship and Special Needs Ministry

Description: In 2020, COVID concerns forced the Church to go online. While online Church serves an important role, successful discipleship requires personal connection. In this presentation, Catherine Boyle, Mental Health Ministry Director from Key Ministry will share why ministry within family units and neighborhoods, equipped by churches, offers an important biblical model for making disciples in 2021 and beyond.

Bio: Catherine Boyle is the Director of Mental Health Ministry for Key Ministry, as well as Blog Editor and Social Media Manager. In addition to developing content and resources for Key Ministry, Catherine has also written blogs and articles for a variety of ministry websites, including Grace Alliance (mentalhealthgracealliance.org), A Different Dream for My Child (differentdream.com) and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC.com).

Christensen, Shelly with Howard Blas, Gabrielle Kaplan-Meyer and Debby Fisher

Presentation Title: B'nai Mitzvah: Creating Meaningful Coming of Age Ceremonies for Jewish People with Disabilities (Christensen, Blas, Kaplan-Mayer)

Description: Our presentation will address the importance of the bar and bat mitzvah in the life of a Jewish child and their family and will include examples of traditional and adaptive, innovative ceremonies, a parents' perspective and an exploration of how this life cycle event helps establish a sense of belonging and connection for people with disabilities, family members and the entire faith community.

Presentation Title: Belonging in Action (Christensen)

Description: People with disabilities and mental health conditions want what everyone wants—to belong! Belonging is at the heart of inclusive faith communities. Consultant and author Shelly Christensen will introduce practical strategies from the new Belonging in Action Project© that build the platform for participation and inclusion.

Presentation Title: Opportunities for Professional Caregivers to Promote Faith and Spirituality Person-Centered Planning (Christensen and Fisher)

Description: Learn strategies to promote meaningful Inclusion of people with disabilities in their faith and spiritual communities and the regulations that guide planning and implementation of person-centered plans to ensure participation and belonging.

Bios: Shelly Christensen is a pioneer in the faith community disability inclusion movement, an international speaker, author and consultant. Her new book is *From Longing to Belonging--A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith Community*. Shelly co-founded Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) and serves as the organizer. She directed the award-winning Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities in Minneapolis for 13 years before founding her consulting group, Inclusion Innovations. Shelly is a national advisor to Faith Inclusion Network. She co hosts the popular webinar series, *Everyone's Welcome—A Fresh Conversation About Disability* with Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer. Shelly has been a b'nai mitzvah tutor for over 20 years. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Developmental Disabilities from St. Mary's University of Minnesota.

Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer is an experienced Jewish educator, having worked as an education director, curriculum writer, teacher, author and youth director/advisor in various capacities for over 20 years. At Jewish Learning Venture, she works as the Acting Co-Executive Director. Gabby also runs an award-winning Shabbat family education program called *Celebrations!* at Congregation Mishkan Shalom for children with special needs and their families and directs Whole Community Inclusion at JLV. Her most recent book *The Little Gate Crasher* is a memoir of her *Great-Uncle*, who overcame society's prejudices about dwarfism to lead a remarkable life. Among other books, she's also written *The Kitchen Classroom*, a children's cookbook designed for children of all abilities. Gabby holds a B.F.A. in Theatre and Creative Writing from Emerson College and an M.A. in Jewish Studies from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Howard Blas...see under "Blas"

Debby Fisher is a management and professional service consultant who specializes in disability-empowerment mission-driven organizations, their professional and volunteer leaders, and the individuals and families who receive support services. Debby is a proven innovator who has devoted her career to advocating for and supporting the needs of individuals with an array of cognitive, developmental and psychiatric disabilities in school, employment and community settings, promoting their rights to achieve self-determined, independent and engaged lives. Her career has taken her from working with individuals, their families and professionals to the C-Suite where she has been able to increase her impact. Debby established her consultancy in order to apply her expertise and experience to strengthening organizations' capacities to promote the needs and interests of people with disabilities.

Chung, Rachel

Presentation Title: Faith and Advocacy: Engaging our elected leaders for changes at local & national levels

Description: It is often said religion and politics should not mix! However, we can feel the direct impacts of local and national policies and laws especially in regards to education opportunities for our children with learning needs, job programs for young people leaving school, and services (or lack of services) for a lifetime of supports. How can we effectively advocate for policies, regulations, and laws to ensure our loved ones living with disabilities are healthy, safe, and contributing members to our community? Learn how groups in Maryland, alongside houses of worship, are mobilizing families and self-advocates to be a voice for change in their communities

Bio: Rachel Chung currently serves as the Disabilities Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Washington Department of Special Needs Ministries. In this role, she supports parish outreach and religious education programs with people living with a variety of disabilities and those living with mental illness across the Archdiocese of Washington. She has worked in a variety of settings supporting people with developmental and intellectual disabilities such as employment, coordinating services for adults with developmental and intellectual in state funded programs, and developing programs for orphaned children with multiple disabilities as a Maryknoll lay missionary in Cambodia. Ms. Chung lives in Germantown, Maryland with her husband, two children and mother.

Collins-Bohrer, Rev. Padraic Michael

Presentation Title: You Have To See It To Be it... Or So I Thought

Description: My presentation is a 20-minute talk sharing my experiences as a priest in The Episcopal Church living with cerebral palsy. My focus is on my journey to the priesthood, the challenges encountered along the way and how I handled those challenges. I will also share how I advocate for myself as a priest with cerebral palsy when questioned and offer tips for others.

Bio: The Rev. Padraic Michael Collins-Bohrer is a priest in The Episcopal Church. He currently serves as a Supply and Support Priest in The Episcopal Diocese of Rochester assisting at Churches across the Rochester NY region. He is highly sought after as a guest preacher at Episcopal Churches and by other faith traditions. He often speaks about the intersection of faith and disability and his experiences as a priest living with cerebral palsy. Rev. Padraic is also a member of the Spiritual Life / Faith Community Inclusion team at Heritage Christian Services in Rochester NY where he supports individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Rev. Padraic earned his Master of Divinity Degree at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester NY and his Diploma in Anglican Studies at Bexley-Seabury Episcopal Seminary in Chicago IL.

Davies, Jeanne

Presentation Title: We Are Able: Offering Inclusive Service Opportunities for Youth and Young Adults

Description: There are camps offered that serve youth/young adults with IDD. But what about opportunities for them to serve? Youth/ young adults with IDD have gifts to share and a desire to help others. For over ten years the We Are Able workcamp has offered a 4-day summer service trip for intellectually and developmentally disabled youth/young adults. Youth and adults without IDD can register to serve alongside. Workcampers also enjoy recreation and worship together each day.

Bio: Jeanne Davies serves as Executive Director for Anabaptist Disabilities Network, in Elkhart, Indiana, and also as pastor for Parables Community, a new church start in Lombard, Illinois committed to accessibility for and full inclusion of all persons. She is currently working on a Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry at Western Theological Seminary.

Duckworth, Jasmine

Presentation Title: Accessibility, Ableism, and the Church

Description: Throughout history, the church has had a complicated relationship with disability. At times, Christians have been agents of change and human dignity. At other times, churches have been ableist and discriminatory. Understanding history reveals patterns that continue to shape current policies, practices, and theology. This workshop offers a “Disability & Church History 101” that challenges inaccessible approaches in our congregations and points to possibilities for an inclusive and accessible future!

Bio: Jasmine Duckworth has served people who experience disability for over 15 years at Christian Horizons, and has been disabled herself for five years. As part of her role as Community Development Manager she strives to nurture communities of belonging. You can find her writing at The Disability and Faith Forum (disabilityandfaith.org).

Dyer, Rebekah Ph.D.

Presentation Title: Successful Inclusion of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Disability Ministry Programs

Description: This presentation focuses on the successful inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in churches. The number of children diagnosed with ASD is on the rise. Children with ASD struggle with social and communication skills, but they can benefit from being included with their non-disabled peers. Parents and individuals with disabilities themselves have expressed a desire to participate in faith communities, but there are barriers in the church that can prevent this from happening. It is important for churches to consider how they can fully include individuals with disabilities.

Bio: Dr. Rebekah Dyer is a professor in the college of education at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, AZ. The courses that she teaches focus on special education. She is the faculty advisor for two clubs on campus; Best Buddies and Canyon Inclusive. Both clubs focus on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Her dissertation research focused on the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in disability ministry programs. She presented her research at an International Autism Conference in Nanjiing, China. Dr. Dyer is passionate about special education, specifically inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Eckert, David

Presentation Title: Mental Illness: What is it and why does it matter for your faith community?

Description: This training will provide participants with a basic understanding of mental illness in relation to its causes, defining characteristics, and impact on society. A summary biblical perspective on mental illness will also be offered to help individuals respond to those with mental illness in ways that are faithful, compassionate and recovery oriented.

Presentation Title: Supporting Those with Mental Illness in Your Congregation and Community

Description: This training will provide clergy and faith community members approaches to making their congregations a welcoming and supportive space for people with mental illness. Particular attention will be given to public communication, relationship development and partnering with external mental health providers.

Bio: Dave Eckert is the Director of Intersect, an initiative within Access Services that supports those at the intersection of faith and mental health through consultation, training and the fostering of collaboration between faith communities and mental health providers. He has spent 19 years working for Access within various roles including Director of a Mobile Psychiatric Rehabilitation program and agency Chaplain. In addition, Dave has been in the role of Associate Pastor of Grace Community Church in Chalfont, PA for the last 12 years. Dave is a graduate of Cairn University and Mission Seminary, holding degrees in Social Work, Biblical Studies and Divinity. Dave currently serves on the Boards of PAPRS (Pennsylvania Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services) and the Lakeside Educational Network. He lives with his wife and three children in Montgomery County, PA.

French, Joanna

Presentation Title: Show Me: The Biblical Backing for Special Needs Ministry

Description: We all want to be intentional about honoring God. The heart of God is for all. But where, if anywhere, do you find a biblical backing for Special Needs Ministry? That my friends is what we are going to discover together during this talk.

Presentation Title: Weeping Together: When a Minister Struggles with Mental Health

Description: Can faith, ministry, and mental illness really connect? Pastor Joanna French has been in the ministry for 5 years, and shares her heartbreak, and well as her hope as we uncover what it means to be a pastor and have a mental illness.

Bio: Pastor Joanna French and her husband Jaimie have 2 beautiful boys with autism. She is the Special Needs Pastor at Flint Hills Church in Junction City, Ks. For the last several years she has spoken both on special needs ministry and mental illness in the church. She is also a writer for Key Ministry. Her heart is that the gospel could be made accessible to everyone. Because there's a seat at the table for all.

Friedman, Lorraine

Presentation Title: A Path Forward – Helping Empower People with Disabilities to Find their Voice through Self-Advocacy

Description: Finding our voice, knowing that we deserve to use it and what we have to say is of value are crucial steps to personal growth. Helping people with disabilities know that our congregations are not complete without their presence, opinions and “voice” are paramount to creating a space where everyone knows they are valued and belong. It is not enough to say “our doors are open to all” – we need to create a holy space where all voices are welcome and know they will be heard. Come join an exciting conversation about encouraging and empowering our members with disabilities by exploring the following: educational opportunities, access to programming, dissemination of information, available resources, meaningful support and real connections.

Bio: Lorraine Friedman, J.D., has been a strong voice in the disability community since her graduation from Georgetown University Law Center. As an attorney and advocate, Lorraine argued dozens of cases in D.C. Federal Court to protect the rights of children with disabilities. As the Director of Special Needs Partnerships and Programs at Jewish Family Service of Greater Dallas, she created programs to empower adults with disabilities, facilitated a parent support group for parents and guardians of children and adults with disabilities, ran an experiential learning program called The Inclusion Experience and organized the Faith Inclusion Network of Dallas (FIND).

Gaventa, Rev. Bill

Opening Address: *Are We a Movement?*

Description: The rising number of faith communities interested and involved in inclusive congregational ministries has been very exciting. But we all know that sometimes it feels like we are slogging through mud. Surveys and invitations to many congregations indicate that accessibility and inclusion has not gotten much further than ramps, font sizes, hearing loops and accessible bathrooms. How do we keep ourselves energized? How do we attract more initiatives simply because of the positive impact on all involved? How do we keep inclusion and belonging moving?

Gaventa, Rev. Bill and Beaudoin-Kobb, Meggie

Presentation Title: Coping with Grief in the Lives of People with Intellectual Disabilities and/or Autism

Description: How do you respond when someone says that a person with an intellectual disability cannot understand death? Or that they should be protected from it? What are some of the key strategies and resources for supporting people with IDD and/or autism in times of loss? What should clergy know? This presentation will share some answers to these questions and also provide an update on a national project developing a website on grief and loss for autistic adults.

Bio: Bill Gaventa is currently the Director Emeritus of the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability as well as the new Collaborative on Faith and Disability, linking a number of University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities who are addressing spirituality through initiatives in training, technical assistance, research, and/or dissemination. He was formerly Director of Community and Congregational Supports at the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities in New Jersey. Bill's primary areas of experience and expertise are spiritual and faith based support with people with disabilities, training for clergy, seminarians and community services staff, aging and end of life/grief issues in intellectual and developmental disabilities, cultural competence, and community building. He served as the President of American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for 2016-2017.

Hancock, Rev. Justin

Presentation Title: Reading our civic text in order to form coalitions within and beyond the disability community

Description: When we hear the phrase "civic text," we are most likely drawn to the statutes, laws, and written documents that govern civic discourse. In this talk, the Julian Way invites you to consider the notion that civic text is any public space or gathering place and then examines how considering civic text in this regard can help the disabled community be better prepared to create coalitions that might lead to social change.

Presentation Title: The gospels and the models of disability

Description: This talk uses 5 of the most common ways of thinking of disability: the medical model, the moral model, the social model, the limits model, and the cultural model and asks the question, "how would Jesus respond to framing disability in this way," with the ultimate goal of demonstrating how the cultural model leads to a more generous and life giving conversation.

Bio: Justin Hancock is an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church, with long experience working with young people as both the college pastor at St. John's United Methodist Church in Lubbock and the director of the Texas Tech Wesley Foundation. Since moving to Dallas in 2011, Justin worked with the Missional Wisdom Foundation from 2015 until July of 2019 as the prior of the Epworth project, a network of intentional Christian communities in the North Texas area. While at the MWF, Justin and his wife co-founded the Julian Way, an organization that focuses on education and empowerment with/for/by persons with disabilities.

In July of 2020, Justin and Lisa made the decision to take the Julian Way to a partnership with the Neighboring Movement out of Wichita, KS, so that the Julian Way could expand its reach and develop its resources to transition to a fully independent non-profit organization. Reverend Hancock believes firmly that disability is a mark of God's abundant creation, and in the words of Julian of Norwich, "All of God's creation is God's good creation."

Hills, KARENNE Ph.D.

Presentation Title: Spirituality in the Context of Nonverbal Autism

Description: Whilst research concerning people with Autism represents a growing discipline, people with severe (level 3) autism are significantly under-researched. An Australian research study explored the spirituality of this group, who do not communicate with speech. Spirituality is fundamental to humanness, and the results of the study suggest that the absence of spoken language may significantly impact personal spiritual experiences, not unlike those achieved through ancient mystical practices.

Bio: Dr. Karenne Hills maintains a 'portfolio lifestyle' with a number of professional interests in the fields of disability, tertiary education, counselling and nursing. She is a lecturer and Course Coordinator of the Masters Counselling program at Australian Institute for Professional Counsellors (AIPC) in Brisbane Australia, while also operating a private counselling, health and disability services practice. She provides professional development workshops and consults to local disability organizations, and is currently working on an innovative program designed to support students with specialized learning abilities to achieve success in post school educational and employment opportunities. Karenne completed her Ph.D. studying the Spirituality of People with Nonverbal Autism in 2019. She regularly speaks at local, national and international conferences on various topics pertaining to people with disabilities, spirituality and autism.

Jackson, Karen

Presentation Title: Welcome Video

Bio: Karen Jackson lives in Norfolk with her husband Scott and daughter, Samantha, with two sons, Jacob and Joseph in college. She graduated from the Eastman School of Music, NY and Temple University, PA and has been teaching music for over 30 years.

Karen's experience advocating for her 23-year-old daughter who has autism and her work as a Parish Advocate at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, Norfolk, led her to found Faith Inclusion Network in 2008. Karen currently serves as the organization's Executive Director, coordinating all major events as well as continuing to expand Faith Inclusion Network's work in the local and national community.

Karen has written on the topic of faith and inclusion with articles published in area newsletters, the Catholic Virginian and on various websites and blogs. She is the author of *Loving Samantha @2015*

Jamieson, Lisa

Presentation Title: Parenting Special Siblings

Description: Parenting siblings in a family affected by disability brings challenges, disappointments, advantages and opportunities. Participants will be encouraged with basic principles and practical ideas about how to enjoy more victories and deeper graces despite the reality that there are weaknesses in every family. Discussion topics will include sibling conflict, balancing attention, grief processing, dealing with social stigmas and misunderstanding, family vacations and managing stress.

Presentation Title: The Energized Caregiver: Tapping Your Unique Strengths

Description: The caregiver's life is intense, and some people are more naturally "wired" for it than others. Still, no matter who you are and what circumstances you face, every caregiver is equipped with strengths to care for self and family well. There is a way to get into a satisfying and effective groove socially, emotionally, spiritually, and practically.

Bio: Lisa Jamieson is a special needs family advocate and co-founder of [*Walk Right In Ministries*](#) where she serves as a caregiver consultant and licensed pastoral counsellor. Lisa and her husband, Larry, live in Minnesota with the youngest of their three grown daughters, Carly, who has Angelman Syndrome. Lisa's books and Bible studies include [*Finding Glory in the Thorns*](#) and the picture book [*Jesus, Let's Talk*](#).

Jones, Samantha

Presentation Title: Building Your Disability Ministry Team

Description: Volunteers are the lifeblood of every ministry. They are one of the biggest investments of every ministry leader. This workshop will teach you practical strategies for structuring, growing, and retaining volunteers for disability ministry.

Presentation Title: Starting Your Disability Ministry

Description: Every successful ministry begins with a prayer and a plan. This workshop gives you tools and walks you through how to build your unique ministry plan with excellence.

****Templates and other goodies included****

Bio: Samantha Jones believes that every person is made in the image of God, valuable, and needed. Passionate about connecting others into relationship with Christ and discipleship, she is the founder and CEO of Benevolence United. Samantha is also a proud parent of children with special needs and has worked in ministry for over 2 decades now.

Jones, Tom

Presentation Title: Parent Connection-A Movement toward Wholeness

Description: Upon the diagnosis of a child's disability, parents enter a world that is full of challenges and uncertainties. One major challenge is isolation that they experience from friends, family, community, resources, information, and other parents who care for children with special needs. In addition, the never-ending financial, medical, and educational stresses are overwhelming and leave little time for relationships. Parents need time and opportunities to develop and nurture the relationships that make their lives whole.

Bio: Tom Jones has taught children with special needs for 25 years in Midland, Texas. He and First Christian Church started SHARE, a respite care ministry for children with special needs in 2005. SHARE's mission is to partner with families to support and strengthen their efforts to become strong and successful families. Tom became an ordained minister by the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) which recognized SHARE as the ministry Tom was called to serve. Tom served SHARE as the executive director until his retirement in October 2020. His goal in retirement is to establish a Faith Inclusion Network in West Texas that can help families find, become included, and belong to church families.

Kaufman, Aaron

Panelist for National Community Conversation, "Faith Communities, Disability, and Public Policy"

Bio: Aaron Kaufman joined The Jewish Federations of North America's Washington DC office in January 2016 as a Senior Legislative Associate. He focuses on disability and poverty issues. Aaron came from the Arc Maryland where he lobbied members of the Maryland General Assembly and the Maryland Congressional delegation on issues affecting Marylanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

Having Cerebral Palsy, Aaron feels he brings a unique perspective to JFNA's efforts on behalf of people with disabilities. Outside of advocacy, he was the instructor in Project SEARCH Montgomery, a job-training program for young adults with significant disabilities.

Aaron graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park with a BA in American Studies and with several honors. He is on the Executive Committee of the Jewish Foundation for Group Homes and is the former Vice Chair of the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council. He also served on the Board of the National Association of Developmental Disabilities Councils as well as the Board of Disability Rights Maryland.

Masters, Anne Ph.D

PresentationTitle: Reconsidering Charity Within the Body of Christ

Description: For many individuals with disabilities, "charity" has become a dirty word. Yet charity continues to be a popular framework within Christian congregations. Can this divide be bridged? Anne's research discovered a shadow narrative about persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) that dims the light of the Gospel and denies their innate dignity. This session will present a summary of these findings and suggest a framework to counteract these developments and nurture the appreciation and meaningful participation of individuals with IDD in congregational life.

Bio: Dr. Anne Masters is the Director of the Office for Pastoral Ministry with Persons with Disabilities for the Archdiocese of Newark. Anne collaborates with Catholic and interfaith partners to advance the needs of individuals with disabilities, contributes to the work of the National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities (NCPD), is a Fellow of the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and a past president of its Religion & Spirituality Interest Group.

Morstad, David

Moderator for National Community Conversation, "Faith Communities, Disability, and Public Policy"

Bio: David Morstad, M.Ed, is the author of the book, "Whole Community: Introducing Faith Communities to People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities". He is a Fellow of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and was the 2010 recipient of the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Division's Henri J.M. Nouwen Award. For more than 38 years, he was with Bethesda Lutheran Communities in roles that included educational resource development, corporate director of staff training, Vice President for Communications, and was the Executive Director and Senior Fellow of the Bethesda Institute. David has published numerous articles and has lectured to professional organizations across the US, Central America, the Baltic nations, and the Middle East. He currently serves on the Wisconsin Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities, and is an advisor to the Faith Inclusion Network of Hampton Roads, and the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability.

His blog can be found at www.LargerTable.com.

Murphy, Bronwyn

Presentation Title: Building The Next Inclusive Generation: *Partnering with Youth, Children and Families to Create Inclusive Communities*

Description: The purpose of this presentation is to equip faith communities to cast a vision for and grow a culture of inclusion specifically through partnering with youth, children and families and equip faith communities to develop on-ramps for connection and relationship building between youth, children and families with and without disabilities.

Presentation Title: Room to Breathe: *Creating and Sustaining Supportive Community Groups for Parents of Children with Disabilities/Special Needs*

Description: The purpose of this presentation is to equip faith communities to cast a vision for and grow a culture of inclusion through supporting parents and families of children with disabilities/special needs and to develop thriving supportive community groups for parents of children with special needs.

Bio: Bronwyn Murphy currently serves as the Inclusion Coordinator at University Covenant Church (Davis, CA) and an inclusion ministry consultant/parents of children with special needs cohort facilitators for the Pacific Southwest Conference of the Evangelical Church. I also serve as a board member in the area of Outreach and Development at University Covenant Nursery School (Davis, CA). I have three children, each with disabilities and I was diagnosed with ADHD and OCD as an adult. All of that to say, inclusion in faith communities is near and dear to my heart and a definite passion of mine.

Philo, Jolene

Presentation Title: The 5 Love Languages® for Families Affected by Disability

Description: Whether you're new to the 5 love languages or a longtime fan, this workshop provides strategies for identifying the primary language of every member of your family, including those with disabilities. You will learn how to adapt how to adapt the love languages for your children with disabilities and their typical siblings. As an added bonus, those attending will learn inexpensive and easy ways caregiving spouses can use the love languages with one another. This workshop's content is based on more than 40 interviews Jolene conducted while doing research for *Sharing Love Abundantly in Special Needs Families: the 5 Love Languages® for Parents Raising Children with Disabilities*, which she co-authored with Dr. Gary Chapman

Presentation Title: The Mess That Stress Builds and What To Do About It

Description: This workshop explores the mess that stress and compassion fatigue create in the lives of caregiving parents and their families. After a quick look at studies about how stress affects a caregiver's health, those attending will hear about parents who have learned to cope and live well with chronic stress while raising children with disabilities. The strategies they used to improve their physical, mental, and spiritual health will be presented, along with ideas about how to tweak them to make them usable in unique caregiving situations.

Bio: Jolene Philo is the parent and daughter of loved ones with special needs and disabilities. She is a former educator who created inclusive classrooms for all learners for 25 years. She's the author of several books about caregiving, special needs parenting, and childhood PTSD, including *Sharing Love Abundantly with Special Needs Families: The 5 Love Languages® for Parents Raising Children with Disabilities*, which she co-authored with Dr. Gary Chapman. Her award-winning blog, www.DifferentDream.com, provides encouragement and resources for caregiving families. Jolene and her husband live in central Iowa.

Pratt, Maureen

Presentation Title: The Spirituality of Caregiving

Description: Spirituality is an integral part of a life of faith, but although it can be talked about in general terms, for each individual, spirituality is deeply personal and individual, intricately woven into his or her relationships with God, self, and others. This workshop will respond to the question, "How might a spirituality of caregiving be expressed?" and offer three ways that caregivers might build greater resilience, strength, and insight in their spiritual lives and, thus, in their ministry of caregiving: through intentional modalities of prayer, networking and sharing, and joy and humor.

Presentation Title: How Do We Keep on Learning? Religious Education and Congregational Belonging for Adults with Disabilities

Description: Today, more children with disabilities are moving into adulthood, and they do not leave their disabilities behind. Rather, their welcome into a congregation or other church community implies that their whole selves, including their disabilities, will continue to be a part of that body of Christ for years to come and will take their place beside others, adults, who either already have or develop disabilities, too. This workshop will ask the question, "How do we keep on learning?" and discuss ways that congregations and individuals might create opportunities for continued faith, spiritual, and personal growth for adults with disabilities, including children-now-older and those who are aging and, perhaps, developing disabilities for the first time.

Bio: Maureen Pratt is an award-winning author of 8 books and a nationally syndicated column distributed by Catholic News Service, and a retreat leader and speaker who focuses on disability, faith, and the places where faith and spirituality meet life with chronic health challenges. Among her books are the devotional, *Peace in the Storm: Meditations on Chronic Pain & Illness* (Image/Penguin Random House 2005) and the double-award-winning resource, *Salt and Light: Church, Disability, and the Blessing of Welcome for All* (Twenty-Third Publications 2018). She holds a Bachelor of Science in Languages from Georgetown University, a Master of Fine Arts from UCLA's School of Theater, Film, and Television, and is currently studying theology at the Jesuit School of Theology and expects to graduate with her Masters in Theological Studies in Spring 2021. She lives with multiple disabilities, including lupus, and resides in Los Angeles.

Ramsey-Lucas, Curtis

Panel Member for National Community Conversation, "Faith Communities, Disability, and Public Policy"

Bio: Curtis Ramsey-Lucas is editor of *The Christian Citizen*, a digital first publication of American Baptist Home Mission Societies, and *The Christian Citizen Weekly* newsletter. He is also host of the *Justice. Mercy. Faith.* podcast. He previously served as director of Interfaith Engagement at the American Association of People with Disabilities. Working with the leadership of the American Psychiatric Association, he helped cofound the Mental Health and Faith Community Partnership to reduce stigma associated with mental illness and develop mental health resources for faith leaders. He serves on the boards of directors of Pathways to Promise, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, and the Religious Liberty and Human Rights commissions of the Baptist World Alliance. His articles have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Religion News Service*, *Sojourners*, *Baptist News Global*, and *Good Faith Media*. His book, *#InThisTogether: Ministry in Times of Crisis*, is available from Judson Press.

Rizzo, David and Mercedes

Presentation Title: Balancing children, marriage and self care in a special needs family

Description: Given the disproportionate amount of attention you often need to give to your child with special needs, how do you balance everything else? What does this feel like?

In this session we will discuss how to balance children, marriage and self-care in a special needs family. This can get tough at times. Before long, you may come to think of yourself as performers in a balancing act. So, what are the relationships you are trying to balance? You have to find a balance across the full spectrum of your relationships. What is that? This could mean your other kids, your marriage, your career and yourself. As people of faith, we learned that it is important to bring God into the deal.

Bio: David and Mercedes Rizzo write and speak from a faith perspective as parents of a child with autism. Inspired by their daughter they developed the *Adaptive First Eucharist Preparation Kit*. Together they are the authors of *Praying for Your Special Needs Child*; and *Spiritually Able: A Parent's Guide to Teaching the Faith to Children with Special Needs*. In addition David is the author of *Faith, Family and Children with Special Needs*. They blog for Catholicmom.com each month on the topic of special needs. David has a Master's Degree in Physical Therapy and Mercedes has a Master's Degree in Education.

Ruppert, Mary with Chris Friedman and Jack Stewart

Presentation Title: Be Together: Building Relationships Across Difference

Description: At the heart of every community are authentic relationships. If we want to create communities of welcome for all, we need to go beyond our comfort zones and build relationships with people who may be very different from us. This is the core work of L'Arche, where adults with and without intellectual disabilities share life and friendships in community, and it applies equally to faith communities. Join members of L'Arche to hear stories about the steps and impact of connecting heart to heart.

Bio: *Chris Friedman* is a founding member of L'Arche Wavecrest in Orange, CA, and has 16 years of experience building relationships in a faith community. *Jack Stewart* has been involved with L'Arche over the last two years in L'Arche Seattle, and now as a house leader in the home he and Chris share at L'Arche Wavecrest. *Mary Ruppert* has dedicated over a decade to creating community with people with and without intellectual disabilities and is now the manager of donor relations for L'Arche USA.

Sandison, Ron

Presentation Title: Living with Autism and Growing in Faith

Description: Ron Sandison an author, motivational speaker, and minister shares his amazing journey of autism and faith. He shares his personal challenges having autism and how God helped him overcome by learning social skills and handling sensory issues. An American with Disability case enabled Ron to become a nationally known disability advocate. Ron teaches families and church leadership ways to empower individuals with autism and disabilities to participate in ministry.

Bio: Ron Sandison works full time in the medical field and is a professor of theology at Destiny School of Ministry. He is an advisory board member of the Art of Autism and the Els Center of Excellence. Sandison has a Master of Divinity from Oral Roberts University and is the author of *A Parent's Guide to Autism: Practical Advice. Biblical Wisdom* published by Charisma House and *Thought, Choice, Action*. He has memorized over 15,000 Scriptures including 22 complete books of the New Testament. Sandison speaks at over 70 events a year including 20 plus education conferences. Ron and his wife, Kristen, reside in Rochester Hills, MI, with daughter, Makayla. His website is <http://www.spectruminclusion.com>. You can contact him at sandison456@hotmail.com.

Schipani, Sister Kathleen

Presentation Title: Cyber Catechesis – We Can Adapt!

Description: Explore strategies and platform features that help parents, catechists and catechetical leaders to effectively engage individuals with disabilities in remote learning for sacramental preparation. Discover ways that virtual formats and sacramental prep can foster belonging within the faith community.

Presentation Title: We Can Adapt: Materials and Methods that really work! Part II

Description: Materials and research-based strategies that optimize learning will be demonstrated. Adaptive Finding God (Loyola Press) hands on interactive learning tools and other religious education resources to use during virtual catechesis will be shared.

Bio: Sister Kathleen Schipani, who is a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the Director of the Office for Persons with Disabilities and the Deaf Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Sister Kathleen is the past chair of the board of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability and the National Catholic Office for the Deaf. She has presented nationally and internationally on topics related to faith, disability and the Deaf. Sister assisted in coordinating and was one of the international facilitators for a conference at the Vatican, entitled: Catechesis and Persons with Disabilities: A Necessary Engagement in the Daily Pastoral Life of the Church. In 2019 she was awarded the papal honor, Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice.

West, Angela

Presentation Title: "Roll Called... Living With a Purpose"

Description:

People talk in general about the inclusion of people with disabilities, but I think we need to dig a little deeper than that. God has a calling on each of our lives and that includes people with disabilities. I believe the best place for people to discover what their calling is within the faith community. This is where we can work together as a Body to learn more about what our gifts are.

This presentation will explore this idea of the importance of our own calling as well as an opportunity to share and discuss the new non-profit organization I have just begun, "Roll Called".

Bio: Angela lives in Chesapeake, Virginia, where she was born and raised. She has been with her life partner, David, for 9 years.

Diagnosed with cerebral palsy at a very young age, doctors told Angela's parents that she would never talk, work, or do much with her life. BUT GOD had a much different plan! Upon graduating with her Master's degree, Angela started working right away at an organization dedicated to serving families with children with disabilities. She enjoys encouraging others that may be living in similar situations.

Angela knows she is called to spread the Gospel by speaking into women's lives, despite her speech impairment. Whether using an interpreter or slowing down the delivery, she is confident that the Holy Spirit speaks through her!