
Monday, May 20th Community Day Theme: From Longing to Belonging

**Barbara Newman
and Shelly Christensen**

*"Everyone is welcome." "My house shall be called
a house of prayer for all peoples." "Join our
family."*

Our congregations issue these warm statements of welcome and offer places of belonging. How can our congregational good intentions in these words on our doors and on our websites turn into actions that support all people to belong? Join us for a discussion that introduces the key elements in a community of belonging and discover some very practical strategies and tools to turn those welcome statements into a reality in your congregation. You'll learn from faith communities we have visited and worked with as we highlight the perspectives and practices that allow each of us to move from longing to belonging within the heart of a congregation.



Shelly Christensen is a leader in the faith community disability inclusion movement. She is an international speaker and consultant to numerous faith communities and faith-based organizations. Shelly's newest book, *From Longing to Belonging-A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith Community*, is a resource for all faith-based organizations to enhance and encourage participation and inclusion for each and every person. Shelly is co-founder and organizer of Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month (JDAIM), recognized in February and co-founder of the Jewish Leadership Institute on Disabilities and Inclusion.

Shelly is past president of the American Association on Intellectual Disabilities Religion and Spirituality Network and is recognized by AAIDD as a Fellow for her meritorious contributions to the field. She directed the award-winning Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities in Minneapolis for 13 years before founding Inclusion Innovations. Shelly has contributed to numerous faith community inclusion initiatives in leadership and educational roles and is a consultant to faith-based organizations. She is a national board advisor to the Faith Inclusion Network in Virginia Beach, VA. Shelly believes that people with disabilities and mental health conditions, and those who love them, want what anyone else wants—to belong, to contribute, and to be a valued member of the faith community they choose. Shelly lives in Minneapolis with her husband, Rick. They have three sons, one of whom lives with a disability.

2019 PLENARY SPEAKER LINEUP



For over 30 years, **Barbara J. Newman** has endeavored to create communities of inclusion through CLC Network where she serves as the director of church services. Co-administrating inclusive education at Zeeland Christian School allows her to stay on top of best practices which she shares at schools and churches nationwide and in her books and practical resources, including *Autism and Your Church*, *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities*, *Nuts & Bolts of Inclusive Education*, and her latest title, *Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship*. Barbara was the 2012 recipient of the Christian Service Award from Bethesda Lutheran Communities and the 2015 recipient of the Henri J.M. Nouwen Award from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, as well as the recipient of the Ability Award from the Disability Network (Lakeshore) in 2017. She holds a teaching certificate with a cognitive impairment endorsement from Calvin College, and a Master of Arts in early childhood education and early childhood developmental delay with a concentration in autism spectrum disorders from Grand Valley State University.

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Tuesday, May 21st Plenary Speakers

Morning Sessions

Amy Julia Becker *Healing the Wounds of Privilege: How my Daughter with Down Syndrome Helped Me Understand that Privilege Harms Everyone*

I am a white woman who grew up with wealth, education, and a stable home environment. As a child with Down syndrome, our daughter was born both inside and outside the “privilege,” the unearned social advantages, of her parents. Penny awakened my heart to the injustices of excluding marginalized people from opportunities and from positions of value. She also demonstrated the way I (and others like me) was missing out on the beauty and goodness of different ways of being. Penny exposed the way privilege harmed those excluded from it and those ostensibly benefitting from it. In confronting the reality of privilege in the context of my Christian faith, I began to acknowledge harm, ask for help, and participate in healing. This talk will invite participants to consider the wounds of privilege and the need and possibilities for healing.



Amy Julia Becker is the author of *White Picket Fences: Turning toward Love in a World Divided by Privilege* (NavPress, 2018). She is also the author of *Small Talk: Learning From My Children About What Matters Most* (Zondervan, 2014), *A Good and Perfect Gift: Faith, Expectations and a Little Girl Named Penny* (Bethany House), named one of the Top Books of 2011 by *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Penelope Ayers: A Memoir*. A graduate of Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary, her essays about faith, family, and disability have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Christianity Today*, the *Christian Century*, and online for *The New York Times*, *ABC News*, the *Atlantic*, *Vox*, and *The Huffington Post*. Amy Julia is a member of *INK: A Creative Collective*. She lives with her husband Peter and three children, Penny, William, and Marilee in western CT.

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Andy Arias *Becoming More Effective Agents of Change: Looking beyond Inclusion to all Intersections of One's Disability.*

Andy Arias is a diverse individual with several different identities that interplay constantly in his professional and personal life. Born into systemic poverty and a product of the foster system made it difficult for Andy to see beyond tomorrow. It was only when faith had intervened he found the peace within himself to move forward and he was able to achieve more than anyone could've imagined. He was born with a significant disability and identifies as LGBTQ. This made Andy face his Christianity head on and really look at the core of who God wanted him to be. It is through all these intersections of his identity that Andy has become such a dynamic leader for his communities. His faith and has carried through all of these challenges, so that he able to provide an example of strength for others. Andy has always had to fight to have his voice heard that's why he takes the context of the term inclusion and wants to extend this idea, inclusion should not be asked for but our right of all people especially those with disabilities. When we understand people at their core and respect their intersections as gifts of opportunity, we are able to change our perception of what somebody is capable of. If we can change our perception we then become greater agents of change.



Andy Arias currently works on federal policy in Washington DC. Previously, Andy worked for a Los Angeles law firm as a corporate ADA SME. Andy Arias has been an advocacy professional for over seven years. He gained his advocacy roots at Independent Living Centers in California implementing statewide systems change through statewide legislation. He created a youth program the served over 150 transitional youth, assisting them in meeting their goals of independence and employment. Andy is creating pathways and intersections between disability and LGBTQ. As a System Change Advocate and Program Manager for Orange County & Los Angeles, he was able to work with local and state legislators to pass policy that impact individuals with disabilities Andy is often hired speak and train at universities, high schools, and Congressional leaders on ADA compliance and the inclusion of people disabilities and others from diverse backgrounds and communities. He has received several awards for his presentations on LGBTQ diversity and disability equality. Andy advocates in the entertainment industry by creating visible pathways as an actor and stand-up comedian. As an actor, Andy has had the pleasure of working with Tom Hanks, Mark Ruffalo and Hilary Swank on projects. He is often asked to consult with producers and directors in create greater media visibility of people with disabilities. He has also produced several small projects that have brought attention to persons with disabilities and the LGBTQ to community

2019 PLENARY SPEAKER LINEUP

Tuesday, May 21st Plenary Speakers

Afternoon Session: Summer Institute TED Talks

Hearing from three new Summer Institute PhD's

Sarah Jean Barton *Becoming the Baptized Body*

In this plenary session, I revisit and reimagine the conversation of theological anthropology in the field of disability theology. Drawing on resources from the Christian tradition, as well as interviews with adults with intellectual disabilities, I suggest that religious ritual practices, and specifically Christian baptismal practices, provide a much-needed turn to embodiment and participation for the construction of anthropologies robustly inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities.



Sarah Jean Barton was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. She earned a BS in Biology from Seattle Pacific University, an MS from Boston University in Occupational Therapy, and an MTS and Th.D. from Duke Divinity School. Sarah currently serves as a Henri Nouwen Faculty Fellow at Western Theological Seminary, teaching courses in ethics, theology, and pastoral care, with a specific emphasis on issues related to disability and trauma. Sarah's research interests include the intersections of disability, theological anthropology, and liturgy. Her dissertation explored a baptismally-rooted anthropology radically inclusive of people with profound intellectual disabilities. Before her teaching appointment to Western Theological Seminary, Sarah worked as a Senior Pediatric Occupational Therapist at Duke University Health System. She continues to engage in academic work in a variety of interdisciplinary contexts, including issues related to theological education, disability studies, occupational therapy, global health, and ethical issues in healthcare. Sarah is an active Episcopalian who enjoys serving as a lay preacher and lay eucharistic minister. She is married to the Rev. Andrew Phillips who is an Elder in the United Methodist Church.

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Keith Dow *Practicing the Virtues of Discovery, Together*

“Call, Encounter, and Response: Loving my neighbor with intellectual disabilities” was a PhD project that explored the roots of ethical *motivation* and *formation* among direct support professionals in a Christian faith-based service setting in Canada. It asked questions such as, “What shapes an ethical call or vocation?” “How does the *imago Dei* inform our human encounters?” and “What ethical response is called for in our encounters with one another?”

Out of this work arises the realization that our encounters with one another are often shaped by the belief that we “already know” ourselves, one another, or God transparently. Love instead calls us to journey with one another in *virtues of discovery*: Virtues grounded not in intellectual ability but in the desire to love and to be loved. These virtues have the power to shape our communities and theologies in transformative ways.



Keith Dow serves on the Organizational and Spiritual Life team with Christian Horizons (www.christian-horizons.org), a faith-based organization working with people with intellectual disabilities in Canada and around the world. He is a credentialed pastor with BIC Canada and defends his PhD in Theology at the VU University of Amsterdam in February, 2019. His academic work explores the ethical and theological motivation and formation of care, under the direction of Hans Reinders and Tom Reynolds. Keith lives just South of Ottawa, Ontario with his wife Darcie and their three children.

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Jason Grieg *The Disarmed Community: L'Arche as "Parable" for the Peace Church*

While many take the communities of L'Arche to be examples of good (religious) "service provision," the work of founder Jean Vanier and the identity of communities committed to his theological emphases understands the movement to be much more. I will present an interpretation of L'Arche as a Gospel-inspired community, committed to being a "peace culture" that witnesses to the non-violent peace of Christ. The theological story of L'Arche reveals the transformation of L'Arche from "rescue project" to reconciled community, which not only re-describes "disability" but also provides a milieu of liberation for all persons. As examples of peace cultures, L'Arche communities offer a location for the reception of peaceable habits through the performance of communal practices. These habits and practices exist as fruit for the church not only in moving toward faith communities "beyond inclusion" but as witnesses to and participants in God's peaceful redemption of the world.



Jason Grieg lived for 11 years on two different L'Arche communities, acting as a live-in assistant at L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill, Ontario, and as Spiritual Life Coordinator at L'Arche Cape Breton, in Whycocomagh, Nova Scotia. Jason then undertook theological graduate studies receiving a Masters of Divinity from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (2013) and a PhD from VU Free University of Amsterdam (2018). Jason's academic research has centered around how disability, particularly as it is understood in the work of Jean Vanier and in the practice of L'Arche communities, impacts the domains of theology and ethics. Notable areas of interest include moral theology and Christian bioethics, ecclesiology and Christian non-violence, practical theology and faith communities, L'Arche and the work of Jean Vanier, and philosophies and theologies of time and their intersection with society. Jason lives in Kitchener, Ontario with his wife and two children. He is an active member of L'Arche Stratford, and a Visiting Fellow at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

Wednesday, May 22nd Plenary Speakers Morning Session

Carmen Nanko-Fernandez *¡Ay Bendito! Theologizing latinamente on Dis-ability Hyphens*

Among the key insights of Latin@ theologies is the role of lo cotidiano, lived daily experience--in all of its complicated, incarnated particularities—as locus theologicus. Ordinary living provides source, content, context, and marks the spaces and places from which Latin@s do theology en conjunto, in collaborative and mutually accountable ways. This presentation explores possibilities of constructing theologies at the intersections of latinidad and dis-ability.



A self-described Hurban@ (Hispanic and urban) theologian, **Dr. Carmen Nanko-Fernández** is Professor of Hispanic Theology and Ministry and the director of the Hispanic Theology and Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Her publications include the book [Theologizing en Espanglish](#) (Orbis, 2010) and numerous book chapters, journal articles, and digital media on Latin@ theologies, Catholic social teaching, im/migration, sport and theology--with attention to béisbol/baseball. In 2018, Nanko-Fernández created the column [Theology en la Plaza](#) for the *National Catholic Reporter* where some of her [recent essays](#) are available. She is currently completing the book *¿El Santo? Baseball and the Canonization of Roberto Clemente*, which is under contract with the Sport and Religion series of Mercer University Press. Nanko-Fernández has presented in a variety of academic and pastoral venues including a conference at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. A past president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS), she received their Virgilio Elizondo Award in 2012 for “distinguished achievement in theology.” Her scholarship and work in theological education, in ministry, and on editorial boards reflects an ongoing commitment to agency, access, and justice particularly for communities too often underrepresented, marginalized and/or minoritized in the academy, the Catholic church, and in publication/media.

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Wednesday, May 22nd Plenary Speakers Afternoon Session

Bill Gaventa
Erik Carter

*The Summer Institute on Theology and Disability:
A Community Conversation about our Past and Future*



The Summer Institute is 10 years old. Where have we been? What needs to happen in the future for the Institute to continue as well as to plan for transitions in leadership. What form will and should this take? All attendees, no matter how many times you have been here, are invited to think this through as part of the Summer Institute community. All attendees will be sent a Ten Year Snapshot of the Summer Institute. Come prepared to give engage in conversation with ideas and feedback.

2019 PLENARY SPEAKER LINEUP

Thursday, May 23rd Plenary Speakers

Morning Session: Inclusion, Theology and the Church: Voices from India and Zambia

Christopher Rajkumar *Inclusivity: A Mission Mandate of the Church*

The session will start with an introduction to the Indian Ecumenical Response to Disability, Indian Disability Ecumenical Accompaniment (IDEA) and its ministerial and diaconal interventions. The session would emphasize on the need for theolog(y)ies 'BY' and 'FOR' PWDs by highlighting a few theological conversations of the PWDs and their siblings (care-givers) during our journey. The Session would also highlight the theological approaches and shifts that affirms and promotes inclusivity such as: Great Commission to Great Commandment, Conventional Mission to Covenantal Mission, Isolation to Inclusion, Subjects to Citizens, Charity to Accompaniment and such.



Christopher Rajkumar is an ordained minister of the Church of South India and a theological educator and writer. He serves the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) as its Executive Secretary for the Commission on Mission, Ecumenism and Diakonia and also the Director of the Indian Disability Ecumenical Accompaniment. This forum is working with the Churches and Societies to inculcate the spirituality of Radical Inclusion, through various programmes, seminars, consultations, discussions, interface and more. He facilitated the Indian Churches to responsibly respond to the issues related disability and the issues of care-givers and families theologically, ministerially and diaconally. He is a theologian and a disability activist!

Patrick Chisanga *The Pastoral and Theological Perspectives on Disability and Inclusion in the Diocese of Mansa - Zambia*

Inspired by the mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd who came “that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10), the Diocese of Mansa seeks “to embrace everyone with the love of Christ” (Diocesan Vision in Strategic Plan 2016-2021). People with disabilities, especially children, tend to be neglected by families and excluded from participation in public life due to certain traditional beliefs and myths about

**Abstracts and bios are written by the presenters themselves.*

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disabilities. To counter this challenge, the Diocese has, since 2014, undertaken various initiatives and deliberate pastoral actions to promote better understanding of the dignity of every human person created in the image and likeness of God. Workshops have been conducted for priests and parents to raise awareness. Small Christian Communities are reaching out to families where children with disabilities are hidden away and parishes are involving people with disabilities in worship and ministry. “Disability is not Inability” is gradually becoming a popular refrain among children in our schools.



I am **Patrick CHISANGA**, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Mansa in the Northern Zambia since 1st February 2014. Prior to my appointment, I served as a Franciscan priest in parish ministry (1999-2001), in the seminary training of future priests (2001-2002, 2006-2008; 2013) as well as in leadership of the Franciscan Order in my country (2008-2012). Besides the philosophical-theological training prior to ordination (1992-1999), I also pursued specialized studies in clinical psychology (Master's Degree) at the Gregorian University in Rome (2002-2006). My interest and work with people with disabilities goes back to 2008 when I had the opportunity to follow a Leadership and Advocacy Program on Disabilities at the University of Minnesota, facilitated by Professor Amy Hewitt and the Arch Greater Twin Cities. I have also had the privilege of getting to know and interacting closely with Billy Beddor, a 52 years old man of Minnesota with Down Syndrome, who has developed so many amazing abilities – thanks the love and opportunities his family has accorded him from childhood. In 2017, I was honored to host Billy, together with Amy and Billy's elder sister for a series of workshops in my Diocese. This was a great hit. Attendance of the 2015 AAIDD Conference in Louisville, Kentucky was another great opportunity for me to be exposed to the bigger picture. In my everyday ministry as a Bishop, I am committed to fostering change of negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and promoting love, respect, dignity, advocacy and inclusion of in the life of the Church and society at large. Lack of material resources, trained and available personnel as well as the myths and general suspicious attitudes towards disabilities are the major challenges encountered in the process.

Thursday, May 23rd Plenary Speakers

Afternoon Session: The Jean Vanier Emerging Scholar Lecture

Talitha Cooreman *Cognitive Impairment, Friendship and Spirituality – A Reading Of Lazarus from a Dementia-Perspective.*

People who live with cognitive impairment or with dementia-related diseases often face the same problem: it is difficult for them to maintain friendships. This is, at least in part, due to what Tom Kitwood named *malignant positioning*. Activism around dementia related issues focusses on how to change our society's perspectives on dementia. Our Churches can contribute to this, in order to counter the societal negativity that surrounds dementia and the mechanisms at work that make our contemporaries so fearful of dependence and the loss of certain cognitive faculties. Pedagogical work is necessary to combat negative feelings and educate everyone's gaze to see more than only the disappearance of possibilities. Like Saint Bonaventure, I suggest using Scripture as a corrective to a dark reading of the world. Can the story of Lazarus help us to shed a new light on how Christians can engage in society when confronted with dementia?



Talitha Cooreman-Guittin is happily married to Florent. They have three grown up children. Talitha has worked 11 years for the Catholic Diocese of Strasbourg (France) as a Youth Minister and has also taught religious education and catechesis to children and youngsters with intellectual disabilities. In January 2018 she finished her doctoral thesis on "The perception of intellectual disability within the catechetical pedagogy of the Church" at the University of Strasbourg, where she also co-organized a seminar on Disability Theology in August 2017 (together with the Kairos-Forum and Cristina Gangemi). She currently works as postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium, where she leads a project on the relevance of maintaining friendships with people who have dementia-related diseases.