

Kennedy Krieger Institute 2026 Annual Faith Leaders Conference

Advancing Disability Inclusion— Creating Communities of Belonging



**The Arnold J. Capute, MD, MPH, Conference Center
Kennedy Krieger Institute
1741 Ashland Avenue, 8th Floor
Baltimore Maryland 21205**

June 25, 2026 | 8:30 a.m.–3 p.m.



**Maryland Center for
Developmental Disabilities**

Welcome!



On behalf of Kennedy Krieger Institute and the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD), welcome to our 2026 Annual Faith Leaders Conference. We are honored to gather with so many of you today. Our conference theme this year is “Advancing Disability Inclusion—Creating Communities of Belonging.”

Last year, we focused on “Partnership with Purpose,” recognizing that meaningful disability inclusion begins when faith communities, individuals with disabilities, families, and advocates come together with shared commitment and vision. This year, we take the next step forward by asking an important question: What does it truly mean to create communities where every person knows they belong?

Belonging is often shaped in small but meaningful moments such as the way a family is greeted, how a child is welcomed, whether accommodations are offered with compassion, or whether someone feels seen instead of singled out. For many individuals with disabilities and their families, these moments determine whether a faith community becomes a place of connection, support, and spiritual growth, or a place they never return to again.

Our gathering today is rooted in the belief that every person is created in God’s image and has inherent dignity, worth, value, and purpose within the life of their faith community. Faith communities are called not only to open their doors wider, but also to intentionally create environments where individuals of all abilities can fully participate, contribute, lead, and thrive.

Throughout today’s conference, we will learn from lived experiences, explore practical and faith-informed strategies, and reflect on how our worship spaces can become communities of belonging that strengthen the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities and their families. We will also celebrate faith leaders who are already modeling what intentional inclusion can look like in action.

Thank you for choosing to be part of this important conversation and commitment. May today inspire us to move beyond awareness into meaningful practice. May we be reminded that communities of belonging are not created accidentally, but intentionally, with one interaction, one decision, and one act of grace at a time.

Let us begin this day in the warmth of community, rooted in grace, and united in our shared purpose of advancing disability inclusion and creating communities of belonging!

In peace, purpose, and partnership,
Dr. Mirian E. Ofonedu, PhD, LCSW-C

Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities Director of Training and Conference Chair



2026 Faith Leaders Conference

Agenda

Time	Program
8:30–9:00 a.m.	Check-In, Breakfast and Networking: 8 th -Floor Conference Center Reception Area
9:00–9:15 a.m.	Opening Reflection and MCDD Welcome Remarks: Dr. Mirian Ofonedu, PhD, LCSW-C, Director of Training, and Maureen van Stone, Esq., MS, Director and Assistant Vice President, Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities, Kennedy Krieger Institute
9:15–9:25 a.m.	Welcome Address: Dr. Bradley L. Schlaggar, MD, PhD, President and CEO, Kennedy Krieger Institute
9:25–9:40 a.m.	Keynote Speaker Address: Lt. Governor Aruna K. Miller
9:40–10a.m.	Invited Guest Address: Rev. William (Bill) Gaventa, MDiv, Author of “Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness, Why Disability Inclusion Matters in Faith Communities?”
10:00–10:45 a.m.	Lived Experience Panel: Beyond Welcome—Mr. Lichter, Dr. Tazanu, Pastor Williams, Ms. Chernack, and Dr. Carter
10:45–11 a.m.	Coffee Break and FCLC Ambassadors’ Group Picture
11:00–11:15 a.m.	Invited Guest Address: Dr. Lora Hargrove, PhD, DMin, MDiv, Director of Faith Outreach, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, “Creating Communities of Belonging”
11:15 a.m.–12 p.m.	Lived Experience Panel: Called to Belong—Ms. Queen, Mr. Kourtz, Ms. Wright, Rabbi Yanky, and Imam Dr. Amin
12:00–12:30 p.m.	Lunch and Networking: 8 th -Floor Conference Center Reception Area
12:30–1:15 p.m.	Breakout Roundtable Session: Practical Strategies for Disability Inclusion and Belonging in Faith Communities
1:15–2 p.m.	Lived Experience Panel: Voices of Belonging—Ms. Cefaratti, Ms. Chung, Evangelist Johnson, Rabbi Druk, and Rev. Gaventa
2:00–2:20 p.m.	Interactive Discussion: Moving from Awareness to Action
2:20–2:40 p.m.	Action Planning and Resource Sharing
2:40–3 p.m.	Closing Remarks and Next Steps: Dr. Mirian Ofonedu



Main Stage Speaker Bios



Lt. Governor Aruna Miller is the 10th lieutenant governor of the state of Maryland. She is the second woman to serve as lieutenant governor and the first woman of color and immigrant elected to statewide office in Maryland.



Dr. Lora Hargrove, PhD, DMin, MDiv, is the director of faith outreach at the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, where she serves as a liaison for all faith-related matters for the Moore-Miller Administration.



Rev. William (Bill) Gaventa, MDiv, is an author, speaker, trainer, and consultant primarily in the arena of faith and disability. He is the founder and director emeritus of the Institute of Theology and Disability and served as the initial president of the Disability Ministry Network.



Dr. Bradley L. Schlaggar, MD, PhD, is the president and CEO of Kennedy Krieger Institute and holds the Zanvyl Krieger Faculty Endowed Chair at Kennedy Krieger. He is also a professor of neurology and pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.



Dr. Mirian Ofonedu, PhD, LCSW-C, is the director of training at the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at Kennedy Krieger Institute, a fellow of the American Psychological Association and associate professor at the University of Maryland Baltimore School and the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health.



Maureen van Stone, Esq., MS, is the director and assistant vice president of the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute and the founding director of Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law).



Disability Inclusion Ambassador Speaker Bios



Pastor Angelic L. Williams is a disability inclusion ambassador and senior pastor at St. Luke United Methodist Church. She has been a preacher of the Gospel for about 20 years, serving in various roles.



Rabbi Yanky Baron is a disability inclusion ambassador and rabbi at the Chabad of Ellicott City. He studied in Rabbinical School in Chicago, Montreal, and Argentina before receiving his ordination at the Central Lubavitch Yeshivah in Brooklyn, New York.



Evangelist Barbara Johnson is a disability inclusion ambassador and faith community leader at The Good Shepherd Church of God in Christ and grandparent of a child with a disability. She is a retiree from Baltimore City Public Schools and served as an IEP chairperson for 22 years.



Eva Queen is a disability inclusion ambassador, a parent of a child with a disability and faith community leader at the Messiah Community Church. She is the executive director at the Advocates 4 You and has supported individuals and families within the disabilities community for over 30 years.



Rachel M. Chung is a disability inclusion ambassador and the coordinator of disability ministry, Department of Special Needs Ministries at the Archdiocese of Washington. She has worked for over 25 years supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Rabbi Levi Druk is a disability inclusion ambassador and rabbi at the Chabad of Downtown that serves as a center for Jewish life and education. He studied rabbinic jurisprudence and Chassidic philosophy, and he was ordained from the Central Yeshivah in Brooklyn, NY.

Plenary Speaker Bios



Dr. Abila Tzanu, MD, is a pediatrician with more than 20 years of health and community service experience. She is a mother of five inspiring adult children, three of whom have autism and related co-existing emotional concerns. She serves as Spectrum of Hope's lead medical guide/consultant.



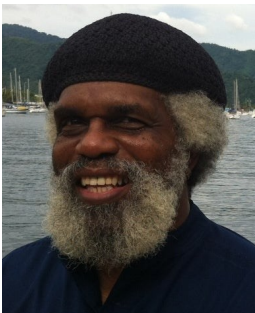
Alisa Chernack, Esq., is an attorney and a parent of a child with a disability. She specializes in elder law and disability law, among others areas. She is a member of the Community Advisory Council (CAC) advisers at the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at Kennedy Krieger.



Collin Kourtz, is the director of the Office of Life, Justice, and Peace, at the Archdiocese of Baltimore . He has a background in engineering, from which he obtained his degree from Loyola University, and he is now pursuing an advanced degree in theology at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.



Dr. Ernest L. Carter, MD, PhD, is the director of health, research and innovation at Kennedy Krieger Institute. He has an AB degree in physics from Harvard College, an MD from Harvard Medical School, and a PhD in bioengineering from the University of Pennsylvania. He holds years of experience in direct patient care, telemedicine and health IT, and public health and population health management.



Imam Dr. Hassan A. Amin is the founder and executive director of the Muslim Social Services Agency. He serves as imam and Islamic chaplain at the Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore City's Police Department, and is the Islamic chaplain with United States Park Police.



Plenary Speaker Bios



Neal Lichter is a parent of a child with a disability and the program director at Pathfinders for Autism. He is a certified police academic instructor for the Maryland Corrections and Police Training, where he has provided an understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) training since 2014.



Sunny Cefaratti is a self-advocate, mentor, and co-director at The Musical Autist. Sunny is a member of Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Council, and she joined the SDAN board in 2018. She is a talented public speaker and testified for participant choice and control of services for SDAN at the Maryland General Assembly in March 2020.



Tracy Wright is a self-advocate and the deputy director and director of training at People On the Go Maryland. Ms. Wright designed and presented trainings on self-determination, self-advocacy, disability rights, risk taking, and quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the professionals who support them.

Disability Inclusion Training Testimonial

“Receiving training through Kennedy Krieger’s FCLC Collaborative was critical. That experience helped shape not only our first Sensory Sunday, but also the way we began reimagining worship for individuals and families with special needs.

More than an event, this work became a shift in how we think, plan, and build systems of belonging. It taught us to ask better questions, remove unnecessary barriers, and make space where all people are seen, valued, and included. Most importantly, it helped us create a community where individuals with developmental disabilities are not simply accommodated, but welcomed into true belonging.

As I transition to another faith community in Baltimore, I look forward to leading yet another congregation in inclusive practices.”

—Pastor Angelic Williams—
Disability Inclusion Ambassador



Faith Community Learning Collaborative (FCLC)

Disability Inclusion Ambassadors

Recognized by Maryland Governor's Office

Title	First Name	Last Name	Faith Community and Maryland County
Ms.	Alisha	Williams	Greater Grace World Outreach Baltimore City
Pastor	Angelic L.	Williams	St. Luke United Methodist Baltimore City
Evangelist	Barbara	Johnson	The Good Shepherd Church of God in Christ Baltimore
Rev.	Carmi	Washington-Flood	St. Timothy's Christian Baptist Church Baltimore
Deacon	David M.	Lascu	Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore City
Ms.	Donna	Scott	Calvary Baptist Church Baltimore City
Ms.	Eva L	Queen	Messiah Community Church Baltimore County
Ms.	Hannah	Nelson	Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia Howard
Elder	Jacqueline	Farrow	Mt. Calvary Church and Ministries Baltimore City
Elder	Jessica	Campbell	Power House of God Fellowship of Churches Baltimore City
Dr.	Joyce	Vance	Greater Gethsemane Baptist Church Baltimore City
Rev.	Kevin W.	Johnson	Celebration Church, Columbia Howard
Rabbi	Levi	Druk	Chabad of Downtown Baltimore City
Dr.	Mark A.	Martin	Kingdom Fellowship AME Church Prince George's
Ms.	Rachel D.	Turniansky	Suburban Orthodox Congregation Baltimore County
Ms.	Rachel M.	Chung	The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington Montgomery, Prince George's, Charles, Calvert, St. Mary's, and Washington, D.C.
Bishop	Robert	Farrow	Mt. Calvary Church and Ministries Baltimore City
Ms.	Tonya	Cherry	Chapelgate Church in Marriottsville Howard
Ms.	Tracy	Knox	Helping Hands Ministries Harford
Ms.	Tricia	Han	Fourth Presbyterian Church Montgomery
Ms.	Valerie	Chadwick	Harvest Time Christian Fellowship Pennsylvania
Chaplain	Veda	Jefferson	Village Baptist Church Baltimore City
Rabbi	Yanky	Baron	Chabad Ellicott City Howard



Faith Community Learning Collaborative Disability Inclusion Ambassador Leadership Training and Event Photos



Advancing Disability Inclusion



Training Resources

Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities

Faith Leaders Training



**Disability, Mental Health,
Inclusive Faith Support and
Belonging: A Training
Collaborative**



If you are a faith leader who is interested in participating in our free two-day, in-person training, please click [here](#) to register or scan the QR code. For more information, visit KennedyKrieger.org/Faith or email: Training.MCDD@KennedyKrieger.org

2026 Virtual Annual Learning Series

Connecting Home, School and Community



The Annual Learning Series consists of interactive, virtual workshops with interdisciplinary topics. For more information, visit KennedyKrieger.org/ALS or scan the QR code.



Conference Evaluation

Thank you for joining us!

We would like to hear your feedback on this conference.

Please take a few minutes to complete the conference evaluation.

Click [here](#) or scan the QR code.

Note: When the form opens, please select “*Faith Community Learning Collaborative (FCLC) Training/Conference*” and enter “06/25/2026” as the date of the conference.

Certificate of Attendance

To request a certificate of attendance, after you have completed the conference evaluation, email us at: Training.MCDD@KennedyKrieger.org

Thank You!



Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our core conference committee, the staff of the Kennedy Krieger Institute conference center and cross-departmental teams, sponsors, speakers, and partners for making this conference a success!

Core Conference Planning Committee

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Watch Dr. Mirian Ofonedu's interview with Dr. Lora Hargrove, director of faith outreach at the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives. Visit:

goci.maryland.gov/the-faith-spotlight/

