



*Inclusive Voices: Welcoming
People With Disabilities*



Image: headshot of nice-looking man with a beard wearing suit and tie.

Bill Gaventa is currently the Director of the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability as well as the new Collaborative on Faith and Disability, linking several University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities who are addressing spirituality through initiatives in training, technical assistance, research, and/or dissemination. Bill's primary areas of experience and expertise are spiritual and faith-based supports 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.

As a writer and editor, he has edited newsletters and several books, written articles and chapters, and served as the Editor of the Journal of Religion, Disability and Health for 14 years, now as an Associate Editor. His book, *Spirituality and Disability: Recovering Wholeness*, was published by Baylor University Press in the spring of 2018.



Image: headshot of Catholic Deacon with gray hair wearing white vestments

Deacon Dennis Ferguson was born in New York City, grew up in Darien and Wilton, Connecticut, and has resided in West Hartford for more than 35 years. His undergraduate degree is in Special Education and he retired from the Connecticut Department of Developmental Disabilities after 25 years as Director of Residential Services. He was accorded the distinction of Fellow of the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. He received his law degree from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 1988 and was a solo practitioner in West Hartford specializing in Trusts, Estates and Probate law. Deacon Dennis is a member of various local and national boards including Hartford Archdiocese Catholic Charities; American School for the Deaf; Catholic Health East; Mercy Housing and Shelter; and the William J. Ryan Scholarship Committee. He is the former Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Mercy Community Health and is also an Associate of the Sisters of Mercy.



Image: headshot of seated smiling woman with silver hair with plants in the background.

Lynn Johnson is a pastoral psychotherapist and former Director of Center for Serenity, which provided counseling and education with a spiritual base to people in the greater Hartford area from 1996-2016. She is currently devoted to doing all she can to salvage God's creation and serves on the Board of the Interreligious Eco Justice Network (IREJN). She is a Quaker who attends Immanuel Congregational Church, where she preached on "A Celebration of

Abilities: The Light within Us All.” She has been living with Multiple Sclerosis since 1988.



Image: headshot young woman in outdoor setting with short brown hair smiling at the camera.

Amy Langston is a recent graduate of Hartford Seminary with a Master of Arts in Religious Studies. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Religious and Ethical Studies from Meredith College, Raleigh, NC and completed a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Interreligious Studies at Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland. Amy is conducting ongoing research entitled *Autism Inclusion in Religious Environments* that has been presented at Hartford Seminary and the Parliament of World’s Religions, Toronto, Ontario. At the age of 10, Amy was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, which has now become included in Autism spectrum Disorder (ASD). During her years in college, Amy became passionate about autism inclusion, combining her intimate understanding of autism with her expertise in other areas. Amy loves writing, editing and public speaking as a medium for communicating and creating change. Her primary goal in her work is to increase the quality of life and well-being of autistic people and their families.



Image: headshot of a smiling woman with red hair wearing a black robe.

Candace Low has been an advocate for disability rights for forty-five years and has been a trainer on disability and independent living related issues and legislation for over forty years. She has

served as a member of the Board of Directors for the National Council on Independent Living. Candace is Past President of the Americans with Disabilities Act Coalition of Connecticut (ADACC) and serves on a variety of committees and task forces to initiate systems change and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. She is a member of the CT UCC Disability Ministries team.

She received recognition from the City of Hartford for her work on disability issues and received the Spirit of the ADA award from the ADA Coalition and was recognized as a pioneer for her work on the Americans with Disabilities Act local, state and national levels. She has published numerous articles relating to disability issues, the philosophy of independent living, the Americans with Disabilities Act, traumatic brain injury and faith and disability issues. Candace has a B.A. in advertising design and a Master of Education degree from the University of Central Oklahoma and graduated from Hartford Seminary in May 2018 after studying worship and spirituality. Her focus is helping faith communities include the disability community as principal of Candace Low Consulting Services.

For her ministry, Candace has developed several training programs including a series entitled “Building A Longer Table” that explores various issues as ableism, communication, disability theology, the theology of accessibility, the elements of accessibility and inclusion and building communities of belonging. Sermon titles include “Do You See Me?”, “Invite to Transform”, “A Sense of God-Extraordinary Possibility in Vulnerable Ordinarity (Our Disabled God)”, “The Resurrection of Jane Doe” and “In Jesus Name, Amen (protest as prayer).”



Image: smiling woman with glasses wearing headset and floral shirt.

Cathy Ludlum’s work focuses on the inclusion of disabled people in all aspects of community life. She has had a lifetime of personal experience with disability; and has spent over 30 years writing,

speaking, and facilitating meetings about disability and community-related topics. Cathy has advocated for physical and attitudinal accessibility in her local congregation and in the Jewish community at large. She has written articles, position papers, web content, and several books. Her most recent book is *One Candle Power; Seven Principles That Enhance the Lives of People with Disabilities and Their Communities*. Cathy has been hiring all her own personal assistants since 1988 and living in a housing cooperative in Manchester, Connecticut since 1992.



Image: smiling woman wearing white and gray floral hijab.

Aida Mansoor is the Interim Coordinator of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program and an admissions recruiter at Hartford Seminary. She obtained her Joint Honors B.S degree in Biochemistry/Physiology at King's College, University of London, and has a Master's Degree in Community Health. Aida also earned an Islamic Chaplaincy Graduate Certificate and a Master's Degree in Religious Studies with a focus on Christian-Muslim Relations from Hartford Seminary. She is a board member of the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding, the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut, Hartford Hospital & St. Francis Hospital Pastoral Service Committee, and the Islamic Association of Greater Hartford. She was awarded the Human Relations Award from the National Conference for Community and Justice in 2011.



Image: woman with short blonde hair is standing wearing a black robe and colorful stole with the words Seek Justice, Love Kindness.

Erica Thompson was born and raised in rural Minnesota, moved to the East Coast with her family as an adolescent, and returned to Minnesota for college earning her undergraduate degree in Social Work from Concordia College - Moorhead, Minnesota in 1997. In the summer of 1997, Erica accepted a position with the US Peace Corps in Guayaquil, Ecuador where she lived and worked for three years. Upon return to the United States in the fall of 2000, Erica started seminary at Princeton Theological Seminary - Princeton, NJ. She graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in the spring of 2003 and was called to be the Associate Minister at Old South Union Church in Weymouth, MA in January 2004.

Erica is a daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother. Brian and Erica were married on January 14, 2007, in Ecuador, overlooking the Pacific Ocean and are the parents of two wonderful little girls. Erica is a traveler and an avid reader. She has a love good food and wine, speaking Spanish, going to the beach, hip-hop, folk, and country music, and wearing flip-flops and jeans. Erica loves peace, and justice, and righteousness. She loves diversity and the celebration of our common humanity!

The chorus of one of her favorite song says, "All it takes is a point of light, a ray of hope in the darkest night. If you see what's wrong and you try to make it right, you become a point of light." Erica believes that as human beings, as Christians, we are called to be those points of light for each other - transmitting the love of God from one to another; sometimes it is simply a matter of igniting a spark and then fanning the flames. With that in mind, it is her sincere hope that through her preaching, teaching, presence, and outreach at AHCC, she can help to ignite the flames in others so that all might go out into the world illuminating the way of hope in the darkest night. This year, Erica accepted the call to become the first female senior minister of the 150-year-old Asylum Hill Congregational Church.