

Total Inclusion! Steering Committee



Jeff Bluhm is originally from Michigan, and started his professional career with Marriott Hotels working in downtown Chicago and at the Lincolnshire Resort. He has also worked in New Orleans, Long Island New York, and Milwaukee. In 1988 he accepted a position as Director of a Lutheran Camp and Conference Center in Michigan, where he served for 9 years. In 1997 he took over as the Executive Director of Lutherdale, a year-round camp and conference center serving over 10,000 people annually located on Lauderdale Lakes, Elkhorn WI.

Over the last 20 years, Jeff has completed two capital campaigns to improve and build new facilities and is currently running his third capital campaign to build a new conference center.



Anthony Briggs currently serves as Executive Director of Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center, an Episcopal-Lutheran Outdoor Ministry in New Jersey. He is originally from NC and has worked professionally in Youth and Outdoor Ministries for over 30 years. Before coming to NJ, he served as Executive Director of Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center in Western New York and as Executive Director of Lutheran Retreats, Camps and Conferences of Southern California.

Anthony has a passion for equipping others to grow and to lead. His experience recruiting, training, and mentoring young adult leaders over the years has given him a few gray hairs and a deep understanding of leadership development.

In each ministry setting, Anthony has been called upon to lead processes of difficult and drastic change. After both great successes and painful failures, he feels grateful to have emerged in an upright position. Anthony loves traveling, reading, learning about history, working with people of all ages, and making pottery.



Penny Christensen is the Executive Director of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in Ohio (LOMO). LOMO owns and operates Camp Luther in northeast Ohio on the shores of Lake Erie and Lutheran Memorial Camp north of Columbus. They also bring outreach day camps to congregations. Originally from North Dakota, Penny lives in central Ohio and has been working in outdoor ministries for more than 30 years.



LaShonda Curry serves as a lead minister at Shekinah Chapel Lutheran Church in Riverdale, IL. She is married to Bishop Yehiel Curry who was elected on June 8, 2019, to serve a six-year term as Bishop of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Together, they have three beautiful daughters: Shemiah, Ashirah, and Shekinah (that's right, they named their child after the ministry).

LaShonda has been a member of Shekinah Chapel since 1997, where she has served as ministerial lead in various capacities including, Women's Ministry, Christian Education and currently Evangelism-Outreach. As a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Lashonda desires to be a vessel for transformation within the ministries she has been called to serve and lead.

LaShonda serves as President for the African Descent Lutheran Association-Metro Chicago Chapter, where she collaborates with congregations of African descent to serve as both voice and presence within the ELCA. Since 2007, she has served as Co-Director of Safe In My Sisters' Arms (SIMSA), a mentoring program for female youth ages 8-18 with chapters in Chicago, Rockford, Dekalb, Indianapolis, and Columbus, Ohio. She also serves as Board Chair for Rescue, Release, Restore Inc., an organization that believes in transforming and empowering youth through leadership training, artistic expression and mentorship.

Lashonda received a Bachelor of Arts from Lewis University and a Master of Education from National Louis University. She has served the students and administrators of Chicago Public Schools for 15 years and is currently working to expand her expertise in educational consulting and professional development. She earnestly believes that through Christ, we can do all things.



Reverend Lisa E. Heffernan graduated from [Wartburg Theological Seminary](#) in Dubuque, Iowa in May of 2013. Lisa is 33 years old, grew up in the Faulkton, SD area, and attended [Concordia College](#) in Moorhead, MN. Presently, she serves as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Chamberlain, SD. She is a part of ELCA Disability Ministries, and has written for Women of the ELCA.

When she has a bit of free time, Lisa loves to write, crochet, travel, and swim. She will also confess to having a soft spot in her heart for all things Irish, and the Lord of the Rings books and films. Having been born with spina bifida, Lisa uses a wheelchair to get around independently.

Her mother is a special education teacher in South Dakota, and her brother works with persons with disabilities as a case worker and direct care service person in MN. Lisa's father was an English teacher. He died in 2004 when she was 17, as a result of complications related to MS.



Don Johnson serves as the executive director of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM). He has been serving in this capacity since 2015, and he is the first full time executive director of the 90 outdoor ministry organization (120 sites) that are affiliated with the ELCA.

A lifelong Lutheran, Don is rostered in the ELCA as a deacon.

Don graduated from Worcester (MA) Polytechnic Institute (WPI) with a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering. He worked in that field for a short while after graduating from college. In 1970 he became camp director and then executive director at Camp Calumet Lutheran, the camp and now also conference center of the New England Synod. During his leadership tenure, Calumet grew and thrived in many ways. In 2005, Don became the director of Project Connect, an initiative of the Eastern Cluster of ELCA seminaries (LTSP in Philadelphia, LTSG in Gettysburg, and LTSS, Southern), where he served for eight years. Then, for two years, he served as vice-president for student advancement at LTSP before moving into his current position with LOM.

Don and his wife, Janet, have been married for 50 years. They have two adult daughters and five grandchildren.



Ross Murray is the Senior Director of Education & Training at [The GLAAD Media Institute](#), which provides activist, spokesperson, and media engagement training and education for LGBTQ and allied community members and organizations desiring to deepen their media impact.

Ross is also a founder and director of [The Naming Project](#), a faith-based camp for LGBTQ youth and their allies. The Naming Project has also been the subject of much media, including the award-winning film *Camp Out*, as well as the controversial episode "Pray the Gay Away?" of *Our America with Lisa Ling*.

Ross has secured national media interest in stories that bring examples of LGBTQ equality across diverse communities in America. He specializes in relationship between religion and LGBTQ people. He has written and appeared on numerous media outlets, including CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, The Washington Post, Huffington Post, and Religion News Service. In 2014, he was named one of Mashable's "[10 LGBT-Rights Activists to Follow on Twitter](#)."

Ross is a consecrated Deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with a specific calling to advocate for LGBTQ people and to bridge the LGBTQ and faith communities.



Reverend Darryl Thompson Powell is the Program Associate for African Descent Ministries at the ELCA. Darryl received his undergraduate degree from Wittenberg University, his MDiv from Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, and was ordained in 1996. He is President of the LOM Board of Directors, serves as Board Liaison to the Diversity Committee, and is a member of LOM's Strategic Planning Task Force.

Darryl lives in the Chicago area with his wife, Carla Thompson Powell, who is also an ELCA pastor, with whom he has three young adult children.



Reverend Timothy L. Taylor was born and raised in Newark N.J. and is one of ten children.

Tim attended St. Benedict's Prep. School in Newark and then Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA. where he graduated with a BA degree in religion. During summers he worked at the Beisler Camping and Retreat Center in New Jersey as a camp counselor where he met his wife, Sharon. They were married in June of 1985. Sharon and Tim have developed and lead workshops about diversity and inclusivity as well as workshops on conflict resolution.

Tim attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia where he graduated with an MDiv. and has served several churches in a variety of settings that ranged from urban to rural settings. Tim has been ordained for 27 years in the ELCA. Tim served as the director of Beisler Camping and Retreat Center (Now Crossroads), and has served in youth ministry in the ELCA for many years. He has continued to work with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries as a consultant and currently serves as the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Raleigh, NC.



Jessica Nipp Hacker, an ELCA deacon and Certified Fund Raising Executive, serves as Director of Stewardship Strategy and Operations. Jessica grew up in Minnesota and studied theology and bible at Wartburg College, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and the University of Munich. Before she came to the ELCA churchwide organization, she served as managing director of the ELCA Wittenberg Center in Germany, and as a director for advancement at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. At churchwide, she has coordinated the ELCA Malaria Campaign, built

a comprehensive donor stewardship program, worked with the executive on special projects, and now leads the Stewardship Strategy and Operations team. Her work combines her love of the church with her passions for spreading God's inclusive love, walking alongside our global companions, building up leaders for the ELCA and the world, and stewarding our ELCA donors as they generously share the gifts God has given them. Jessica lives in Villa Park with her husband Scott and five-year-old son, Simon. She is an active member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Lombard.



Kelly Pierce is the Scholarship Operations Manager for the team, working primarily with ELCA Fund for Leaders. Kelly grew up in the Southwest Chicago suburbs and studied Communications at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her professional background has helped her develop her skills in analysis, process efficiency and logistics. Kelly came to the ELCA in 2018 from the North Suburban YMCA, where she served as Development and Events Operations Director, working closely with the CEO, executive board, high level donors and community leaders to implement successful campaigns and fundraising events. Kelly manages many internal and external relationships for Fund for Leaders, works on donor events and manages the scholarship application and distribution processes through ELCA GrantMaker. She will also be working to develop new granting processes in conjunction with large foundation grants.

Kelly lives on the North Shore of Chicago with her 18-year-old son Aiden and 14-year-old daughter Frances. She is a member at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Glenview, IL.



Nicole VanderDoes is the part-time program coordinator for Total Inclusion! Originally from Columbus, Nicole has a BA in theater from Ohio University and a JD from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. A former Ohio trial lawyer, Nicole more recently worked for the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the American Judicial System where she planned events, provided communications training, and created educational resources. She is an active member of Luther Memorial Church of Chicago and has facilitated small groups at various churches since 2007.

Nicole lives near the ELCA with her fiancé, Tim Klein, to whom she will be married at the end of May. In addition to church activities, Nicole enjoys avant garde jazz, art museums, and is an avid Cleveland Indians fan, as well as rooting for Ohio State men's basketball and football, and the Chicago Blackhawks.