



LIVING WATERS INC

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT 2025

Bridging The Gap In Community Connections  
To Support Children and Families

**Thursday, June 5, 2025**

**9:00AM - 3:00PM**

**HYBRID EVENT**

# LIVING WATERS INC

*Sharing a Legacy of Caring Partnerships with Community Organizations,  
Health Care, and Faith-Based Organizations.*

Living Waters Inc is a non-profit organization committed to the growth and development of our most important asset,  
"the people."

Living Waters Inc works to bring communities together in collaboration and partnership with government, public and private sectors.

Living Waters Inc empowers communities to establish and implement new goals.



*Empowerment Is The Key To Success*



Living Waters Inc

# PROGRAM

|   |  |
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| Welcome   | Tonya Rivens   |
| Invocation  | Brent Jones  |
| Opening Remarks   | Chaplain Harry Burns MA, BCC   |
| Domestic Violence And<br>Mental Health In North Carolina                                      | Lisa McLaughlin  |
| A Child Witness Of Domestic Violence  | Pamela Blount  |
| Community Connections For Children and<br>Families A Lived- Experience Discussion             | Facilitator: Irish Jean Benton<br>Rev. Dr. Claude Ellis Forehand II<br>Yasin Holland<br>Jason Accashian<br>Anabel Paniagua-Doyle<br>Rev. Beverly Burns<br>Keldrick Wilson              |
| <b>BREAK</b>  |  |
| Keynote Address   | Dr. Charles Eugene Thompson  |
| Breakout Session 1  | Presenters:<br>Rev. Dr. Sandra H. Gripper, D.Min.<br>Jason Accashian<br>Sydney Giesey, MSW, LCSW-A<br>Pamela Blount<br>Jennifer M. Thomas, PhD   |
| <b>LUNCH</b>  |  |
| Breakout Session 2  | Presenters:<br>Rev. Dr. Sandra H. Gripper, D.Min.<br>Jason Accashian<br>Sydney Giesey, MSW, LCSW-A<br>Pamela Blount<br>Jennifer M. Thomas, PhD   |
| Bridging The Gap In Community And<br>Agency Collaboration To Support<br>Children And Families | Moderator: Tonya Rivens<br>Crystal Gatewood<br>Sa'idah A. Sudan, DVS, CLC, DVIF<br>Rev. LeDayne McLeese Polaski<br>Spencer B. Merriweather III<br>Mark Jerrell<br>Hon. Tyyawdi M Hands |
| Audience Q & A  | Tonya Rivens   |
| Call To Action  | Joseph Graham Jr.  |
| Closing Remarks and Adjourn   | Tonya Rivens   |

## Breakout Sessions:

Support Systems Within Faith-Based Communities - Rev. Dr. Sandra H. Gripper, D.Min.

The Impact of Domestic Violence on Male Mental Health - Jason Accashian

Collaboration Between Faith-Based Communities and Domestic Violence/Mental Health Agencies - Sydney Giesey, MSW, LCSW-A

Mental Health of Children and Teens Witnessing Domestic Violence - Pamela Blount

Resources To Support The Mental Health of Teens And Young Adults Impacted By Domestic Violence - Jennifer M. Thomas, PhD

# SPEAKERS AND PRESENTERS



**Tonya Rivens**

**Host/Moderator**

Tonya Rivens is an award-winning Journalist with more than 30 years in radio, ten years in television and is a feature writer for a monthly publication. Tonya received the 2023 National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Angelo B. Henderson Community Service Award, 2021 & 2022 Chan Zuckerberg Grant (NABJ) and is a North Carolina Equity Fellow. She has a BA (Bachelor of Arts) in Journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and MS (Master of Science) Communications, specializing in Journalism Innovation, at Syracuse University.



**Dr. Charles Eugene Thompson**

**Keynote Speaker**

Dr. Charles Eugene Thompson is a native of Queens, New York. He is also a second-generation pastor. Dr. Thompson grew up doing whatever the church needed and found his way into singing, ushering, choir directing, and drumming. His parents taught him to have a high commitment to faith and unconditional love for others. Dr. Thompson has served in ministry for thirty years, always sensing God's call upon his life. He directs and educates Chaplains at Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center and Levine Children's Hospital in Charlotte, North Carolina in his role as the Assistant Director of Spiritual Care and Education.



### Chaplain Harry Burns, MA, BCC

Chaplain Burns, is a Chaplain at Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center in Charlotte, N.C. He has also served as a Community Engagement Specialist with the Community Engagement Department. He has been an ordained pastor in the AME Church for over thirty-six years. Chaplain Burns was the first African American Minister appointed at the Citadel, The Military School of the South in 1987. He holds a BA Degree in Business Management from Shaw University in Raleigh.



### Irish Jean Benton

Irish is the founder of H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Evolve) Coaching and Counseling Services. She is the mother of three children and grandmother of three grandchildren. Irish is of the Christian Faith and believes that without this rearing as a child, she might not be here today as an adult to share her stories. Irish extended her education by attending Rowan Cabarrus Community College, Brookstone Business College, Grace Biblical Institute and Seminary where she obtained a certification in Christian Counseling.



### Mark Jerrell

Mark Jerrell serves as chair of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners and represents District 4, which comprises the eastern part of Mecklenburg County. He was first elected as commissioner in 2018. Mark is actively engaged in the community and is focused on efforts to support social justice, equity and improving the lives of all people in Mecklenburg County. He currently serves on the Inter-Governmental Relations Committee (Chair), Economic Development, Environmental Stewardship and Health and Human Services committees.



### Pamela Blount

Pamela Blount is a native of Peachland, NC in Anson County. She is a certified speaker & advocate with the Mecklenburg County Speakers Bureau in Charlotte, NC. Pamela currently serves as Vice President of the Domestic Violence Advocacy Council there as well. For the past 20 years, she has been relentless in her fight against domestic violence, and other causes in which she partners with organizations fighting to end DV, and organizations such as Paisley Puppet Adventures that teaches STEM lessons to children by means of puppetry.





### **Rev. Dr. Claude Ellis Forehand II**

Dr. Forehand is a native of Lakewood N.J. He completed his undergraduate studies in Business Administration and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1995 from Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte N.C. Later, he furthered his education in the formal study of professional ministry and in 2002 received his Master of Divinity (M.Div.) and in 2009 his Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) both from Hood Theological Seminary Salisbury, NC. In addition to serving his country honorably for nine (9) years in the United States Marine Corps., Dr. Forehand has developed his career in ministry serving as a Christian educator, pastor, and church consultant for over 17 years.



### **Yasin Holland**

Yasin Holland is a Victim Advocate at Safe Alliance. He works in Lake Norman where he provides support, education, empowerment, and resources to survivors of Sexual Violence, Domestic Violence, & Human Trafficking. Before working for Safe Alliance, Yasin worked as a victim advocate and Prevention Educator for a Rape Crisis Center in Wilmington, NC for 6 years. Yasin graduated from University of North Carolina Pembroke with a Bachelor's in Social Work.



### **Rev. LeDayne McLeese Polaski**

Rev. LeDayne McLeese Polaski has been the Executive Director of MeckMIN (Mecklenburg's Metropolitan Interfaith Network) since October 2019. She previously served on the staff of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America ~ Bautistas por la Paz for 21 years, ending as Executive Director, and she began her career as the Minister of Youth at Myers Park Baptist Church. LeDayne loves "being outside and moving". She's an avid reader, a crossword enthusiast, a podcast addict and an obsessive fan of Jeopardy.



### **Rev. Beverly Burns**

Rev. Beverly Burns is a native of New Bern, N.C. Rev. Burns earned an Associate degree in Early Childhood Education from Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C. She became the proud owner of a five star in home childcare facility in Charlotte. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Pastoral Ministry from Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. Her awards and honors include, member of the National Dean's List, member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Member of the National Technical Honor Society, a recipient of the Carol Gestwicki Scholarship, the Avenir Scholarship and a member the Psi Beta Honor Society.



### Keldrick Wilson

Keldrick Wilson is a Child Protective Services investigator for Catawba County Department of Social Services. He is also an employee at the Alexander Juvenile Detention Center and a Mentor and Facilitator with Empower Your Life Services. His professional goal is to continue to working with youth through the complexities of the juvenile justice system and helping them make positive changes in their lives. He holds a degree in Criminal Justice from Hampton University located in Hampton Virginia. He is a former Division 1 athlete.



### Joseph Graham Jr.

Joseph Graham Jr. is the Faith and Wellness Program Facilitator responsible for program coordination and development for faith and mental wellness, capacity building, training facilitation and advisory services at Living Waters Inc. The programs and activities include Behavioral Health Initiatives that provide Trauma and Mental Wellness events and training, Community Engagements, establishing and maintaining Community, Governmental, Academia partnerships and collaboratives.



### Jason Accashian

Jason Accashian is a father of 3 children and a domestic violence survivor. He was born in Richmond VA and raised by his mother and grandparents. Jason is currently a small business owner on ebay and he recently started a men's empowerment podcast. Jason wants to help men acknowledge their mental and emotional health by sharing his story. He also want to use his story to help create more resources for men in unhealthy relationships.



### Sydney Giesey, MSW, LCSW-A

Sydney Giesey, MSW, LCSW-A, is a Domestic Violence Counselor at Atrium Health's Domestic Violence Healthcare Project (DVHP), with nearly a decade of experience in supporting survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and mental health disorders.



### Crystal Gatewood

Crystal Gatewood is a licensed clinician and Domestic Violence Liaison at Mecklenburg County's Community Support Services. She provides Domestic Violence counseling services to adult survivors and has been doing so for the past 7 years. Prior to Domestic Violence work, Crystal provided substance abuse counseling at an outpatient agency. She holds current licensure as a LCMHC and LCAS. Crystal earned a Master of Arts degree in clinical mental health counseling from UNC-Charlotte, and a Bachelor's degree in human development and family studies from UNC-Greensboro.



### Jennifer M. Thomas, PhD

Dr. Jennifer Thomas serves as the Chief Psychologist for Assessment Services at Teen Health Connection in Charlotte, NC. Teen Health Connection is a leading provider of integrated medical and behavioral health care, prevention and education services for adolescents and young adults ages 11 through 25. The Assessment Services team at Teen Health Connection provides assessments for youth involved with the child welfare system in Mecklenburg County, NC, (including the Independent Psychological Assessment or IPA) and behavioral health triage services for adolescents throughout the community.



### Anabel Paniagua-Doyle

Anabel Paniagua-Doyle is a dedicated advocate for underserved communities, with extensive experience in human services, finance, and education. Most recently, she served as a Senior Regional Liaison for a non-profit insurance company, supporting eight counties surrounding the greater Mecklenburg area. Originally from El Salvador, Ms. Paniagua-Doyle grew up in Cambridge, MA, before relocating to North Carolina in 2007 after her marriage.



### Rev. Dr. Sandra H. Gripper, D.Min.

Rev. Dr. Sandra H. Gripper is was ordained in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and is currently a retired pastor after 33 years. She holds a Doctor of Ministry from Liberty University, a Master of Divinity from New Life Theological Seminary, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Johnson C. Smith University, and an undergraduate degree in Education from Central Piedmont Community College. Dr. Gripper is the Chief Executive Officer of Wheatfield Solutions, a HIV/AIDS Case Management Agency that assists individuals in gaining access to needed medical, social, education, and other services and Wheatfield Ministries Inc., focusing on Health Disparities and wellness in our community.





### **Brent W. Jones**

Brent W. Jones is Executive Director of Service & Outreach at StoneBridge Church Community in Charlotte, North Carolina. He received his BA in international relations from the University of California, Davis, and his MDiv from Western Theological Seminary in San Jose, California. Prior to 2001, he spent a number of years in software sales in California's Silicon Valley. Following a call to ministry in 2001, he has served in various ministerial capacities in the San Francisco Bay Area and Charlotte.



### **Spencer B. Merriweather III**

Spencer Merriweather is District Attorney for Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, after having been appointed in 2017 by N.C. Governor Roy Cooper and elected to full terms in 2018 and 2022. DA Merriweather previously served as an Assistant District Attorney for over a decade, prosecuting cases ranging from sexual assault and domestic violence crimes to drug trafficking and homicides. Since taking office, Merriweather has emphasized victim-centered responses to domestic, sexual and child violence, expanded access to restorative justice programs, and served as a critical champion for the development of The Umbrella Center, his county's Family Justice Center, which is slated to open in 2026.



### **Lisa McLaughlin**

With nearly 20 years of dedicated experience in the human services field, Lisa McLaughlin has passionately worked to support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. While in direct services, she focused on providing trauma informed care, advocacy, and resources to empower survivors on their journey to healing. With experience in non-profit, as well as the private sector, Lisa brings to her current role as Eastern Region Director with Council for Women and Youth Involvement for the state of North Carolina Department of Administration, a unique, firsthand, and an insightful perspective when working with the 26 programs and 35 counties in her region.



### **Sa'idah A. Sudan, DVS, CLC, DVIF**

Sa'idah Sudan is a dedicated Domestic Violence Specialist with 25 years of experience in advocacy, intervention, and rehabilitation. She has spent over two decades providing critical support to survivors while working to address the root causes of domestic violence through education and accountability programs. As a Co-Facilitator of the Domestic Violence Intervention Program for Men at Baitul Hemayah, Inc., Sa'idah plays a pivotal role in guiding participants toward personal accountability, behavioral change, and the development of healthier relationship dynamics.



## Honorable Tyyawdi Hands

The Honorable Tyyawdi Hands known as Judge Ty Hands is a devoted mother, committed community servant and race equity change agent. Born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, she made history as the first in her family to go to college. She graduated magna cum laude from Winston-Salem State University and received her Juris Doctor from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law. Judge Hands began her legal career clerking on the NC and Nevada Supreme Courts. She thereafter practiced complex commercial litigation for a large law firm in Charlotte; then stepped out on faith and built a thriving law firm from the ground up.

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## Domestic Violence And Mental Health Summit 2025

### SPONSORS



### EXHIBITORS



### SUPPORTERS

*Wheat Field Ministry, Inc.*



*"Where Hands and Hearts are One"*



The Planning Team and the Board of Directors of Living Waters Inc expresses our sincere appreciation for helping to make the Domestic Violence And Mental Health Summit 2025 a success.

Thank you for partnering with us to make a positive, long-term impact in the lives of our community as we continue to promote awareness, dialogue, and partnership concerning disparities in Mental Wellness.

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