

Kara M. Whittaker, LMSW

Kara_Whittaker1@baylor.edu | www.karawhittaker.com

EDUCATION

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| Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work | <i>Expected 2028</i> |
| Baylor University <i>Diana R. Garland School of Social Work</i> | |
| Master's in Social Work Joint BA/MA Program | 2013 |
| The University of Chicago <i>Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, & Practice</i> Clinical Concentration Program of Study: Family Support | |
| Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Religious Studies | 2012 |
| The University of Chicago <i>Honors Thesis: "A Theology of Child-Saving: The Christocentric Liberalism of Charles Loring Brace."</i> | |

PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE

Texas Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) | License Number 114096

FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

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| Doctoral Research Fellow Center for Church & Community Impact (C3I) | 2025 – Present |
| <i>Baylor University Diana R. Garland School of Social Work</i> | |
| Interfaith America Emerging Leaders Network Grant \$1,500 | 2026 |
| <i>Awarded to pursue professional development in interfaith leadership.</i> | |
| Baptist Scholars International Roundtable (BSIR) 2027 Cohort | 2026 |
| <i>Paper selected for the funded 2027 cohort convening in Oxford, England.</i> | |
| Veritas Forum Graduate Scholar Social Sciences Cohort | 2026 |
| <i>One of 90 PhD students selected for the funded 2026 Veritas Forum Conference at the University of Notre Dame.</i> | |
| Association for Women in Science (AWIS) Caregiver Advancement Scholarship \$575 | 2026 |
| Region V Membership Award American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) <i>Awarded in recognition of 2026 conference submissions.</i> | 2026 |
| Graduate Student Travel Award \$2,000 cumulative | 2025, 2026 |
| <i>Baylor University Diana R. Garland School of Social Work</i> | |
| Full Scholarship Funding for up to five years | 2025 |
| <i>Baylor University Diana R. Garland School of Social Work</i> | |
| Brinks Fellowship in Family Support & Early Childhood Mental Health \$3,000 | 2013 |
| <i>The University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, & Practice</i> | |
| Jan Baum Memorial Scholarship | 2013 |
| <i>The University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, & Practice</i> | |
| Departmental Honors in Religious Studies <i>The University of Chicago</i> | 2012 |

RESEARCH & GRANT EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant | Baylor Collaborative on Faith & Disability *Jan. 2026 – Present*

Assisting across different projects with qualitative data analysis, transcription, coding, translating findings, resource development, literature reviews, proofreading and editing, participant recruitment and communication, and survey management.

Current projects include:

- **Bridges to Belonging: Accessible Ministry with Youth and Young Adults.** PIs: Dr. Angela Reed, Dr. Erik Carter, Dr. Gaynor Yancey.
- **The National Pastors' Survey.** PIs: Dr. Devan Stahl, Dr. Jason Le Shana.
- **Accessible Worship for All God's Children.** PI: Dr. Erik Carter, Co-PI: Dr. Jason Le Shana.

Co-Investigator. From Presence to Participation: Congregational Tools for Disability Inclusion. Funded by Baylor University's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work Ph.D. Student Research Stipend. **(\$5,000)**. PI: Dr. Gaynor Yancey. *Aug. 2025 – Present*

Grant Writer & Project Director. Room on Our Pew: Making Space for All Children in Worship. Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. A Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative. **(\$1,250,000)**. With Engaging Disability. *Jan. 2024 – Aug. 2025*

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Whittaker, K. (2006). Do beliefs matter? How disability theology can inform the belief-practice gap. *Pastoral Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-026-01328-5>

Manuscripts in Preparation

Whittaker, K., & Yancey, G. (2026). Mapping the moral model: A critical review of religious constructions of disability in congregational contexts. [Manuscript currently in preparation].

Whittaker, K. (2026). If you confess with your mouth: The moral model revisited through the lens of nonspeaking autism. [Manuscript currently in preparation].

PRESENTATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations

Whittaker, K. (Forthcoming, 2027, August). A seat at the table: Presence, participation, and power in Baptist social engagement with disability [Paper]. Baptist Scholars International Roundtable, Oxford, England.

Whittaker, K. (Forthcoming, 2026, October 22-25). Presuming competence with nonspeakers: Rethinking communication, agency, and inclusion in social work practice [Paper]. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

- Whittaker, K., & McMullen, E.** (Forthcoming, 2026, October 22-25). From models to meaning in social work education: Integrating disability, religion/spirituality, and resilience [Workshop]. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.
- Whittaker, K.** (Forthcoming, 2026, October 30-November 1). Let the little children come: Adult and child perspectives on disability and participation in congregational worship [Paper]. Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the Religious Research Association, Denver, CO.
- Whittaker, K.** (Forthcoming, 2026, November 21-24). Preparing for the disabled future: Why the Church needs nonspeakers now more than ever [Paper]. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Denver, CO.
- Whittaker, K.** (Forthcoming, 2026, June 22). From presence to participation: A toolkit for congregational support of non and minimally speaking autistic individuals [Poster]. American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Whittaker, K.** (Forthcoming, 2026, June 22). Pursuing evidence-based inclusion: A reasoned action approach to beliefs, attitudes, and congregational practices toward IDD [Poster]. American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Whittaker, K.** (Forthcoming, 2026, June 17). If you confess with your mouth: The moral model revisited through the lens of nonspeaking autism [Paper]. Institute on Theology and Disability, University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, MN.
- Whittaker, K.** (2026, April 2). Mapping the moral model: Religious conceptualizations of disability in congregational contexts [Paper]. Southwestern Social Science Association Annual Convention, Nashville, TN.
- Whittaker, K.** (2025, November 14). Beyond words: Implications of presuming competence for Christians in social work [Workshop]. The North American Association of Christians in Social Work Annual Convention, Norfolk, VA.
- Whittaker, K.** (2025, November 6). Critique, caution, and potential: The moral model of disability and nonspeaking autism [Paper]. Faith on the Margins: Engaging with Nonspeaking and Black Autistic Christians (Virtual). University of Aberdeen Centre for Autism and Theology.

Invited Talks

- Whittaker, K.** (Forthcoming, 2026, May 31). Disability and the gospel. Invited address for "Commissioning Sunday," Longview Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Longview, TX.
- Whittaker, K.** (2026, April 15). Brick by brick: Disability and the body of Christ. Invited chapel address, LeTourneau University, Longview, TX.
- Whittaker, K.** (2026, February 20). Accessible tools for spiritual formation: Using visuals to support belonging and participation. Invited breakout session speaker, Bridges to Belonging Cohort Gathering, Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

Whittaker, K. (2025, April 6). Is there room on our pew? Invited disability ministry presentation and guided discussion for congregants, Pine Tree Church of Christ, Longview, TX.

Whittaker, K. (2024, October 11). Is there room on your pew?": Disability and the church. Invited chapel address, School of Theology and Vocation, LeTourneau University.

Whittaker, K. (2024, September 23). Autism panel. Invited guest speaker in Professor Jodie Hillburn's undergraduate course, *Children with Exceptionalities*, LeTourneau University.

Whittaker, K. (2017, May 24). TpT Teacher Talks: Visuals for success. Invited keynote speaker, Live webinar, Boston, MA. (1,145 registrants).

Other Workshops and Presentations

Whittaker, K. (2025, April 30). Does this look okay?: Leveling up your disability ministry through graphic design. Disability and the Church Conference, Washington, D.C.

Whittaker, T., & **Whittaker, K.**, (2025, April 30). Uncovering the hidden histories of disability and the church. Disability and the Church Conference, Washington, D.C.

Whittaker, K. (2025, April 29). Does he understand?: How presuming competence impacts disability ministry. Disability and the Church Conference, Washington, D.C.

Whittaker, K. (2020, July 8). Accessibility: Good for students, teachers, and you! Presentation at TpT Forward National Conference (Virtual).

OTHER MEDIA

Interviews

Gillmore, M. (2025, April 23). Welcoming people with disabilities into church life and service. *byFaith Magazine*. <https://byfaithonline.com/welcoming-people-with-disabilities-into-church-life-and-service/>

The University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice (2013). Kara Whittaker (Fox), AB '12, AM '13: Alumni Success Story. <https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/alumni/success-stories/kara-whittaker-fox>

RECENT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Teaching Differently | Longview, TX July 2014 – Present
Teaching Differently is a digital publishing company specializing in academic, social-emotional, and spiritual resources for children with disabilities.

Founder and Director | Founded and currently lead a digital publishing company focused on accessible, disability-affirming educational and spiritual resources; developed and distributed over 100,000 digital downloads for use in classrooms, homes, and ministry contexts supporting children with disabilities.

Engaging Disability | Longview, TX (Remote) June 2021 – Aug. 2025
Engaging Disability is a national non-profit that equips churches to include people with disabilities and their families.

Director of Strategic Initiatives (Oct. 2024 – Aug. 2025) | In this role I oversaw the organization’s grant strategy – researching new opportunities, crafting proposals that aligned with ministry priorities, and supporting the launch of new grant-funded initiatives.

Resource Development Coordinator (June 2021 – Sept. 2024) | In this role I created adapted spiritual formation resources for children and adults with disabilities and consulted with individuals and churches on disability-inclusive practices.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Cambridge Public Schools | Cambridge, MA Aug. 2016 – July 2018
 District Behavior Specialist | Office of Student Services (Aug. 2017 – July 2018)
 Autism Teacher | Fletcher-Maynard Academy (Aug. 2016 – July 2017)

Boston Public Schools | Boston, MA Aug. 2014 – July 2016
 Lead Teacher (Substantially Separate Classroom) | UP Academy Dorchester Charter School

Chicago Public Schools | Chicago, IL Aug. 2013 – July 2014
 K-8 Special Education Teacher | John J. Pershing Elementary School (Aug. 2013 – July 2014)
 Chicago Teaching Fellow | Albert Sabin Elementary Magnet School (June – Aug. 2013)

PRACTICA & INTERNSHIPS

Hyde Park Neighborhood Club | Chicago, IL Sept. 2012 – June 2013
 Graduate Social Work Intern | Early Childhood Programs

West Gary Lighthouse College Preparatory Academy | Gary, IN Sept. 2011 – June 2012
 Graduate Social Work Intern | Student Support Services

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital | Chicago, IL June – Aug. 2011
 School Services Intern | The University of Chicago Summer Links Program

Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty | Chicago, IL June – Aug. 2010
 Student Intern | Faith Outreach

SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Interfaith America Emerging Leaders Network 2026 – Present

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training 2025
 Human Subjects Research | Social, Behavioral, & Education Research

Graduate Six-Course Sequence (24 credits) in Applied Behavior Analysis (Non-Degree) 2017
 Simmons University | Boston, MA
 *Courses: Introduction to Single Subject Research Design, Introduction to Behavior Analysis, Methods for Changing Behavior I & II, Legal & Ethical Issues, Behavioral Assessment

Alternative Certification Program in Special Education 2014
 Chicago Teaching Fellows | The New Teacher Project (TNTP) | Chicago, IL

**Formerly licensed to teach special education in Illinois (PreK-Age 21) and Massachusetts (K-8, 5-12); eligible for special education licensure in Texas.*

Orton-Gillingham 30-Hour Comprehensive Training for Language-Based Learning Disabilities 2014
The Institute for Multi-Sensory Education | Chicago, IL

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Baylor University | Diana R. Garland School of Social Work
PhD Student Member, Mentoring Subcommittee 2025 – Present
Student Representative, Danny and Lenn Prince Chair Search Committee 2025

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) | Proposal Reviewer for Annual Conference 2026

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Sparrow in the Pines | Longview, TX | Sparrow in the Pines is a nonprofit organization connecting East Texas families of children with disabilities to resources and community supports.
Board Member 2026 – Present

Longview Evangelical Presbyterian Church | Longview, TX
Member of Children’s Committee, preschool Sunday School teacher,
and nursery volunteer. 2021 – Present

Seven Hills Presbyterian Church | Somerville, MA
Created child-friendly missions’ video on the topic of disability ministry 2024
for the Kid Summer Adventure program.
Nursery volunteer and community group leader 2017 – 2021

Christ the Redeemer Church | Quincy, MA
Director of Children’s Ministry 2020 – 2021

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Academy of Religion (AAR), American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), Association for Women in Science (AWIS), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW), Religious Research Association (RRA), Southwestern Social Science Association (SSSA)