



**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
CONVOCATION 2026**

**Wednesday, January 14, 2026
4:00 p.m.**

Blackburn College Campus
Bothwell Auditorium

Blackburn COLLEGE

MLK JR. CONVOCATION

PRELUDE

Take My Hand, Precious Lord

Dr. Joseph Welch, Piano
arr. Beatrice A. Miller

PROCESSION

Larry K. Lee, President
Doug Downey, Mayor of Carlinville
Alia Stewart, Director of Student Engagement & DEIB Liaison
Marcella Cloud, Chaplain, Spiritual Life & DEIB Liaison
Phuong Duong, Data Audit Coordinator, Student Life Graduate Intern & DEIB Liaison
Alexis Brown, Director of Financial Aid & Staff Advisor of the Black Student Union
Dr. Margaret “Margie” Lawler, DEI Officer & Deputy Director of Personnel, IL Secretary of State

WELCOME

Alia Stewart

HISTORY OF THE MLK CONVOCATION

Phuong Duong

“WE SHALL OVERCOME”

by Charles Albert Tindley

Blackburn College Choir

DR. KING’S LEGACY

Larry K. Lee

PROCLAMATION

Doug Downey

INTRODUCTION OF KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Alexis Brown

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Margaret “Margie” Lawler

FACULTY & STAFF DIVERSITY AWARDS

Larry K. Lee

MLK LEADERSHIP AWARD

Larry K. Lee

CLOSING

Marcella Cloud

Please remain seated until stage guests have exited the stage

POSTLUDE

Troubled Waters

Dr. Joseph Welch, Piano
Margaret Bonds

ABOUT THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Dr. Margaret “Margie” Lawler earned her bachelor’s degree in law enforcement administration from Western Illinois University in 1993 and her Master’s degree in College Student Personnel Administration from the University of Central Missouri in 1995. In 2019, she completed her doctorate in Education with an emphasis in Community College Leadership at Ferris State University.

Dr. Lawler’s professional foundation is in Housing and Residential Life, where she served for more than 18 years. Throughout her career, she has developed extensive expertise in recruitment, hiring, staffing, diversity initiatives, and campus-wide programming. She credits her early work in student affairs for shaping her commitment to leading effective DEI spaces and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across organizations. Collaboration, relationship-building, and team development remain central to her leadership

approach. She has hosted large-scale programs, facilitated professional development training, and continues to mentor doctoral students and former staff.

In 2010, Dr. Lawler transitioned to corporate operations at Caterpillar, Inc., first serving as a Materials Specialist and later being promoted to User Technician at the Corporate Headquarters in Peoria, Illinois. During this time, she earned her Six Sigma Green Belt certification—an achievement she considers pivotal in strengthening her process-improvement and operational leadership skills.

Dr. Lawler returned to higher education in 2015 at Illinois Central College, where she served in two newly created full-time roles: Diverse Faculty Recruiter and Compliance Officer. She also taught freshman seminar courses as an adjunct faculty member, further supporting student success. In 2019, she joined the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as an EEO Investigator, conducting investigations involving discrimination, harassment, and other claims within the Office of Access and Equity.

Following a position elimination in 2021 due to national Title IX regulatory changes and the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Lawler embraced an opportunity to shape a new role at Blackburn College. As the institution’s inaugural Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Chief Diversity Officer; and Title IX Coordinator, she developed both the institution’s compliance infrastructure and its DEI training programs. She also served as advisor to the Black Student Union and as the Designated School Official for the international student program.

Dr. Lawler’s career is defined by her willingness to lead with purpose and to build foundational programs from the ground up. In May 2023, she accepted her current inaugural role as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and Deputy Director of Personnel for the Illinois Secretary of State, where she leads statewide DEI initiatives.

Dr. Lawler is a proud member of the Graduate Chapter of Epsilon Sigma - Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. in Springfield, IL - where she actively volunteers within her community, partners with community leaders and supports programs for the local youth.

The logo for Blackburn College features the word "Blackburn" in a large, bold, black serif font. Above the "burn" portion of "Blackburn", the word "COLLEGE" is written in a smaller, black, all-caps sans-serif font.

Blackburn COLLEGE

WHERE LEADERS RISE