



# TRANS FORMING CHURCHES

A practical guide for the inclusion of trans and gender non-conforming people in the Church



# Forward by Steve Chalke

**The Church is commissioned to be a community of radical inclusion – especially for those that society has pushed aside.**

However, when it comes to people who have an expression or understanding of gender identity that does not fit within historic paradigms, it is clear that we have too often failed in this God-given responsibility.

The vast majority of Christians seek to be healers of pain rather than contributors to it. But in this case, the cocktail of unknown medical and psychological language, misleading media caricatures, and the struggle of engaging with complex issues we deem to be beyond the boundaries our traditional theology leave us pastorally paralysed.

This guide does not pretend to have all the answers. But along with other resources available at **[openchurch.network/GenderConversation](https://openchurch.network/GenderConversation)** it gives the first steps to shaping a biblical and Christ-centred response along with a set of principles for our pastoral practise.

Thank you for endeavouring to be part of this crucial conversation.

**God bless you**

**Steve**



# Forward by Dr Christine Rose

**Fifteen years ago, I had never knowingly met a trans person and had no understanding of the barriers and obstacles that trans people can face in a church.**

Since then, I have met many trans people who have kindly shared their stories with me, gently corrected my false assumptions and prejudice, opened my eyes to some of the difficulties they experience and helped me along on my journey of understanding.

I have had the privilege of carrying out research with organisations such as the EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) and Press for Change, and delivering national conferences with organisations such as Stonewall, Ofsted, AoC (Association of Colleges), and Gires (Gender Identity Research and Education Society). I've provided training and support to schools, colleges and universities across the length and breadth of England to share best practice for the inclusion of trans staff and students.

I've come a long way. I'm still learning. I hope that this guide will help you on your journey of understanding and support your church to openly welcome, value and include trans and gender non-conforming people.

**Christine**  
**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Consultant**

# Contents

**1.** Introduction and purpose of this guide

**2.** What does it mean to be trans?

**3.** The lived experience

Drew, Peta, Rachel and M's story

**4.** Practical ways to ensure trans inclusion in churches:

Welcome team

Website / notice board / front of house literature

Loos

Language

Children's work

Pastoral support and privacy

Home groups

Church meetings and services

**5.** What does the Bible have to say about trans people?

**6.** Questions for churches / leaders to consider

**7.** Useful definitions (glossary)

# 1.

## Introduction and purpose of this guide

**People are unique, created in the image of God and worthy to be treated with dignity and respect.**

**This is a central tenant of the Christian faith. Christ-centred inclusion is radical and particularly focused on those often marginalised by society.**

But talking about this means nothing without finding concrete ways to make these beliefs real.

This is a practical guide to help raise awareness, encourage open, respectful and honest conversations and spur churches on to be salt and light in the inclusion of trans and gender non-conforming people.

# 2.

## What does it mean to be Trans?

This guide uses the term **'trans'** to describe a wide and diverse range of people including people whose gender identity or gender expression:

differs from their sex assigned at birth, and / or

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does not conform to typical cultural or societal gender expectations, and / or

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falls outside the traditional categories of 'male' or 'female'.

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There is no universal experience of being trans. The following pages provide a short explanation of different terms - you will find further information in the **'useful definitions'** section at the end of this guide.

# Gender status, gender identity, gender expression

People are assigned a **sex** at birth, based on a **gender binary – male or female**. The sex assigned at birth is normally on the basis of external genitalia, although it can also include sex chromosomes, sex hormones and internal reproductive structures. Their **gender status** is assumed from the sex assigned at birth.




For many people, their assumed gender status at birth more or less aligns with their **gender identity** (how they feel internally, their deeply held sense of their own gender) and their **gender expression** (how they express themselves externally, such as through what they wear, how they speak and how they act).

For example, a baby might be assigned a gender status of male based on the baby's external genitalia. The baby grows up knowing they are a boy and then a man. He is comfortable expressing himself as male. This can be represented diagrammatically:

Gender spectrum	Traditional category of Male		Traditional category of Female
Gender status assumed at birth			
Gender identity			
Gender expression			

However, for some, gender identity and expression do not readily align with the gender status assumed at birth.

A person might, for example, be given a gender status of female at birth but grow up identifying as male and seeking to express themselves as male.




Gender spectrum	Traditional category of Male		Traditional category of Female
Gender status assumed at birth			
Gender identity			
Gender expression			

As a result, they may decide to undergo **gender reassignment, transitioning** from female to male.

# Beyond the binary

Some people are gender non-binary – they do not identify with the traditional categories of male or female.

For example, someone may be assigned female status at birth but grow up considering themselves as neither male nor female.

Gender spectrum	Traditional category of Male		Traditional category of Female
Gender status assumed at birth			
Gender identity			
Gender expression			

Some people are gender fluid – their gender identity fluctuates.

Some people, for example, feel more male on some days and more female on others.

There is a wide, rich and complex spectrum of gender identity, therefore, that goes way beyond the simple and rigid binary concept of ‘male’ or ‘female’.

## Intersex

This is a term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or neither or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. They may have differences in sex development or variations in sex anatomy. However, they are still assigned a sex at birth, male or female, which they may or may not identify with as they develop. Intersex is a separate identity to trans but the barriers and discrimination that people experience are similar for both groups.

## How many people are Trans?

At present, there is no official estimate of the size of the Trans population. Research carried out in 2012<sup>1</sup> suggests that approximately

# 1% of the UK

population experiences some degree of gender variance. However, this is likely to be a significant underestimate.

<sup>1</sup> EHRC (2012) Technical note: measuring gender identity. Equality and Human Rights Commission, London.



# 3.

## The lived experience

### Drew's story

**'I spent the first 46 years of my life homeless. I don't mean homeless in a way you are accustomed to – I am talking about a kind of homeless born out of a disconnect between my internal spiritual self and my external physical self.'**



From the beginning of my life, aged 4 or 5, I attempted to communicate this disconnect to my parents. I insisted that I was a boy even though the doctor who had delivered me had assigned my sex as female. But my assigned sex did not match my true gender identity of male. I was a boy. I was adamant about that. So you can imagine that it was very difficult when I reached puberty pressured by family, friends, church and community to conform and dress and act like a female.

At that time, unlike now, there was little knowledge about gender identity and no available medical expertise to help me and my family understand the spectrum and complexity of gender identity. Now, we do understand.

So growing up in the absence of this knowledge and understanding, I felt homeless. It was if I, my spirit, had no place to reside. It took me 46 years to find

role models, educational materials and the medical expertise to help me understand that I could take healthy steps to integrating my body with my mind and spirit. I could transition from my shell of a self to my authentic, God-given self. I transitioned from female to male.

**And I can say, very clearly, that I have come home. I am home.'**

Drew is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church serving churches for 20 years. He is now a pastor in Alaska.

*The above text is abridged from a speech given, by Drew at a Conference in 2008.*

## Peta's story

**While I knew from a young age that being designated a 'girl' wasn't right in some way, I didn't have language to explain what was wrong. If a teacher asked for 'strong boys to move tables', I stood up – not through awkwardness but just because I knew gender labels didn't apply to me.**



I knew wearing the girls' uniform distressed me. Others knew I was different – I was 'the unisex kid'. But in the early 90s all I knew of transgender was the image of an unhappy, unbalanced loner, not an inquisitive, churchgoing student with good friends and good grades.

I sometimes say I was never in the closet because I couldn't find it – I wasn't good at pretending to be a girl, and mostly I gave up. Therefore my welcome in churches and Christian groups was variable, and I experienced harassment and exclusion (as for instance from communion), yet I persisted.

In 2006 I changed my name and began transitioning to male, and was far happier. The Anglican church where I worshipped was confused but supportive. If the wider denomination had been equally supportive I might have remained, but eventually I found my calling in the Metropolitan Community Church, and began training for ordained ministry.

Meanwhile, I found that although happier as a man, I still wasn't quite right – my journey hadn't ended. So now aged 40 I find myself somewhere betwixt and between, neither man nor woman and more content and at peace with myself than I have ever been.

Throughout, God has been my Rock indeed – I've doubted the love of human beings, but never the love of Jesus. Human opposition hasn't quenched my hope or my vocation, (or my enthusiasm for Biblical studies). My hope is that, as we offer more welcome, role-models and understanding, others like me will grow up knowing they have a place in God's church, as they are, without having to spend years searching for it.

*Rev. Peta Evans is a pastor at Metropolitan Community Church in Brighton*

**I sometimes say  
I was never in the closet  
because I couldn't find it**



## Rachel's story

The Reverend Rachel Mann is an Anglican parish priest, a Canon and Poet-in-Residence at Manchester Cathedral.

**Our family home was pretty typical of 1970s Britain. We didn't go to church every Sunday, but we did for big festivals. As a child, I prayed every night for one thing: that I would wake up as a girl.**

'My given name was Nick. I was assigned male at birth and grew up as a boy. I had a very ordinary upbringing, yet from age four I felt I should have been a girl. My clothes, the way I was seen and the pronouns used to describe me just didn't make sense. It became worse in my teens as my body developed. As a teenager, I rejected God because I thought, 'Either God doesn't exist or God is a sadist for making people like me.' I reached a crisis point in my early 20s, because I knew if I didn't deal with it I was going to kill myself. At 22 I finally came out as trans and began the process of transitioning.

It wasn't until I was 26 that I had enough sense of who I was to offer myself to God, to this God who wouldn't let me go, who was always present.

To my utter surprise, the God who encountered me said: 'Actually, I love you, Rachel, in your deepest being and I accept you completely.' That itself was frightening in an unexpected way; I thought that I could never be accepted by God, and yet I was. Which led to the question: 'So what next?' I returned to the Church of England of my upbringing. I was open about being trans and found an affirming home in an evangelical church.

In my hardest times, the God I've experienced is one who is there with me in the dark, sharing my suffering. Looking back, if I'd repressed my gender dysphoria it would've led to a life of doubt and self-loathing, and it would've been impossible for me to accept myself. Only in coming face-to-face with this fissure in myself could I truly encounter God.'

*The above is abridged, with permission, from 'Christian Role Models' published by Stonewall*

**I prayed 'God, if you are there then I am yours.'**

## M's story



**When I first came out to my friends and loved ones as a non-binary trans person, I was forced to take a leap of faith - I didn't yet have the language to describe my experience. Somehow, the Spirit provided me with just enough strength to overcome my fears of my inability to explain everything and yet speak my truth, "this is who I am."**

It's been some time since that first timid leap, and as God does, God has proved faithful – not by making things easy but by sustaining me through community and the Spirit.

My story and language preferences are only my own and don't reflect the entirety of those who share my identity. But I offer these explanations of my own gender experience in hopes that it will be helpful to those wanting to grow in love and justice for the trans community. I identify as non-binary meaning that I, along with many others, believe gender is much bigger and more diverse than the idea of man and woman as "opposites" on a binary. I use they/them/their pronouns.

Those of us who are trans, in one way or another, feel that the gender label given to us isn't congruent with our experiences. So, many of us (though not all) transition – by name/pronoun/expression/etc – to the gender we feel we've always been. Many trans people fit in the binary, meaning they are male to female or female to male.

Many others do not fit in the binary, but we may transition nonetheless: male or female to neutral/other/fluid/none/etc.

**I know the concept of non-binary genders can be confusing and I certainly know there are many folks who are sceptical. But gender is a big, beautiful, diverse range of possibilities.**



## M's story cont.

I know the concept of non-binary genders can be confusing and I certainly know there are many folks who are sceptical. But gender is a big, beautiful, diverse range of possibilities.

Being trans is not a trend. Trans and gender non-conforming people have always existed. We are now using a shared language to describe our experiences but the experiences themselves are not new.

If our gender identities didn't matter, it wouldn't be worth the risk of violence and certainly not the anguish that comes with such intense social discrimination. This is not an easy world to live in as a trans person. The challenges are myriad but difficult to even talk about in a society that's so unfamiliar with them.

**Nonetheless, I am finally getting to a place where I can say, I wouldn't have it any other way.**

I am so grateful for the Spirit's guidance in the mystery and the initial leap of faith as well as on my continued journey of becoming, of making mistakes, and of learning better how to love people without need of explanation.

For allies who want to learn and are willing to put faith in God who created trans and gender non-conforming people and who created you, before having everything explained, thank you. For those who want to honour the lives of trans people by honouring our experiences, respecting our identities, and helping us shape a more free world together, God invites you to love and be loved – in confusion, in clarity, in togetherness.

*M Barclay is Director of Communications at Reconciling Ministries Network. The above is abridged from a blog posted by M, entitled 'Living Non-Binary: Taking A Leap Of Faith'*

# 4.

## Practical ways to ensure Trans inclusion in churches

### Welcome team

#### “Welcome, we are so happy to see you!”

These words, plus the accompanying atmosphere of acceptance and support is something that we all want to hear and experience when we first walk into a church. The church has the opportunity to mirror God’s extravagant welcome to us to join His family on Earth. Trans people want to be accepted as they are and who they want to be, just like anyone else.

**The welcome team are often the first people that someone encounters as they enter a church and first impressions are crucial.** Train your welcome team so they understand the practical implications of trans inclusion, including language and looks. Training should also empower the welcome team to understand the impact and to gently correct hurtful and inappropriate questions, for example:

### Inappropriate questions

did she used to be a man?


Is she really a man?

I can't tell if they are a man or a woman – What are they?

have they, you know, had the surgery?

what a shame, she was such a lovely woman

Yes, but what's their real name? (meaning birth name)



This also applies to comments that might be made with the best of intentions but can end up being hurtful, patronising or even insulting, for example:

## Inappropriate comments

I would never have known you are trans – you are so pretty

You look just like a real man

You're so brave

Make sure that the welcome team observe social interactions during refreshments that often follow or precede a meeting. People can be fearful of doing or saying the wrong thing and this can lead to 'social distancing', leaving a trans person feeling alone or isolated. The welcome team can make sure this does not happen.

The welcome team should appreciate that many trans people are not 'visibly' trans, so they should assume that there may be trans people at any service.

## Website / notice board / front of house literature

**A welcoming statement that is prominently displayed on your website, notice board and front of house literature shows others that you are a church committed to the welcoming and inclusion of all.**

But saying that your church welcomes 'everyone' is not enough. Trans people frequently assume that 'everyone' doesn't include them. So make sure your welcoming statement is explicit.



**GOD'S LOVE IS FOR ALL**  
Our services reflect our commitment to inclusion which means that you are most welcome irrespective of your age, gender, sexual orientation, health or disability, ethnicity, personal background or circumstance or if you are trans or gender non-conforming. We believe that God's love is for all.

## Loos

**Trans people should be free to choose the facilities that align with their gender identity and expression without fear of intimidation or harassment.**

It is inappropriate to ask a trans person to use an accessible toilet, i.e. a toilet that is designed for use by disabled people, unless, of course, a trans person is also a disabled person requiring the use of an accessible loo.

Make sure that the signs you use to point the way to facilities show all toilet options.

There is a growing trend to have one or more 'gender neutral' toilets available; a facility with a toilet, washbasin and dryer with a clear sign on the door that this is for use by everyone.



# Language

People are often fearful of offending someone, using the wrong word or expression, or hurting someone's feelings. This may prevent people entering into a conversation with a trans person. You can find an explanation of common words and phrases at the end of this guidance, including unacceptable terms that should be avoided. Below is an explanation about the importance of using correct names and pronouns.

Treating people with dignity and respect involves using people's correct names and correct pronouns; 'he/his', or 'she/hers' for example.

Rather than 'he' or 'she', some non-binary people prefer to use 'they', 'them', 'their'. **Although it might seem awkward, if in doubt, politely ask which name and / or pronoun someone prefers to use when they refer to themselves. It is better to ask than to assume and get it wrong.**

Some people, once they have reassigned their gender status, are happy to be known as a trans person. However, others prefer to be known as a male or female with trans history. And some simply want to be known as a female or a male; in this situation it is disrespectful to do otherwise.



If you make a genuine mistake when referring to someone, don't worry, it can happen. Apologise (don't make a big deal out of it), move on, and make every effort to not do it again.

Repeatedly and purposefully using the wrong name or pronoun is highly disrespectful and belittling. If you hear someone in the church doing this, then **explain the importance of treating people with dignity and respect, gently correct them by explaining that what they are doing is hurtful and unacceptable and ask them to get it right next time.** It may also be worth mentioning that such action can potentially be regarded as hate crime.

# Children's work

The variety of children's work that takes place in a church provide settings where each child can be free to express themselves as they wish and each child's difference can be accepted and celebrated. However, it is easy to assume that children will like certain toys and behave in certain ways according to their gender as gender stereotyping occurs regularly in society.

## Common stereotypes, include:

### GIRLS LIKE:

- Playing with dolls
- Wearing dresses
- Sparkly accessories
- Playing quietly

### BOYS LIKE:

- Playing with cars and trains
- Being loud and boisterous
- Play-fighting'

Children's workers can reinforce these stereotypes when planning activities, producing resources or by saying for example :

that's not a ladylike thing to do

boys don't play with dollies

I need a strong boy to help me'

## Children's workers have the opportunity to avoid stereotyping and support children to understand that everyone is unique and special.

They may want to, for example;

- ensure games are mixed so that all children can show how strong, fast or quiet they are
- avoid dividing children for activities or jobs based on gender
- explore stories that counter typical stereotypes, for example the Bible story of Deborah as a strong military leader.
- help children to explore gender stereotyping in an age-appropriate way, such as helping children to explore how they might feel if they were not allowed to play with something simply because they are a boy or a girl

# Being bullied

Young people who do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes run the risk of being teased or bullied. The Church of England has published guidance to help prevent young people from having their self-worth diminished or their ability to achieve impeded by being bullied because of gender identity. Although written primarily for schools, the principles apply to children's work taking place in church.

**For example, the guidance states:**

**'avoid labelling behaviour irregular because it does not conform to gender stereotypes. Children should be free to "play with the many cloaks of identity". When dressing up, for example, a child may choose the tutu, princess's tiara and heels and/or the firefighter's helmet, tool belt and superhero cloak without expectation or comment'.**

In this guidance<sup>2</sup>, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, writes:

**// Central to Christian theology is the truth that every single one of us is made in the image of God. Every one of us is loved unconditionally by God. We must avoid, at all costs, diminishing the dignity of any individual to a stereotype or a problem. [We need to offer] a community where everyone is a person known and loved by God, supported to know their intrinsic value //**

<sup>2</sup>Valuing All God's Children: Guidance for Church of England Schools 2017.

# Pastoral support and Privacy

Many trans people have experienced difficulties and may continue to experience issues where they appreciate some pastoral support. Such support may be provided by the vicar / pastor, curate, pastoral assistant, leader, church counsellor or a mature Christian in the church.



## TOP TIPS

### Provide care, support and a listening ear.

The person may have or be experiencing much hurt, pain and distress. They may have faced significant and painful rejection from their family, friends or from other Christians. They may have turned to drugs or alcohol to try and alleviate their pain. There may be deeply emotional issues with a partner or children that need to be resolved.

### Support might be for other issues.

A person may want pastoral support for trans issues. But they may want support for other common pastoral issues. Or support for trans issues is just one of a number of issues where they would value support.

### Don't expect...

...a trans person to want to talk about their old name or life before transition. Similarly, don't expect a trans person to want to talk about what medical treatment they may or may not have had or plan to have in the future. Be guided by the person.

### Find out about specialist support services.

You may want to refer the person, with their permission, to someone who can provide more specialist support or expertise.

A trans person is entitled to privacy. Don't share information that a trans person has shared with you unless they have given explicit consent to do so. Don't assume silence means consent. Always ask the person who, what and if they are happy for information to be shared with others.

Sharing information about a trans person such as their previous name or gender status, without their knowledge or consent, is a breach of their confidentiality and potentially a breach of their legal rights to privacy. Help people in the church to know that it is not acceptable to 'out' someone, even if they think that it is obvious that a person is trans.

Someone who has been in the church for many years may suddenly announce that they intend to undergo gender reassignment. This may provoke a variety of emotions by other church members including confusion, shock, disbelief, denial. Help the church community to respond with support, compassion and understanding.

**Help the church  
community to  
respond with  
support, compassion  
and understanding.**

## Home groups

**Many people in the church do not understand what it means to be trans and may not have knowingly met a trans person. They may have been influenced by the media that has, at times, reinforced unhelpful stereotypes.**

So raising understanding and awareness of these issues, listening to the experiences of trans people and exploring what the Bible has to say can be critical steps on the journey to becoming a church that fully welcomes trans people. Home groups provide a valuable small and safe space for having such discussions.

People in a home group, however, may not agree on issues around gender identity, gender reassignment or gender non-conformity. If you are anxious about the consequences of having a conversation about these potentially sensitive issues, then think about how you might create space for generous conversations.

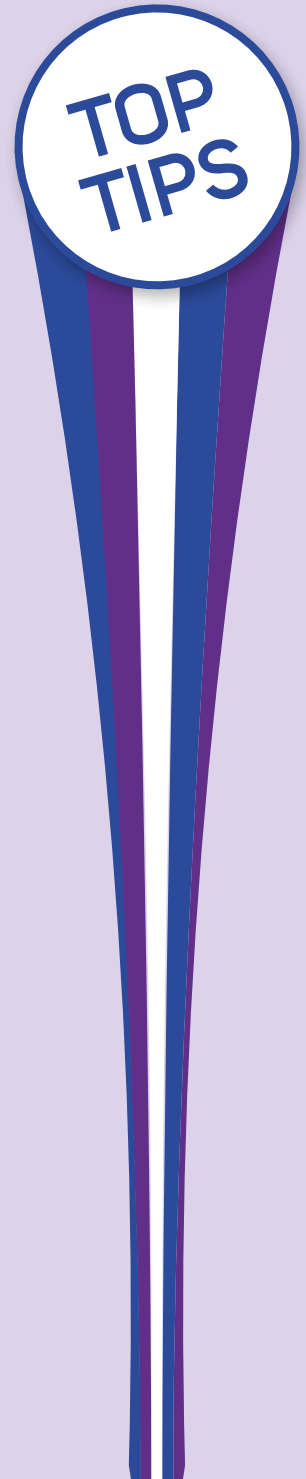
**Generous conversations involve listening, hearing other's perspectives, finding common ground and reaching out to others in grace and love. It is about respecting one another, striving to remain in relationship with one another and honouring dignity without dismissing the other person or claiming superiority.**

# HERE ARE SIX 'TOP TIPS':

1. Start the discussion by helping the group to establish some 'ground rules'.

Ground rules are guidelines that help to keep a discussion on track and prevent it from deteriorating into an argument. These could include, for example:

- **Treat everyone with respect:** let's avoid name-calling and let's ensure that any disagreement is not directed at people, only at ideas or opinions. Disagreement should be respectful – so let's avoid flippant remarks, sarcasm or ridicule.
  - **Don't interrupt.** Let's listen respectfully to one another and let people finish what they want to say.
  - **Respect the rights of others to express their opinion.** Try to keep your comments short and to the point, so that everyone has a chance to have their say.
  - **Don't be defensive if someone disagrees with you.** It does not mean that they are 'right' and you are 'wrong' – they are simply expressing a viewpoint.
  - If people do disagree, let's agree to see if we can **identify common ground** within the disagreement.
  - **Everyone is responsible for following and upholding the ground rules.** Make sure that everyone agrees with the ground rules at the start. If, as the discussion progresses, the ground rules are breached, then stop and remind people about the rules that they agreed to at the beginning.
2. Assume that in a group discussion, there is at least **one person in the group who is trans or knows someone who is trans** but has never told anyone in the group.





### **3. Model the behavior and attitudes that you want others in the group to exhibit.**

Be hospitable and open to different views. Keep your own emotions in check. Do not get defensive, but instead be generous, gracious, gentle and respectful.

### **4. Respect the integrity of the position of each party to a dispute.**

Accusations, name-calling or questioning the motives of others tends to close down a discussion. Help people to respectfully and genuinely listen to one another and to try and see the perspectives or validity of the other person's position, even when they don't agree.

### **5. Help to create a 'safe environment' for an open conversation.**

People are often worried about saying the wrong thing, or offending people, or being labelled as contentious. Creating a safe and relaxed environment where people feel safe to express their views is an important key to creating generous spaces for conversations.

### **6. Use personal stories.**

Jesus used stories and parables to help his followers to understand the truths of the Kingdom of God. You may have been brought closer to God by listening to others talk of their Christian journeys. So it is important to hear the stories and journeys of people of faith who have grappled with issues of gender identity, gender reassignment or gender non-conformity, in their own lives or the lives of their friends and family. There are four stories in this guidance

*Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **1 Corinthians 13 4-7***



## Church meetings and services

You may want to provide a space during a church service to mark a person's gender reassignment, such as a naming ceremony or a gender affirming / confirming ceremony. Such a ceremony might, for example, celebrate someone's transition and provide an opportunity for the church to welcome them into the community as a person whose gender status, gender identity and gender expression are now aligned. However, such a ceremony is a personal choice and not something that a person should be pressurised into doing.

**A template renaming ceremony prepared by Steve Chalke can be found online:**

<http://openchurch.network/content/example-renaming-ceremony>

The Church of England believes in 'one baptism' and members cannot be baptised into Christ a second time. However, many provide an opportunity for people to renew baptismal vows, which has particular significance if people have been baptised as a baby. And this affords trans people an opportunity to renew their vows in a celebration of baptism in their correct gender status and with a new name.

You may want to acknowledge transgender events during a church service, such as Transgender Day of Remembrance, held every 20th November. This is an annual recognition of the discrimination and violence faced by trans people that can often lead to a trans person's death. It is not a religious event but it is an opportunity, during a church service such as during a time of prayer, to show support against the violence aimed at trans people.



Trans people frequently assume that they are not invited to gender-specific events, such as a women's retreat or a men's breakfast. So make sure that such events are explicitly trans-inclusive.

# 5.

## What does the Bible have to say about trans people?

**Christ calls Christians to be radically inclusive and welcoming, particularly to the poor, the marginalised and the most vulnerable.**

Trans and gender variance were not acknowledged, recognised or understood in the time of biblical writings as they are today. We are left, therefore, to reflect on texts that might provide insight on the relationship between God and gender.

A common verse used to justify a position of unacceptance of trans people is from Deuteronomy;

‘A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord’ **Deuteronomy 22: 5**

At face value, this verse seems to clearly denounce anyone who uses clothing to attempt to change their gender status, either temporarily or permanently. However, proper interpretation involves locating text in context, both literary and historically. This type of analysis shows that this verse should be seen as referring to pagan practices

and sexually immoral behaviour. In any case, western clothing today has blurred boundaries; trousers, for example, are worn quite happily by the majority of Christian women. And a trans man may argue that following gender reassignment, he abides by this command as he does not put on clothes specifically designed for women.

**Genesis 1:27** *‘male and female He created them’* is often quoted to support the view that God makes a person as either a man or woman and a person’s birth sex is fixed and should not be altered. However, this verse actually says – *‘God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them’*. Taken within this context, the meaning broadens considerably, placing the emphasis not on the controlling of gender boundaries but on the dignity of a human being, made, known and loved by God.

**Galatians 3:28** declares that 'in Christ there is neither male nor female'. Rigid gender distinctions, and the unhelpful distortions they can activate, are overcome by Christ.

There are a number of affirming passages for trans people. There is Deborah, a righteous woman warrior and leader, countering gender stereotypes of the time. There is the affirmation in the New Testament towards Eunuchs. While it is wrong to say that Eunuchs are trans people, and while it is also incorrect to assume that gender reassignment always involves surgery, these passages make clear that from the earliest days of the Church, radical inclusion was offered to people with expressions of gender and sexuality that were outside of the typical gender expressions of the society of the day.

God is love.  
Christians have  
a profound role  
to play in  
demonstrating  
that love  
here on Earth.

You can read a more detailed explanation of the interpretation of scripture in *'The Gender Agenda: Towards a Biblical Theology on Gender Identity and Transgender Recognition'* by Steve Chalke. Alternatively, you can watch his video 'An Introduction to the Gender Agenda'. Both of these can be accessed online at [www.openchurch.network/GenderConversation](http://www.openchurch.network/GenderConversation)

# Questions for churches/ leaders to consider

Below are a set of questions to help you to reflect on your practice. You might wish to explore these with others in the church, for example in a leaders' meeting. This may help you to consider how far you have come and the actions you need to take to continue your journey to becoming a fully trans-inclusive church.

**When making judgements, you might find it helpful to use the following grading system:**

**1** We have excellent practice we can share with others

**2** We are confident we have good practice here

**3** We need to work on this

**4** We recognise that we are at the start of the journey on this

**These questions come with a health warning - please don't think that they provide a definitive list of all that a church needs to do. They are simply a starting point of topics to ponder.**

## Questions for churches/leaders to consider

	1	2	3	4
Have you trained the welcome team to meet and greet in an inclusive, non-judgmental way?				
Have you trained the welcome team and other key personnel, on the practical implications of trans inclusion, including language and the use of loos?				
Has the above training empowered people to correct others when inappropriate questions or comments are made by people in the church?				
Are leaders, welcome team, home group leaders and other key personnel aware of the importance of using correct names and pronouns?				
Do you have at least one gender-neutral toilet? Is this well-signposted?				
Do you have a statement explicitly welcoming trans people on your website, notice board and front of house literature?				
Do children's workers actively avoid reinforcing stereotypes when planning, delivering activities and developing resources?				
Are children free to play without expectation or comment if behaviour does not conform to common gender stereotypes?				
Are experienced counselling services available for trans people and their families to receive pastoral support?				
Can specialist support services be signposted if required?				
Have you provided resources for home groups to explore trans inclusion in the church?				
Do you offer gender affirming / confirming ceremonies?				
Does your church show support against the violence experienced by many trans people, for example acknowledging Trans Gender Day of Remembrance during a time of prayer?				
Do you ensure that gender-specific events, such as a women's retreat or a men's breakfast, are explicitly trans-inclusive?				
Does your church encourage and support trans people to release their gifts, for example by serving on leadership, elders or deacons teams, assisting in children's and youth work, ministering communion, and leading home groups?				

# Useful definitions (glossary)

Below is a list of common words and phrases including ones that should be avoided. It is by no means exhaustive. Moreover, terminology can change quickly over time and there is not always agreement within the trans community on acceptable language. So it's helpful to be sensitive to this, recognise that some might be offended by different terms, and if in doubt, be guided by the trans person.

**Affirmed gender** – the gender to which someone has transitioned. Avoid terms like 'new gender' or 'chosen gender,' as these imply that the current gender identity was not always a person's gender identity or that their gender identity was 'chosen' rather than always in existence.

**Cross dressing** – a term for someone who occasionally or more regularly feels the need to dress and appear as the opposite sex. They are generally happy with the gender that they were assigned at birth and therefore do not feel the need to change their gender status. For example, a man may feel the need to dress, from time to time, in female clothing and appear as a woman but still identifies strongly as male. Some people are happy, in this situation, to describe themselves as trans, but some are not. Cross-dressing men are sometimes referred to as **transvestite** men; however, this is becoming an increasingly outdated term and may cause offence as it has negative connotations.

**Gender dysphoria** – a term used to describe a person's extreme discomfort or distress because of the mismatch between their gender status given at birth and their gender identity. Some do not like this term because it assumes gender variance to be a pathological disorder (see Gender Recognition Act below and footnote). Not all trans people experience gender dysphoria.

**Gender fluid** – sometimes people who are non-binary (see below) may have gender identities that fluctuate. So someone, for example, may feel more male on some days and more female on others.

**Gender identity** – how a person feels internally, their deeply held sense of their own gender, which may be male, female, some of both, gender neutral or gender fluid.

**Gender non-conforming** – see non-binary

**Gender reassignment** – the process where a person ‘**transitions**’ – either male to female or female to male, so that their gender expression, gender identity and gender status align and they live permanently and completely in the gender to which they identify. Some people prefer to use the term ‘**gender confirmation**’ as they see the process as confirming their true gender. During gender reassignment, they may change their name, their hairstyle, the way they dress, the pronoun they use to describe themselves. The term is broad and covers anything that a person may choose to do to reflect their gender identity, whether this be male, female, non-binary etc. It may or may not involve medical intervention. It may or may not involve surgery.

**Gender reassignment surgery** – the surgical process by which an aspect of someone’s physical sex is altered. This can involve surgery on the genitals, a mastectomy (for female to male gender reassignment) or facial feminisation (for male to female gender reassignment). It is important to appreciate, however, that people can undergo gender reassignment but decide not to undergo surgery, for example for personal or medical reasons.

**Gender Recognition Act 2004** – gave people the legal right to change their gender status on their birth certificate and other documents. It provides a full recognition of their new gender status in law, including marriage.<sup>3</sup>

**Gender variance** – a term sometimes used to mean non-binary (see below) and sometimes used to also include trans (see below)

**Intersex** – a term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or neither or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. They may have differences in sex development or variations in sex anatomy. However, they are still assigned a sex at birth, male or female, which they may or may not identify with as they develop. Intersex is a separate identity to trans but the barriers and discrimination that people experience are similar for both groups.

**Non-binary** – an umbrella term that recognises that some people do not identify within a simple binary concept of male or female, or they do not conform to typical cultural and societal gender expectations. The terms ‘**gender variance**’, ‘**gender non-conforming**’ or ‘**gender queer**’ are sometimes used instead of non-binary although some people may be offended by the latter term. A non-binary person may consider themselves to be neither male or female, or they may consider themselves to be both male and female, or they may consider themselves to be sometimes male and sometimes female (see gender fluid, above). Some non-binary people do not identify as trans as they see this term applicable to a narrower range of people who wish to undergo gender reassignment.

<sup>3</sup>Government proposals put forward in 2017 would, if accepted, simplify the process of achieving a legal recognition of a changed gender status to reflect gender identity. This would avoid the need for a medical ‘diagnosis’ of dysphoria, often an intrusive and lengthy process that still carries the stigma associated with mental illness and psychiatry. This change, if accepted, would bring us in line with many other countries.

Non-binary people might be quite happy as they are, do not want to change in any way and want simply to be accepted for who they are. Some trans people might see themselves as gender non-conforming before transition but might not after transition.

**Pronouns** – the words we use to describe a person’s gender in conversation, for example ‘he’ or ‘she’. However, some people such as those who are gender non-conforming may prefer to use ‘they’ or ‘their’ as pronouns.

**Sex change** – trans people are commonly referred to in the media as having a ‘sex change’. But this term has a variety of problems. First, the term implies that people undergoing gender reassignment are changing their ‘sex’, in other words their gender identity. But gender reassignment is a means of confirming their true gender identity. It is their gender status that they are changing. Second it implies surgery, which not all trans people will desire, require or undergo. Third, it implies that gender reassignment can be reduced to simply having an operation or two, which is something profoundly untrue. For these and other reasons, the term is generally considered impolite and disrespectful.

**Trans** – an umbrella term that describe a wide and diverse range of people including those whose gender identity or gender expression differ from the gender assumptions made about them at birth or in society or from a clear-cut gender ‘binary’, male or female. Although this guide, for simplicity, uses the term trans to include non-binary people, it is recognised that some non-binary people do not identify as trans (see non-binary, above,

for more information). Others may also not identify as trans. For example, someone who has transitioned female to male may be happy to be known as a trans person, a trans man or a man with trans history; but they may simply want to be known as a man. There is no universal experience of being trans.

**Trans\*** - sometimes an asterisk is added to the word trans in recognition that trans communities are diverse, include many different identities and there is no universal experience of being trans. Can be read as ‘trans star’.

**Transitioning** – see gender reassignment

**Transphobia** – discriminatory attitudes, practices or prejudices towards trans people and those assumed to be trans. Transphobia may arise because of a fear or a hatred of trans people, but it can also be caused by common misunderstandings or misconceptions of trans issues. Transphobia can be blatantly discriminatory, for example making derogatory jokes or shouting abuse at someone. But it can also manifest in subtle ways, for example deliberately avoiding someone during a refreshment break at the end of a church service.

**Transsexual** – this term has largely fallen out of use among trans people, partly because its origin lies in medical definitions and the pathologising of peoples’ experiences, and partly because it can exclude non-binary people. However, older people may prefer the term transsexual to describe themselves. It is also the term currently used in equality law.



# TRANS FORMING CHURCHES

A practical guide for the inclusion of trans and  
gender non-conforming people in the church



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