

GENERAL SYNOD

DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION

Welcoming Transgender People

"That this Synod, recognizing the need for transgender people to be welcomed and affirmed in their parish church, call on the House of Bishops to consider whether some nationally commended liturgical materials might be prepared to mark a person's gender transition."

Summary

1. As this is the first time that issues relating to trans people are being discussed at General Synod, there follows (Section 1 "Terms") a summary of the terms used in relation to transgender people.
2. It is essential to understand the parameters of the present discussion, highlighting that the motion considers gender identity and not sexuality (Section 2 "Gender, not sexuality"). There is a brief summary of the numbers of trans people in the UK and the present rate of number of people transitioning. (Section 3 "Incidence")
3. There have been discussions in the House of Bishops concerning trans people, and there have been statements with relation to trans people in marriage and ordination which are summarised in (Section 4 "The Church of England").
4. (Section 5 "The Blackburn Diocesan Synod Motion") summarises the first contact with a trans person requesting this liturgy, and how that has led to the proposal of the Blackburn Diocesan Synod Motion, and the need for a liturgy to mark transition and why these present steps have been taken.
5. I am particularly grateful to The Revd Dr Tina Beardsley, a trans priest and former Chaplain of the Chelsea & Westminster Hospital, as well as others from the trans community for providing much of the information contained within this Briefing Paper.

Terms

- a) **Transgender** is an umbrella or generic term for a range of gender variant people. It is often contracted to '**Trans**'.
- b) **Gender variance** is the term relating to the incongruity between a person's *phenotype* (external sex characteristics of the body) and psychological experience of the person as male or female. Many trans people have been conscious of their gender variance from a very early age, often perceiving it to be present from birth.
- c) A **Female-to-Male (FtM)** trans person refers to someone with a female birth gender transitioning to a male gender identity.
- d) A **Male-to-Female (MtF)** trans person refers to someone with a male birth gender transitioning to a female gender identity.
- e) The transgender people referred to in the motion are those who have made, or are in the process of making, a permanent gender transition.

- f) **Transition** is the process by which one adopts the gender expression that matches one's gender identity. It can be an extremely stressful time for transgender people, especially if they are perceived as "deviant" by others as a result. It is usually preceded by the person's '**coming out**' to others as transgender.
- g) **Transsexual** is an older term that refers to a person with gender dysphoria who looks to undertake gender reassignment to live permanently in their confirmed gender. *Transgender* or *Trans* is used to mean the same thing today.
- h) **Gender dysphoria**, signifying unease with one's birth gender, is sometimes used in the technical literature, with '**Trans**' emerging as the preferred catch-all term in most other contexts.

Gender, not sexuality

- 6. The distinction between gender identity and sexual orientation often requires clarification because of the assumption that transsexual and transgender people are homosexual. This is an echo of a former time when transsexual people were regarded as a subset of homosexuality. Gender dysphoric people, like the rest of the population, can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual.

Incidence

- 7. The Gender Identity Research & Education Service (GIRES 2009) estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 people in the UK have experienced some degree of gender variance, 60,000 to 90,000 of whom desire complete role adaptation.
- 8. In 2007 the number of people presenting for gender reassignment nationally was estimated at 20 per 100,000. The number presenting for treatment was estimated at 3% per 100,000, i.e. 1,500 presenting for treatment, and the total number who had presented for treatment at that date was 12,500. The ratio of adults to children presenting annually for treatment was 100 children and adolescents to 1,500 adults, but the figures for both are rising, and the gender balance is closing (hitherto male-to-females have outnumbered female-to-males).
 - The number of [presenting] trans people in the UK was estimated at 6000 (2009)
 - March 2008 – 2,366 had applied for Gender Recognition Certificates (only 3% were refused)
 - The numbers of people likely to present is rising and likely to increase (GIRES)
 - Charing Cross Gender Identity Clinic, West London receives 500 new referrals each year and has 2000 people on its books

The Church of England

- 9. In 2003 the House of Bishops agreed that two opposing theological views of transsexual people's experience, and gender transition, can 'properly be held', one affirming, the other negative. The House of Bishops Summary of Decisions HB(03)M1¹ contains the full statements which are summarised below:

¹ HB(03)M1 – House of Bishops: Summary of Decisions from the meeting of the House held 13-16 January 2003

- There are two opposing views, namely (1) regarding gender reassignment as “a fiction,” and (2) regarding medical intervention as legitimate, leading to a change of sex or gender.
 - The Church engaged in discussions to safeguard bishops who were unwilling to ordain transgender candidates, and clergy unwilling to solemnise marriages of transsexuals (sic).
10. Having recognised a divergence of views within the House, the Bishops in the House of Lords did not oppose the Bill that became the Gender Recognition Act 2004. None of the bishops voted against the Bill, while some spoke in favour. The outcome was that a man or woman who has been issued with a gender recognition certificate may marry someone of the opposite sex in a Church of England church, subject to the right of clergy to refuse to solemnise the marriage of any person whom they reasonably believed to be of an acquired gender.
11. In 2002, the House of Bishops discussed transgender candidates for ordination, with at least two trans candidates having come forward. The Church of England’s position on transgender ordinands is summarised as follows:
- Bishops intending to sponsor a trans person for a BAP must be prepared to ordain and offer a Title to that person. Bishops’ Advisers could request an exemption from considering trans candidates, and would be moved to another Panel.²

The Blackburn Diocesan Synod Motion

12. The Blackburn Diocesan Synod Motion was prompted by a pastoral encounter with a young transgender person that took place in Lancaster Priory. I will call him “George” (not his real name) as he does not wish to receive any unwanted attention at this time.
13. George was wrestling with the spiritual dimension of what was happening to him as he was coming to the end of his process of transition from inhabiting a female body since the time of his birth to his present state as a man, following the long process of transition. He felt the need to “reintroduce himself to God, with his new name and gender identity.” A similar encounter could occur at any parish church or chaplaincy, and highlights the opportunity to welcome transgender people and respond to their particular needs for prayerful affirmation. The Church of England prides itself on its welcome to everyone who lives in the parish, but the presence of a transgender person in a congregation, or with a request for ministry, requires a particularly informed and sensitive response.
14. Bishop Michael Perham wrote in *“Liturgy Pastoral and Parochial”* (SPCK 1982) that “A Christian community conveys more than it probably intends of its theology of the Church or of its self-understanding by the way it orders its worship.” In taking the decision to offer a service to George, we sought to demonstrate our explicit desire to welcome and affirm an individual, which would resonate throughout the wider community to show a church community that was there for everyone who sought to receive a welcome in the name of The Lord Jesus. This desire came from our pastoral concern for an individual who came with a need, and it was our pastoral response to offer him a welcome and blessing, which marks the full acknowledgement of the identity he has now become able to express. (He asked us for bread, and we could not

² DDO handbook; Section 2, paragraph 17; <https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry/selection/ddos/ddo-handbook.aspx>;

give him a stone). We were clear from the outset that the service was **not a baptism** as he had already been baptised, but it was a renewal of his baptismal vows in which he made the vows for himself, and in his newly acquired legal name he made clear his commitment to the Christian faith, and was anointed as the community prayed for him and his family. The community celebrated this new beginning with great joy.

15. To quote a contemporary writer, The Revd Rachel Mann (a trans priest in the Diocese of Manchester), "Christian liturgy (...) is a recapitulation of what makes the Christian community the community it is - a community of atonement. It is the rehearsal of the story of God that illuminates and sustains the world. That story is that God is Love and liturgy is one way we participate in this truth-claim and grow to be ourselves. Breaking bread and wine, making confession and so on is us being ourselves together.' (*Fierce Imaginings* p.100, DLT 2017). Our offering of a pastoral service for George drew on this acknowledgement that it is through liturgy that we more fully participate in God's story and his desire for us to grow into the likeness of Christ.
16. Despite all the changes which have taken place regarding the place of Church of England clergy in society over the last 50 years, clergy still do have enormous power to do good, or indeed to do serious harm in their pastoral encounters. Providing the support that was requested in a way that was consistent with the Church's teaching was of enormous help to George and his wide circle of family and friends. A rejection by a representative of the Church would have been a huge setback to him, and would have had a serious impact on his mental health at a time when he was particularly vulnerable.
17. This motion seeks to ensure that the Church of England engages seriously with the issue of providing the opportunity of a liturgical marking of a person's transition which has the full authority of the Church of England, as an appropriate expression of community and pastoral support to trans people.
18. It is, however, not the intention of this motion to require clergy to offer to perform such a liturgy if they cannot in good conscience offer support in a liturgical marking of a person's transition. It may be hoped that such clergy may have the generosity to point anyone who asks to a church where the clergy are willing to provide such a liturgy. Organisations such as "*Inclusive Church*" or "*One Body One Faith*" may point interested people to churches which have made a statement of inclusion, and who would be happy to offer to perform such services.
19. Originating in the PCC of Lancaster St Mary (The Priory), and supported by the Lancaster & Morecambe Deanery Synod and the Blackburn Diocesan Synod the present motion calls on the House of Bishops to consider providing some nationally commended liturgical materials which may be used in parish churches and chaplaincies to provide a pastoral response to the need of transgender people to be affirmed following their long, distressing, and often complex process of transition.