

GENERAL SYNOD

An update on 'Welcoming Transgender People'

1. In July 2017 the General Synod carried, with strong support in all three Houses, a motion, brought forward by the Blackburn Diocesan Synod,

that this Synod, recognising 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.
2. Speakers in the preceding debate agreed that the Church of England needed to offer what the Revd Chris Newlands called 'a Christ-like' welcome, 'arms outstretched in love, as Christ's arms were outstretched to draw all people to himself'. Many members offered stories about compassion and sensitivity to the needs of transgender people. In the words of a trans person, shared by Synod member Lucy Gorman, 'it's [about] having a Church that is eager to make sure you feel safe and accepted.'
3. **The House of Bishops welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the Church, the body of Christ, and rejoices in the diversity of that one body, into which all Christians have been baptized by one Spirit.**
4. The motion also called on the House of Bishops to consider whether the recognition of a transgender person's new identity was a moment which should be marked in a particular way in worship. After taking time to consider the issue prayerfully, the House would like to encourage ministers to respond to any such requests in a creative and sensitive way. If not already received, baptism and confirmation are the normative ways of marking a new or growing faith in Jesus Christ. If the enquirer is already baptized and confirmed, **the House notes that the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith, found in *Common Worship*, is an ideal liturgical rite which trans people can use to mark this moment of personal renewal.**
5. The Affirmation of Baptismal Faith is an existing, authorized part of *Common Worship* which is used in all types of churches, and can be part of services of different kinds. It points out that the candidate has already been baptized (and is therefore not a 're-baptism'). It provides the opportunity, requested in the Diocesan Synod Motion, for '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'.
6. The rite of Affirmation includes the opportunity for the candidate to renew the commitments made in baptism, and for the congregation to respond. The emphasis is placed not on the past or future of the candidate alone but on their faith in Jesus Christ. The Affirmation therefore gives priority to the original and authentic baptism of the individual, and the sacramental change it has effected, allowing someone who has undergone a serious and lasting change to re-dedicate their life and identity to Christ. The image of God, in which we are all made, transcends gender, race, and any other characteristic, and our shared identity as followers of Jesus is the unity which makes all one in Christ (Galatians 3.27-28).
7. In inviting ministers to use this rite, the House wishes to point out that everyone's Christian journey—like the journey to find one's true identity—is unique and encourages ministers to treat these possible pastoral encounters accordingly. This

approach, familiar to all who care for people during other major life events, takes into account each person's unique experiences.

8. Some guidance on the usage of these resources for the important work of welcoming and affirming transgender people will be issued by the House later in 2018.

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Secretary to the House of Bishops
January 2018

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
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