INSTITUTE FOR
Welcoming
Resources
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

trans ACTION

A Transgender Curriculum for Churches and Religious Institutions

"I just want to worship my God in a community of faith-filled believers"

– A TRANSGENDER WOMAN

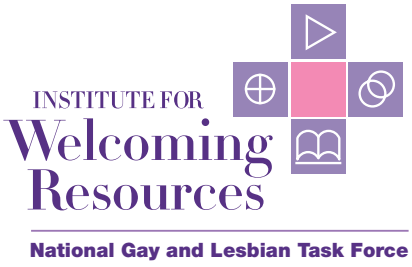
Most transgender Christians are searching for the same things that other believers want: a connection to their God within a loving community where worship and working for equality and justice are the focus of the Christian experience.

Unfortunately, these searching transgender people are too often left without a place to call their "church home" because most congregations and religious institutions are not ready to welcome them as their Christian companions.

transACTION is designed to help churches and institutions address this issue of understanding and welcome by providing step-by-step training about the needs, apprehensions and fears of transgender people – as well as the wealth of gifts and graces they bring – while responding to the concerns of the church or religious institution.

"When persons aren't free to be their authentic selves, we all lose. The full potential of those individuals is lost to society in general and our churches and institutions in particular. God's creative freedom is stifled because of our fear and prejudice."

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel
Institute for Welcoming Resources
and Faith Work Director



SUMMARY

Transgender is an umbrella term that covers a variety of ways in which some people think of and present themselves in a manner that doesn't conform to society's expectations. The variety of gender identities and expressions is so extensive that many feel the term transgender is not inclusive enough. But, for our purposes, we will accept that limitation but continue to use the term because it has some legitimacy and many people have at least a basic grasp of its meaning.

SESSION ONE

How Do We Get to Understanding?

Our discussions and activities in this first session are designed to help people understand:

- What gender is and how society's expectations of gender have changed
- Who are transgender people, including basic definitions of transgender types.
- How gender identity differs from sexual orientation

SESSION TWO

How Do We Get to Acceptance?

In our second session we will explore:

- The biblical references to transgender persons and we will also talk about how churches respond to transgender people.
- We will also get specific about your congregation or institution and how prepared it is to have a transgender person as part of the worshipping community.
- We will give you an opportunity to talk about your own exposure or lack of exposure to transgender people and what concerns, apprehensions or fears you might have about a transgender person being in your congregation or institution.

SESSION THREE

How Do We Get to Welcoming?

In this session we will discuss – and develop a plan of action on:

- How a congregation or institution can make itself a place where transgender people feel welcome to come to worship; to be participate fully in the community; and to share theirs gifts and graces.
- And where the members of the congregation or institution can feel blessed to have transgender persons in their worship space and meeting rooms.
- What are ways in which we can take our welcome of transgender persons beyond the doors of our congregation or institution

Much of what will be presented is basic hospitality but there are some issues that pose special challenges to the transgender community and a welcoming congregation or institution needs to be prepared to deal with those concerns.

END RESULT

At the end of these sessions, we expect that your congregation will be ready to offer a welcoming environment to any transgender people who walk through your doors.

SESSION STRUCTURE

A. Creating Sacred Space

1. **Create a centering area on a low table, covered with a cloth. Place an appropriate symbol on the table and light a candle.**
2. **Read from Scripture: I Corinthians, 12:12-27 (one body, many members).**
3. **Prayer: ...**
   - Invite each participant to share a word or phrase without commentary in response to this question: "What is close to your heart as we begin this sacred time in community with the Spirit and in community with one another?"
   - Leader shares a gathering prayer and may lead the group in a sacred song.

B. Creating a healthy and safe space for sharing and learning

1. **Establish Ground Rules**
   - Listen carefully to others.
   - Be willing to examine your own beliefs in light of what others say.
   - Speak your mind freely, but strive to maintain an open mind.
   - Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you.
   - Don't monopolize the discussion.
   - Address remarks to the group and not to an individual.
   - Engage in friendly dialogue.
   - What other guidelines are necessary so that we can be in respectful community with one another?

C. Work

Refer to the outlines that follow for Session One, Session Two, Session Three and Session Four.

D. Closing

Close with prayer.

SESSION ONE

How Do We Get to Understanding?

Our discussions and activities in this first session are designed to help people understand:

- What gender is and how society's expectations of gender have changed
- Who are transgender people, including basic definitions of transgender types
- How gender identity differs from sexual orientation

ACTIVITY 1:

How Do You Think About Gender?

DISCUSSION 1:

Why All of This Talk About Gender?

ACTIVITY 2:

Cisgender Privilege Check List

DISCUSSION 2:

Transgender Definitions

DISCUSSION 3:

Relationship of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

SESSION ONE

ACTIVITY 1:
How Do You Think About Gender?

Most of us have an understanding of gender roles that have been shaped by the environments in which we were raised. Our families, friends, schools and churches all had an influence on how we think of gender.

We are going to spend some time thinking and talking about the gender norms or expectations that society has placed on all of us. And, then, we will talk about what effect those societal expectations can have on someone who doesn't match up to those attributes.

STEP 1:

Using a blackboard or a sheet of poster paper, write the words "Girl or Woman" across the top.

Ask the people attending this session to tell you what attributes they would list under this heading. You are looking for behavioral and personality traits they would use – or they have heard being used by others – to describe girls or women. Such things as: passive, caring, creative, smart, well-behaved, timid, flighty. The traits people call out may be positive or negative. There is no right answer. You are trying to get to how people's understanding of gender has been formed – some of that formation may be "right on" and some of it may be flawed.

Ask people to explain their suggested feminine traits – where did those traits come from? Home, school, work, play, church, etc.?

STEP 2:

Now do the same thing with another sheet of paper or blackboard, writing the words "Boy or Man" across the top. Ask for the same listing of attributes that would describe boys and men: aggressive, bold, risk-takers, handy, unemotional, etc.

Again, ask people to explain their suggested masculine traits.

STEP 3:

Ask people if they know any boys or men who exhibit any of the attributes that have been attributed to women? Ask them if they know any girls or women who have some of the attributes ascribed to men?

Has this been a problem for any of the people they mention?

Has it changed the participants' attitude toward the people they mention?

Have any of the participants ever found themselves exhibiting traits ascribed to the other gender? How did that feel? Was it an issue for you?

STEP 4:

Have each person take a sheet of paper, turn it sideways and draw a line horizontally across the paper. Make a short vertical line in the center as a mid-point. Put the number 0 at the left side of the line and the number 10 at the right side.

0 _____|_____10

Go back to the list of attributes you have collected and, as you read each attribute, ask people to put that word at the appropriate point on the line for them.

If that attribute is an important element of who they are, they should place it near the number 10 and if it doesn't at all describe them, they should place it near the number 0.

When finished, ask if they were surprised by what they discovered – did they place any attributes that were usually not attributed to their gender near 10 – or past the midpoint?

Did any of the attributes that describe their gender get placed on the 0 side of the midpoint?

What did they learn about themselves, or about others?

SESSION ONE

DISCUSSION I:
So Why All This Talk About Gender?

GENDER IDENTITY

Unlike biological sex—which is assigned by others based on physical characteristics—gender identity refers to our internalized, deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, or neither. It can be different from the biological sex we were assigned at birth. Society is beginning to recognize that there are more than two categories of gender identity and is creating newly defined terms to reflect these normal variations of gender.

Because gender identity is internal and personally defined, it is not visible to others—it is determined by the individual alone. Most of us have an early sense of our gender identity, and we may begin voicing this between the ages of two and four. This is not the only time a person's sense of gender identity deepens or solidifies; it may occur at other developmental stages, such as early adolescence or young adulthood. It may remain stable over time, or it may change. Sometimes, social pressures force an individual to stifle their gender identity until later in life – even though that person has experienced that identity since childhood.

GENDER EXPRESSION

In contrast to gender identity, gender expression is external and is what society perceives. It encompasses everything that communicates our gender to others: clothing, hairstyles, body language, mannerisms, how we speak, how we play, and our social interactions and roles. Most people have some blend of masculine and feminine qualities that comprise their gender expression, and this expression can also vary depending on the social context.

GENDER VARIANCE/GENDER NON-CONFORMITY

Gender variance refers to behaviors and interests that fit outside of what we consider 'normal' for a person's assigned biological sex. We think of these people as having interests that are more typical of the "opposite" sex; for example, a girl who insists on having short hair and prefers to play football with the boys, or a boy who wears dresses and wishes to be a princess. These are considered gender-variant or gender non-conforming behaviors and interests.

It is important to remember that these "normal" behaviors or interests are culturally formed and may be different from one society to another,

CISGENDER AND TRANSGENDER

Most people have a gender identity that matches their biological sex – they are called cisgender, which means "matching gender." Those persons who have a gender identity that differs from their biological sex are called transgender.

Transgender is an umbrella term that includes transsexuals, cross dressers and intersex people, and just about anybody else who doesn't conform to the traditional model of sex/gender. "Transgender" is the most general, inclusive term but doesn't fully address the wide variety of non-conforming gender expressions that exist.

SESSION ONE

ACTIVITY 2:
The Cisgender Privilege Checklist

This is a list of issues or concerns that a person who is not transgender will probably never have to think about as he or she goes about daily life:

☐ It is unlikely that I will be ostracized by my family and friends, fired from my job, evicted from my home, given substandard medical care, suffer violent or sexual abuse, ridiculed by the media, or preached against by religious organizations simply because of my professed identity or perceived incongruent gendered behaviors or characteristics.

Reflects the fact that transgender people often are discriminated against in a variety of ways.

☐ I can be confident that people will not call me by a different name or use improper pronouns.

The use of the wrong pronouns or names, when done out of malice, can cause great emotional pain to transgender people.

☐ I never suffered the indignation of "holding it", when both functional and unoccupied public restrooms are available. In fact, I don't need to be concerned about public facilities segregated by sex.

Bathroom usage is a constant and dangerous problem facing trans men and trans women.

☐ If I am institutionalized, I don't have to worry about being housed in the wrong section of a facility segregated by sex.

Decision makers are often guided by fear, ignorance or lack of concern for the gender issues of the person for whom they are making choices.

☐ I am not denied entrance to appropriate services or events that are segregated by sex.

Many transgender persons, failing to fit gender norms, are refused admittance to places that fit their gender identity.

☐ My childhood innocence was not interrupted with desperate prayers to a divinity begging to wake up the opposite sex. I never grieve about my lost childhood and adolescence because I was born the opposite sex.

These are emotional pains that many transsexuals suffer throughout their childhood and into adult life.

☐ I will only experience puberty once.

As transgender persons come out or transition they go through a new adolescence.

☐ I never worry about potential lovers shifting instantly from amorous to distain and even violence because of my genitals.

Violence – including murder - is a response that many transgender persons suffer when their identity is known; some data shows that 60 percent of transgender persons experience violence because of who they are.

☐ I am unlikely to be questioned about my genitals, even less likely to be touched inappropriately or asked to see them.

Unseemly curiosity sometimes breaches the boundaries of respect.

☐ It is unlikely that I would risk my health by avoiding the medical profession for fear of discovery.

This reflects the fear of having to exhibit oneself to another person and suffering ridicule or judgment.

☐ I never considered hiding my body parts by binding or tucking.

Transgender persons have to do this to cover up identifying body parts.

☐ It is unlikely that I would consider changing my voice.

To help themselves pass in society, many transgender persons do this through training, hormones or surgery.

☐ If I have a professionally recognized and diagnosed condition, I am unlikely to be excluded from medical insurance coverage.

Transgender people often suffer rejection or denial of medical coverage because of who they are.

☐ As a man, I am more likely to look my age, and have a body similar in size and shape to other men.

Trans men often have body shapes and sizes that are different from non-transgender men.

(continued on page 9)

SESSION ONE

ACTIVITY 2:
The Cisgender Privilege Checklist

(continued from page 8)

☐ As a man, I am more likely to be satisfied with the functionality of my genitals.

Trans men have to live with the fact that they cannot fully function as a man.

☐ As a man, I am more likely able to father children.

This is not possible for trans men.

☐ As a woman, I am more likely to have a body similar in size and shape to other women.

Trans women will often have body shapes and sizes different from non-transgender women.

☐ As a woman, I am unlikely to lose my hair before middle age.

Trans women often suffer from male-pattern baldness.

☐ As a woman, I am more likely able to conceive and bear children.

This is not possible for trans women.

☐ I will likely have $50,000 or more to spend or save for retirement.

The cost of surgery for transsexual men and women is very expensive and usually not covered by insurance.

☐ I can't imagine spending months and $1000s of dollars on a therapist so they can tell me something I already knew.

Extensive therapy is required before approval can be received for hormones or surgery.

☐ If I am physically healthy, I don't think about having a hysterectomy, a mastectomy, massive hair removal, contra hormone therapy, vocal surgery, facial reassignment surgery, or genital reassignment surgery.

These are the variety of procedures that some transgender people undergo.

☐ I have a better chance of reaching old age without taking my own life.

Suicide rates among transgender persons are very high; some data shows a five-time increase over non-transgender persons – and the numbers are even higher for young trans persons.

☐ At my funeral, it is unlikely that my family would present me crossdressed against my living wishes.

Many unaccepting families have done this.

☐ I never worry about passing gender wise. I am oblivious to the consequences of someone failing to do so, and consequently loosing their cisgender (non transgender) privilege. In fact, I have the privilege of being completely unaware of my own cisgender privilege.

Passing is a significant issue and challenge for the transgender community. Failure to pass can lead to ridicule and violence.

KM - September, 2005

SESSION ONE

DISCUSSION 2:
Transgender Definitions

TRANSGENDER

A broad umbrella term for persons who have a self-image or gender identity not traditionally associated with their biological gender. Some transgender persons wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-perception, while others do not have such a desire.

There is no absolute correlation between sexual orientation and transgender issues. A transgender person may claim a sexual orientation of heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

CROSSDRESSER

A person who dresses in the clothing of the opposite biological gender. Crossdressers generally want to relate as, and be accepted as, a person of the gender they are presenting. Transvestite is a term often used incorrectly as a definition. Crossdressers make up the largest segment of the transgender community and person may identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual in their sexual orientation.

"DRAG"

Dressing in the clothing of the opposite biological sex, or in a manner different than how one will usually dress (i.e. "corporate drag" or "military drag"). 'Drag' is often theatrical, and often presents a stereotyped image. Individuals who dress in 'Drag' may or may not consider themselves part of the transgender community.

GENDER QUEER

People who identify as genderqueer may think of themselves as being both a man and a woman, as being neither a man nor a woman, or as falling completely outside the gender binary. Some wish to have certain features of the opposite sex and not all characteristics; others want it all. The terms "transgender" and "genderqueer" are not synonymous, but there is some overlap between people who identify as transgender and people who identify as genderqueer.

INTERSEX

Generally applied to people born with ambiguous genitalia (an outdated term would be hermaphrodite). This, however, is an incomplete definition; the subject is much broader than that. Many, including intersex persons, believe that intersex is a medical rather than gender identity issue and should not be included under the transgender umbrella. In the past, most intersex individuals have had surgery soon after birth in an attempt to give them an "identifiable" gender. Such "normalization" surgeries are imposed on these children with little understanding of the future impacts.

TRANSSEXUAL

As someone whose gender identity is other than the biological gender assigned at birth, this person may wish to change that anatomy to be more congruent with the individual's self-perception. Many transsexuals would like to alter their bodies through hormonal therapy, gender reassignment surgeries or other means; others do not want to take those steps.

TRANSVESTITE

A term seldom used today, it describes a person who may achieve sexual pleasure through the use of clothing or personal adornments of the other gender. Often incorrectly used interchangeably with 'Crossdresser.'

TRANSITION

In the definition of Transgender issues, the 'transition' is the time period when an individual changes from expressing one gender to another in their personal life and/or workplace. For most individuals the workplace transition is very carefully planned, often including appropriate levels of management in early discussions, and the transition process may be weeks to months in length. The personal life transition, also eagerly anticipated, may be more sudden.

Adapted for brevity from OutFront Minnesota

SESSION ONE

DISCUSSION 3:
What is the Relationship Between Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation?

People generally experience gender identity and sexual orientation as two different things. Sexual orientation refers to one's sexual attraction to men, women, both,or neither, whereas gender identity refers to one's sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender.

The largest segment of the transgender community is made up of cross dressers who are biological males. Most of them are heterosexual in their sexual orientation – which means they are sexually attracted to women

Usually transexuals who are attracted to women prior to transition continue to be attracted to women after transition, and transexuals who are attracted to men prior to transition continue to be attracted to men after transition.

That means, for example, that a biologic male who is attracted to women will most likely be attracted to women after transitioning as a transsexual woman, and she may regard herself as a lesbian. Likewise a biologic female who is attracted to men may continue to be attracted to men after transitioning as a transsexual man, and he may regard himself as gay.

However, it often happens that a transsexual woman will find that she is now attracted to men and want men to be attracted to her – even though this attraction to men was not present before coming out as a transgender woman. She may well think of herself as heterosexual. This same situation occurs with transgender men who find themselves attracted to women and find that a perfectly heterosexual experience.

Again, there are mixtures of sexual orientations. In some cases a transgender woman may find herself attracted to men (hetero relationship) but also attracted to women (bi-sexual relationship). The same situation can play out with a transgender man.

Finally, some transgender people find that they no longer have an interest in sex and yet are able to lead a satisfying asexual life. This situation is most often found in transgender women who are taking female hormones.

SESSION TWO

How Do We Get to Acceptance?

In this second session we will explore the biblical references to transgender persons and we will also talk about how churches respond to transgender people.

Using a set of scenerios, we will also explore how prepared you think your congregation is to have a transgender person as part of the worshipping community.

We will give you an opportunity to talk about your own exposure or lack of exposure to transgender people and what concerns, apprehensions or fears you might have about a transgender person being in your congregation.

How are Transgender People Treated in the Bible?

- Use resource sheet for discussion

Activity: Assign and Discuss Scenarios

- If the participating group is large, split into small groups and assign a different scenario to each group.
- Ask one member of each group to be the facilitator/reader and another person to act as the recorder/presenter of the group's discussion points.
- If the participating group is small enough, the full group can carry on the discussion. Ask someone to read one of the scenarios then have the group react. Try to summarize their reactions. Do other scenarios as time permits.

How Do Other Cultures See Gender?

- Use resource sheet for discussion

SESSION TWO

DISCUSSION 1:
What Does the Christian Tradition Say?

Deuteronomy 22:5

A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God. (NRSV)

In the bible, Deuteronomy 22:5 is the one text that speaks to anything approaching transgender. And here most biblical scholars say the prohibitions against wearing the garments of the opposite sex are aimed at:

- Keeping women in their place as property, or:
- Preserving Jewish traditions by prohibiting other worship services where priest donned the garments of female deities, or:
- Stopping the mixing one category with another (it was prohibited, for instance, to wear a garment made from several different fabrics).

In any case, the rules were aimed at preserving specific social or religious norms, not aimed at transgender people. In fact, many feel that these Old Testament laws are best fulfilled, as Christ said, by loving God and others as we love ourselves. And then there is Paul's proclamation: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,"

The Torah has the same passage but translated differently

A man's item shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not wear a woman's garment; whoever does such a thing is an abhorrence unto Adonai. — Deuteronomy 22:5

Discussion points:

- Have you heard this biblical verse before?
- What did it mean to you when you first read it?
- Did it have an effect on what you thought about transgender person?
- Does this explanation change any of your original concerns?

Eunuchs in the Bible:

Eunuchs are not synonymous with transgender people but they do represent a diversity in biblical culture that stands against the traditional gender identities of masculine and feminine.

And this diversity was not abhorred, but rather celebrated in biblical texts:

Isaiah 56:3-5

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people" ; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Matthew 19:11-12

Jesus says, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

Acts 9:27–38

The apostle Philip's baptism of the eunuch is seen by some biblical scholars as an explicit instruction to include eunuchs within the church.

Discussion Points:

- Are there other biblical concerns you have about transgender people?
- Are there things you have heard preached or said in church settings about transgender people?
- Are you familiar with the role that transgender people play in other cultures and other religions? Are those positive or negative roles?

Clobber Passages:

There are six passages in the bible that are cited by conservative Christians in condemning homosexuality. Called the "clobber passages", these biblical citations have been refuted by countless biblical scholars. Nevertheless, they have caused anguish and pain to many gay, lesbian and bisexual Christians. Since transACTION is about gender identity and gender presentation, not sexual orientation, these passages have not included in this curriculum but you should be aware of their existence.

SESSION TWO

ACTIVITY 1:
Scenarios

Please read one of these scenarios within your group and then respond to what you've heard. How were you affected by the story? If you were in a church facing this same situation, how would you react?

JULIE and JIM:

From age three, Julie told her parents that she was a boy. She was not interested in the girl toys that people gave her but found ways to play enthusiastically and endlessly with the toys of her boy pals.

Her mother bought her girl's clothes: dresses, tops, shorts and slacks – all the things that other girls her age were wearing. Julie wanted none of that and would only dress in things she considered boys' clothes: jeans and tee shirts.

She started calling herself Jim and wanted people to use masculine pronouns: to say "him' and "his" when referring to who she was.

As school loomed on the horizon, Julie's parents were concerned about how that experience would go. They talked to their pediatrician, their minister, their friends and got back a mixture of advice ranging from "put your parental foot down" to " bring her to a psychiatrist" to "let her express herself as she wants and see whether this is a passing fad".

Their minister was willing to admit that he knew nothing about gender issues but said he did know the Bible said that wearing the clothes of the opposite sex was sinful – so Julie had to live and act like a girl or she was going to lose God's love.

MARK and MAUREEN:

Mark has just retired from a successful business career. His family was grown and on their own. Mark realized that the two major fears that kept him from exploring the feminine side that lived just beneath the surface of his life – the fear of losing his job and the fear of losing his family – now have disappeared. He decides to begin seeing what it is like to live as the woman he always felt himself to be.

Mark, now Maureen, shows up at your church because she wants to continue her strong relationship to God and understood your congregation was a "welcoming church" that embraced GLBT people.

But, while your church had gone through a process – including educational programs – aimed at educating the congregation and the members had voted to become a welcoming church, the program never talked about transgender people. This was true, even though the process always talked about GLBT persons. Now there is a "T" – transgender – person in your worship space and nobody knows how to react.

Someone offers that there is a nearby church that has a transgender member and suggests that your church bring Maureen there because it may be a more welcoming place for her to worship.

The pastor approaches Maureen with that idea but she feels rejected and is not willing to go any place else. She decides to leave and try to be spiritual on her own since she is not welcome in your space.

JAMIE:

Jamie started coming to your church about three months ago and has caused consternation among some congregants who are having a tough time deciding whether she is a woman or he is a man.

"She dresses like a guy – but so do a lot of other women, some of them in this very church. So, clothes apparently aren't the determining factor."

"When it comes to singing hymns in two parts, she often will be singing with the men."

"He most often hangs around the men after worship, but then he will be involved with the women's group on a project. It's really confusing"

Jamie has told some people in the church that the gender labels of man or woman doesn't fit who Jamie is. Gender queer is the term Jamie uses as a self-description.

Also the usual gender pronouns don't fit, Jamie is not he or she, not him or her. Jamie has told these church members that there are gender neutral pronouns, like sie and hir for he and him and she and her. But Jamie realizes that most people won't be able to assimilate such a change so Jamie isn't offended when people say he or she when they refer to Jamie.

(continued on page 15)

SESSION TWO

ACTIVITY 1:
Scenarios

(continued from page 14)

KAREN and CATHY:

John and Cathy have been members of your congregation for nearly 20 years. Each is very active in the various church committees and program and extremely well liked as a couple – and as individuals.

John has decided that he has to become the person he always knew he was – a women. He is seeing a counselor and intends to begin hormone treatments as soon as possible with sex reassignment surgery to follow as quickly as he receives approval.

As part of that approval process, he will soon begin being Karen, starting the transition that requires living full time in the opposite gender for what could be a year or more before getting the go-ahead for the sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

Cathy has decided to support his decision and will stay married even after the surgery is completed.

While Karen's decision to come out as a transsexual has caused great concern and confusion among the church members, they are more troubled by Cathy's willingness to support such a drastic step.

Both Cathy and Karen are troubled by the hostility they feel coming from persons they used to think of as friends. They are no longer invited to social events or asked to serve on church committees. Cathy has had women chide her for her decision and some have called her a traitor to her gender.

Both Karen and Cathy have asked the church council to schedule an educational program to give the church members some understanding about transgender issues with the hope that such information would make the congregation more accepting of their decision.

Unfortunately the council said "no" to their request, deciding that such a program could be too divisive for the congregation and might end with people deciding to leave the church.

Karen and Cathy have left their congregation of 20 plus years and are now looking for a place they can call home; where they will be welcomed in their new relationship.

RICKY:

Ricky is a trans man who has been a church member for nearly a year. He has been involved with a variety of church project but has a special talent for keeping the church equipment functioning, whether it is the snow blower or the touchy toilet valves. Everybody is pleased with how Ricky has pitched in to keep the old church working.

Ricky has decided to become more involved with church governance. He feels he has some good ideas that may help make the church more attractive and successful in attracting new congregants. He puts his name forward as a candidate for an opening on the church council.

The nominations committee tells him that he can't run for that position because the church by-laws call for the position to be filled by a male. Ricky reminds them that he is a man – a trans man. The committee agrees to take that response to the council. The council decides that the words in the bylaws call for a "male" and that Ricky is not a male, therefore he is not eligible to run for that office.

Ricky is disappointed but decides to stay with church but he has stopped his maintenance projects and now only attends worship services on Sunday.

SESSION TWO

DISCUSSION 2:
How Do Other Cultures See Gender?

TWO SPIRIT

Two-Spirit people are American Indians who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles found traditionally among many American Indian and Canadian First Nations indigenous groups. Traditionally the roles included wearing the clothing and performing the work of both male and female genders. The term usually implies a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit living in the same body.

FA'AFAFINE

In some Polynesian societies, fa'afafine are considered to be a "third gender" alongside male and female. They are biologically male, but dress and behave in a manner considered typically female. Fa'afafine are accepted as a natural gender, and neither looked down upon nor discriminated against.

HIJRA

In the culture of the Indian subcontinent, a hijra is usually considered to be neither a man nor a woman. Most are biologically male or intersex, but some are biologically female. The hijra form a third gender, although they do not enjoy the same acceptance and respect as males and females in their cultures.

XANITH

The xanith form an accepted third gender in Oman, an Islamic, gender-segregated society. The xanith dressing is male, featuring pastel colors (rather than white, worn by men), but their mannerisms female. Xanith can mingle with women and have their own households, performing all tasks (both male and female) in marriage. Should a divorce or death take place, these men can revert to their status as xaniths at the next wedding.

SESSION THREE

How Do We Get to Welcoming?

In this last session we will discuss how a congregation can make itself a place where transgender people feel welcome to come to worship and be a part of the church community. And where the members of the congregation can feel blessed to have transgender persons in their worship space and meeting rooms.

Much of what will be presented is basic hospitality but there are some issues that pose special challenges to the transgender community and the congregation needs to be prepared to deal with those concerns.

There is also a need to consider how your congregation or organization can respond affirmatively to the challenges transgender people face outside the welcoming walls of your institution: such as employment, healthcare, local and state laws against transgender people and their basic rights in society.

At the end of all of these sessions, we expect that your congregation will be ready to offer not only a welcoming environment to any transgender people who walk through your doors but also a supportive environment for the issues they are challenged by in their daily lives.

SESSION THREE

DISCUSSION 1:
How to Make Your Congregation More Trans-Friendly

Congregations and other Christian organizations are making changes and developing programming to educate members about transgender issues. The following are some examples of steps that institutions have taken to become more inclusive and welcoming.

As you implement changes, make sure to work with and support the leadership of transgender people themselves whenever possible.

1. ASKING QUESTIONS

The first question to ask about someone else's gender is: "Do I really need to know?" In most situations, it is not necessary to know anything about a person's gender in order to include and welcome them. For example, if someone walks into a worship service and his or her gender is unclear, there is rarely any reason to ask or comment on this. The person is there to pray and be in community.

If you decide that you do need to understand more about someone else's gender, appropriate and respectful questions include: "What pronoun do you prefer?" or "Is there anything I/we/the community can do to make this a more comfortable place?" It is inappropriate to ask about transgender people's bodies or medical history.

2. EDUCATION

- Repeat this educational curriculum for others in your congregation.
- Invite the whole community to a panel discussion, workshop, or other event that will offer information and open up dialogue about transgender issues.
- Offer an adult education class or sermon about gender diversity in Biblical texts or transgender issues in general.
- Advertise, host, or co-sponsor other organizations' transgender-related programs.
- Assess the messages conveyed in your religious education or children's programs about gender and gender roles. Make sure there is support for trans and gender-nonconforming children and parents.

3. FACILITIES

Create a non-gender-specific restroom that is available to everyone. If you already have a single-stall restroom in your building, this can be easily accomplished by covering the "Men" or "Women" sign with an "All-Gender Restroom" sign. This applies to temporary, shared or rental facilities also.

In buildings where a single-stall restroom does not already exist, it may be more complicated to create restroom options that will make all members of your community feel comfortable.

(continued on page 19)

SESSION THREE

DISCUSSION 1:
How to Make Your Congregation More Trans-Friendly

(continued from page 18)

However, doing this work sends a very important message about the accessibility of your community. Many transgender people decide where they will go based upon whether there is a trans-friendly restroom or not.

Remember that some transgender people may not be "out" to the rest of the world and are uncomfortable, or afraid, to be seen in public in their transgender persona. Having a private place for these people to change before and after church services or meetings serves as a meaningful signal that your congregation is fully welcoming. Such a facility may not be necessary or used frequently but consider planning for this possibility.

4. LANGUAGE

Let people know that you are trans-inclusive by using welcoming language. This is very important. In newsletters, event announcements, sermons etc., instead of saying "this event welcomes men and women," try "all genders welcome"; rather than talking about "both men and women," try "people of all genders." Saying that your community welcomes "everyone" is not enough. Research shows that transgender, as well as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, often assume the word "everyone" does not include them.

Be sure that forms that ask for gender information include a place for someone to mark "transgender". Be sure to ask for "gender" not "sex".

5. POLICIES

Include "gender identity" and "gender expression" in your non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. Be sure your by-laws are trans-inclusive and don't limit individuals involvement because of gender restrictive language.

6. OUTREACH

Create an outreach plan that includes the changes your community is making. Remember that the world at large is not very welcoming to transgender people. Therefore, trans people often assume that they are not welcome or included in your community, unless it is stated otherwise. Publicize the trans-inclusive steps that your community has taken, as well as the programs that you are planning. This lets trans people know that your community cares about being an affirming place for them. Try to tell your story through the media outlets that reach the GLBT community.

7. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ACTION

Include transgender and gender diversity issues as part of your community's social action work. Support transgender community services and advocacy organizations.

Learn about local laws regarding:

- Hate crimes
- Name changes
- Changing gender "markers' on legal documents
- Discrimination – such as employment, housing
- Impersonation of a gender

Learn about and support an inclusive Federal Employment Non-discrimination Act (ENDA)

8. RITUAL

Be prepared to incorporate or develop new rituals or adapt existing ones in order to be trans-inclusive. How comfortable might a trans person be marking a wedding, baptism, loss, or other life-cycle event in your congregation? How open could they be about talking about their identity from the pulpit or altar? Transgender people often experience unique life-cycle events, such as moments of gender transition or a name change.

Support transgender events where liturgy may be an appropriate element. The Transgender Day of Remembrance, held every November 20th, is an annual recognition of the violence faced by transgender people. While this gathering to remember those who have been killed in the past 12 months is not designed to be a religious event, there can be a role for your congregation to show its support against violence aimed at transgender persons during a regular worship service around the time of the Day of Remembrance.

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF TRANSGENDER RESOURCES

ON THE WEB

www.welcomingresources.org

The Institute for Welcoming Resources is a program of The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force that provides resources and training for member programs of the Welcoming Church movement.

www.transfaithonline.org

TransFaith Online is dedicated to supporting transgender folk in our faith journeys, while providing useful resources to help people of faith become better educated trans-allies.

www.nctequality.org

National Center for Transgender Equality contains information on a variety of transgender concerns.

www.pflag.org

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), is an excellent organization for support and information, especially for family members. Numerous local support groups exist. Find one near you for a transgender speaker or panelist in your community! A good place to begin looking is by contacting your nearest LGBT Community Center or PFLAG organization.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Becoming a Visible Man. Jamison Green, Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

Crossing Over: Liberating the Transgendered Christian. Vanessa Sheridan, Pilgrim Press, 2001.

Gender Loving Care: A Guide to Counseling Gender-Variant Clients. Randi Ettner, Ph.D., W. W. Norton and Company, 1999.

Made in God's Image: A Resource for Dialogue About the Church and Gender Differences. Ann Thompson Cook, Dumbarton United Methodist Church, 2003.

Mark 947: A Life Shaped by God, Gender and Force of Will. Calpernia Sarah Addams, Writers Club Press, 2002.

Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach. Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. ISBN 0-8298-1422-1, 208 pages, Hardcover, The Pilgrim Press, 2001.

Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working With Gender-Variant People and Their Families. Ari Istar Lev, Haworth Press, 2004.

Trans Forming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones, 2nd Edition. Mary Boenke, Editor, Oak Knoll Press, 2003.

Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith. Justin Edward Tanis, Pilgrim Press, 2003.

Transgendering Faith: Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality. Tigert, Leanne McCall and Maren C. Tirabassi, eds. ISBN 0-8298-1494-9, 176 pages, The Pilgrim Press, 2004.

Transition and Beyond: Observations on Gender Identity. Reid Vanderburgh, Q Press, Portland, OR. ISBN 1-893075-38-9

True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism for Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals. Mildred L. Brown and Chloe Ann Rounsley, Jossey-Bass publishers, 1996.

(continued on page 21)

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF TRANSGENDER RESOURCES

(continued from page 20)

MEDIA

Call Me Malcolm

ISBN/Prod. Code: wcmcm2 USA

Order from United Church Press
www.unitedchurchpress.com $14.95*

"Call Me Malcolm" was co-produced by the United Church of Christ and Filmworks, Inc., and since it's debuted at the Riverside (Calif.) International Film Festival (2004), it has screened across the country and around the world, including New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Adelaide (Australia), Johannesburg (South Africa), and Mexico City.

The 90-minute film tells the story of the Rev. Malcolm E. Himschoot, then a UCC seminary student, who poignantly explores his struggles with faith, love and gender identity.

There is also a downloadable curriculum, for more information go to www.ucc.org/lgbt

* this is a special price for congregations using the transACTION curriculum; please indicate when ordering.

FRAMELINE

The following DVDs are transgender resources available for sale or rental from Frameline, a San Francisco based GLBT media outlet (**www.frameline.org**). Contact Frameline for discount pricing for non-profits and rental rates.

The Believers

Todd Holland 2006 80 min. USA

This award winning documentary tells the story of the formation of Transcendence, the world's first transgender gos[el choir from City of Refuge United Church of Christ in San Francisco. The film shows the dilemma of the choir members as they try to reconcile their gender identity with the message that has filled their lives that changing one's gender is against God's law.

T642-DVD, Believers, The – DVD $250.00

CONTACT FRAMELINE FOR RENTAL RATES

Just Call Me Kade

Sam Zolten 2001 26 min. USA

Kade Farlow Collins is a sixteen year old FTM (female to male transgendered person) residing in Tucson, Arizona. Kade's parents maintain a supportive and nurturing relationship to Kade regarding the many challenges facing their teenage child. However, it hasn't always been easy. Friends and family candidly express their feelings about the transition, the changes in Kade and the impact on everyone involved.

T526-DVD, Just Call Me Kade – DVD $125.00

T526-Rent, Just Call Me Kade – Rental $75.00

CONTACT FRAMELINE FOR RENTAL RATES

transparent

Jules Rosskam 2005 61 min. USA

Gender roles we all take for granted are broken apart in transparent, a documentary about 19 female-to-male transsexuals living in the United States who have given birth and, in all but a few stories, gone on to raise their biological children.

transparent focuses on its subjects' lives as parents, revealing the diverse ways in which each person reconciles giving birth and being a biological mother with his masculine identity. Traditional views of gender are further re-examined through the variety of genders the children use to conceive of their parents. The first-person stories in transparent explain how changing genders is dealt with and impacts the relationships, if at all, within these families.

T487-DVD, transparent – DVD $250.00

CONTACT FRAMELINE FOR RENTAL RATES