

Overture 11-12, From New Castle Presbytery: Affirming And Celebrating The Full Dignity And Humanity Of People Of All Gender Identities

Concurrence: Mission Presbytery, Presbytery de Cristo, and Synod of the Covenant

That the 223rd General Assembly adopt the following resolution:

Standing in the conviction that all people are created in the image of God and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people, the 223rd General Assembly affirms its commitment to the full welcome, acceptance, and inclusion of transgender people, people who identify as gender non-binary, and people of all gender identities within the full life of the church and the world. The Assembly affirms the full dignity and the full humanity of transgender people, their full inclusion in all human rights, and their giftedness for service. The Assembly affirms the church's obligation to stand for the right of people of all gender identities to live free from discrimination, violence, and every form of injustice.

Making these affirmations, the Assembly acknowledges that the church has fallen short of these commitments and obligations. In the world and in the Church, transgender people too often experience and suffer discrimination and violence. The church has failed to understand fully and to celebrate adequately the full spectrum of gender embodied in God's creation. As a result, we have participated in systemic and targeted discrimination against transgender people, and we have been complicit in violence against them. The Assembly affirms the scriptural obligation to work for justice for all God's children, and particularly here to work for justice for people of all gender identities. We have fallen short of this obligation, and – by the grace of God – commit ourselves to do better.

These affirmations and this commitment are rooted and grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the breadth of Scripture, and in the Reformed Tradition. Scripture affirms that all people are created in the image of God. In God's creation, we see and experience God's image expressed across a broad and life-giving expression of gender. Honoring the breadth and variety of our gender identities and expressions is one of the ways we can come to an even deeper understanding of who we are created to be in relationship to God and each other. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospel, and the Reformed Tradition affirm the dignity and worth of all people and call on individuals and communities to work for the well-being and protection of all people. Because we recognize that people of all gender identities are created equally in the image of God, we also recognize that we share a mutual obligation to stand for the right of all people and all gender identities and gender expressions to live free from discrimination and from violence. The image of God expansively and specifically includes people of all gender identities including transgender, cis-gender, gender non-binary people, and people of all gender expressions.

Accordingly, the General Assembly empowers, authorizes, and directs the Stated Clerk and the Office of Public Witness to advocate for the rights of transgender people and for legal protections to ensure and protect the full humanity and dignity of people of all gender identities. Specifically,

the Stated Clerk and the Office of Public Witness are authorized to support the right of transgender individuals to:

- to serve in the military, and every type of government and public service,
- to full access to public accommodations, including gender inclusive restrooms,
- to full legal protection against discrimination, particularly with regard to employment, housing, education, and health care,
- to title IX protections for transgender students against violence and bullying,
- to other legal protections that guarantee and safeguard the full rights of transgender individuals.

The General Assembly also encourages congregations of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to welcome transgender and gender non-binary people into the life of the church and to continue to grow in compassion and knowledge about the full expression of our individual and respective gender identities. To that end, the GA directs the Presbyterian Mission Agency to consult with existing LGBTQ+ focused advocacy organizations to develop and/or adopt educational resources to support congregational and denominational learning, and encourages Synods, Presbyteries, Seminaries, and congregations to do the same.

Transgender inclusion is lived out in our congregations and Presbyterian institutions in the following ways:

- Welcoming statements that specifically name transgender and gender non-binary people as included within the life of the church
- Policies that are inclusive of transgender and gender non-binary people
- Available facilities such as bathrooms that are either designated as gender neutral, or allow for transgender and non-binary people to use the facility that matches their gender identity
- Worship, liturgy, and hymns employ language inclusive of all gender identities
- Transgender and gender non-binary people's pronouns are respected and used appropriately.

Rationale

Our call as Christians is to welcome the diversity of all God's creation

- “For by God all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through God and for God. And God is before all things, and in God all things hold together” (Col. 1:16–17).
- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3: 28).

The terms to describe and define sexual orientation, gender identity and expression evolve as individuals name the nuances of who they are created to be. While language is inadequate to keep up with the depth of human experience, the Directory for Worship also reminds us, “the church is committed to using language in such a way that all members of the community of faith, may recognize themselves to be included, addressed, and equally cherished before

God” (W-1.2006b). For the purpose of this overture, we use the following description of the terms to describe transgender and gender non-binary experiences:

- Transgender: an intentionally broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned t when they were born.
- Gender Non-Binary: a term that is often used to describe people whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify with no gender, with a gender other than male or female, or as more than one gender.

In the world and in the Church, transgender people, and those who are gender non-binary, too often experience and suffer discrimination and violence. The findings of the [2015 U.S. Transgender Survey](#), the largest survey examining the experiences of transgender and gender non-binary people from all fifty states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. military bases overseas “reveal disturbing patterns of mistreatment and discrimination and startling disparities between transgender people in the survey and the U.S. population when it comes to the most basic elements of life, such as finding a job, having a place to live, accessing medical care, and enjoying the support of family and community.”

- Of 28,000 respondents, just in the year prior to the survey (2014), 30% who had a job were fired, 46% of respondents were verbally harassed and 9% were physically attacked because of being transgender. Nearly one-third (29%) of respondents were living in poverty, compared to 14% in the U.S. population. The majority of respondents who were out, or perceived as transgender while in school (K-12), experienced some form of mistreatment, including being verbally harassed (54%), physically attacked (24%), and sexually assaulted (13%) because they were transgender. Transgender people of color have some of the highest rates of discrimination, unemployment, and poverty compared to white transgender people, and to people who share the same race. While respondents in the USTS sample overall were more than twice as likely as the U.S. population to be living in poverty, people of color, including Latino/a (43%), American Indian (41%), multiracial (40%), and Black (38%) respondents, were up to three times as likely as the U.S. population (14%) to be living in poverty. The unemployment rate among transgender people of color (20%) was four times higher than the U.S. unemployment rate (5%). The survey also notes that growing visibility of transgender issues has lifted up not only the voices of transgender men and women, but also people who are non-binary, “with non-binary people making up over one-third of the sample, the need for advocacy that is inclusive of all identities in the transgender community is clearer than ever.”

In confession, we recognize and name the places we fall short in our relationship with God and with one another. For the church, the Confession of 1967 acknowledges, “In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations” (Confession of 1967, 9.43). In this particular time, the testimony of the harm and violence transgender and gender non-binary people face daily in this country calls upon the church to act. We confess that the violence impacting transgender people is not new, and that the church has not yet been outspoken to claim transgender and gender non-binary people as created in the image of God. In our own denomination, transgender and gender non-binary people have longed to use their gifts within our sanctuaries and within ordained ministry. Our silence as a church has meant that those

who are transgender or gender non-binary seeking to serve the church have not received calls to ordained service, or have felt unwelcome to bring their full gifts into the life of the church.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has previously affirmed the need for the church to stand for the dignity and worth of “homosexual persons” (*the term used at the time of passage*). Given the disproportionate rates of discrimination and harassment faced by transgender and non-binary persons, the church is called to expand its affirmation of the dignity and worth to include transgender and non-binary people.

- The 117th and 118th General Assemblies asserted “the need for the church to stand for just treatment of homosexual persons [sic] in our society in regard to their civil liberties, equal rights and protection under the law from social and economic discrimination which is due all its citizens.”
- On Affirming Civil Rights and Nondiscrimination for All Persons, Regardless of Sexual Orientation. That the 214th General Assembly (2002) direct the Stated Clerk to communicate the following action to all clergy, congregations, and seminaries: The General Assembly reaffirms these resolutions adopted by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the UPCUSA-
 1. Calls upon Presbyterians to work for the passage of laws that prohibit discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations based on the sexual orientation of a person.

In the Foundations of Presbyterian polity in our *Book of Order*, the church is to be identified as “a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions” (F-2.01). To that end, this overture embraces two specific actions: advocacy and learning, for the denominational leadership and agencies, mid-councils, congregations, and seminaries. It authorizes the office to engage in the issues of our day to advocate for the rights of transgender and non-binary people and for legal protections to ensure and protect the full humanity and dignity of people of all gender identities. At the same time it encourages learning in order to grow in compassion for transgender and gender non-binary people. Resources to support this learning can be drawn from a number of sources including:

- More Light Presbyterians’ transgender inclusion resource page: <https://mlp.org/trans-inclusion/> and teach-in video series on [Gender Justice and Trans Inclusion](#).
- The National Center for Trans Equality has compiled a number of resources for education on transgender and non-binary persons: <https://transequality.org/about-transgender>
- Transgender Law Center developed an action center focused on supporting laws to prohibit discrimination for transgender individuals: <https://transgenderlawcenter.org/resources>
- Teaching Transgender Toolkit offers a range of curricula to help individuals teach workshops on transgender education <http://www.teachingtransgender.org>