

7.4 Transgenderism

A transgender person has a defined sex but experiences their gender identity to be at odds with that sex (sometimes called ‘assigned sex’). Some transgender people operate within the binary model of ‘male’ or ‘female’ but are convinced they are the opposite sex to their body and want to modify their body to agree with their gender. Such people often identify as transsexuals.

A male-to-female transsexual is someone whose sexual biology is male but who is convinced they are a female. Conversely, a female-to-male transsexual is someone whose sexual biology is female but who is convinced they are a male.

Some transgender people reject the traditional binary model and identify as another gender: neutrois, neutral or null gender; genderfluid; genderqueer; two-spirit; intergender; pangender; trigender. They, too, have a disjunction between their embodied sex and their internal, subjective convictions about their self.¹

There is another category of transgender people. They are intersex. There are a small number of people who are born with conditions in which their physical and sexual features do not reflect the regular binary structure (Disorders of Sex Development or intersex). The prevalence of DSD is challenging to determine because it covers a wide range of conditions, some of which are not obvious until a person has a medical investigation.

They would have genitalia of both sexes. There is no medical consensus on the treatment of many intersex conditions. In this case, they are unsure of their gender not because of a subjective self-understanding but because of the inconclusive biological conditions and experiences. Doctors and even psychiatrists are suggesting that time be given for their bodies and hormones to stabilise so that a more definitive gender can be identified. We need to show compassion and a clear awareness of the pain and struggles of intersex people, with a straightforward theological approach focussing on redemption in Christ.

We saw that in Genesis 1:27, “male and female He created them,” affirming that God designed humanity as sexually dimorphic, with male and female representing the two distinct biological categories. We understand both transgenderism and intersex conditions as

¹ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is one of the standard diagnostic guides for mental health professionals. The fifth and latest edition was published in 2013. DSM is the classification system used in the US and much of Australia; the International Classification of Disease (ICD) classifications are used in Europe and the United Kingdom. The latest editions of both are seeking uniformity in their coding. Note that many Australian hospitals use ICD so they can include all diseases, not just mental illness, in their patient assessments. ICD-11 uses “gender incongruence”, and DSM-5 uses “gender dysphoria” to replace “transgender”. We retain “transgender” as it is still the term in theological literature.

consequences of the Fall, not as part of God's original creation. This theological paper uses "transgender" to refer to both categories.

7.4.1 Theological Standpoint on Transgenderism

We affirm the belief that human sexuality is part of God's intentional design, characterised by the creation of two distinct sexes: male and female. Transgenderism is viewed as incompatible with this biblical understanding.

1. **Divine Design and Creation:** According to Genesis 1:31, God created humanity in His image as male and female, and this design is deemed "very good." Sexuality is considered a gift from God, and any deviation, including transgenderism, is because of human fallenness and depravity.
2. **The Augsburg Confession Article XXVII** (Latin text) argues that marriage between a man and a woman is God's "creation and institution". This is the foundation for a proper human sexual relationship.²
3. **Human Dignity and Worth:** Despite theological disagreements with transgender practices, we emphasise that God loves transgender individuals and should be treated with respect, dignity, and compassion. They are considered persons of worth who live under God's grace.
4. **Marriage and Sexual Ethics:** The church reaffirms its commitment to traditional Christian sexual ethics, which include marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Transgender theologies are viewed as contradictory to these foundational beliefs. The modern transgender movement is seen as challenging the reality of two distinct sexes, potentially leading to significant consequences for individuals, families, and society.
5. **Ordination and Church Leadership:** We oppose the ordination of transgender individuals into clergy roles and the celebration of transgenderism as a gift from God. The church must stand firm in its teachings and not compromise on its theological convictions.
6. **Role of the Church:** The church is encouraged to continue proclaiming the truth of God's design for sexuality and gender, offering guidance and teaching based on biblical principles. This includes opposing cultural trends that seek to redefine or dismantle traditional understandings of gender and sexuality.

² "Moreover, this is the command of God [1 Cor. 7:2*]: "Because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife." Not only God's command, but also *God's creation and institution* [emphasis] drive those into marriage who, apart from a special work of God, are not exempted according to Genesis 2[:18*]: "It is not good that the man should be alone." Consequently, those who comply with this *command and institution of God* [emphasis] do not sin." Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 85.

7.4.2. Pastoral Care and Attitudes

Recognising the complexities and personal struggles associated with transgenderism, we provide guidelines for pastors on how to minister to transgender individuals in a manner consistent with Christian teachings.

1. **Law and Gospel Distinction:** Pastors are instructed to uphold the distinction between Law and Gospel when dealing with transgender persons. This means convicting individuals of sin through the Law while offering forgiveness and hope through the Gospel. The example of Jesus' compassion towards the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) is cited as a model for pastoral care.
2. **Compassionate Engagement:** Pastors are encouraged to avoid condemnatory language or attitudes. Instead, they should approach transgender individuals with humility, recognising their sinfulness. The goal is to offer God's forgiveness and support healing and transformation through Christ.
3. **Trust-Circle Approach:** This method involves building trust with transgender individuals. Pastors should communicate respectfully, listen empathetically, and offer counsel based on God's Word. The trust circle may include forming small support groups within the church to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the individual.
4. **Communication and Confidentiality:** Maintaining confidentiality is emphasised. Pastors should create a safe space for open dialogue, ensuring that transgender individuals feel heard and respected. This involves avoiding harsh judgments and sensitivity to the person's experiences and feelings.
5. **Avoidance of Coercive Methods:** We clarify that our approach is not akin to "conversion therapy," which may involve coercive or harmful practices. Instead, the focus is on loving persuasion, biblical teaching, and spiritual support without force or psychological manipulation.

7.4.3. Practical Scenarios and Pastoral Actions

We provide practical examples to guide pastors in real-life situations involving transgender individuals within the church community.

Scenario 1: Participation in Church Activities

A transgender church member wishes to join the choir. Pastors should consider:

- Whether the individual is repentant and willing to follow pastoral advice, including counselling.
- If they are willing to present themselves in alignment with their biological sex (e.g., refraining from cross-dressing).
- The readiness of the choir and congregation to accept and support the individual.
- The suitability of leadership roles based on the person's alignment with church teachings.

Scenario 2: Transgender Individuals Seeking Inclusion

1. Continuing in Perceived Gender: For those wishing to live as their perceived gender, pastors should:
 - Show respect and welcome them as any other visitor.
 - Engage in open conversations about biblical views on sexuality without compromising theological convictions.
 - Encourage repentance and, if necessary, consider church discipline compassionately if the individual remains unrepentant.
 - Provide support groups to foster genuine Christian friendship and care.
2. Desiring to Return to Birth-Assigned Gender: For those seeking to detransition:
 - Affirm their desire to align with their biological sex.
 - Offer counselling and possibly partner with professionals to assist in the process.
 - Provide support to their families.
 - Utilize pastoral resources like individual confession and absolution to encourage repentance and assure them of Christ's forgiveness.

Scenario 3: Cross-Dressing Attendees

When a transgender person who cross-dresses attends church services:

- Show them respect and treat them with the usual courtesy.
- If appropriate, privately and respectfully encourage them to refrain from cross-dressing during future visits.
- For members, assess their willingness to align with biblical teachings and offer ongoing counsel.
- Emphasize that refraining from cross-dressing is consistent with repentance and living according to Scripture.

7.4.4 Response to Conversion Therapy Allegations

We address concerns about being associated with "conversion therapy," which is often criticised for involving coercive or harmful methods aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

1. Distinction from Conversion Therapy:
 - Non-Coercive Methods: The church's approach relies solely on respectful communication, biblical counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a clear rejection of any use of physical violence, psychological manipulation, or coercion.
 - Focus on Persuasion and Love: The goal is to persuade individuals through the love of Christ and the truth of Scripture, not to force change upon them. The church emphasises the importance of free will and personal conviction in repentance and transformation.
 - Legal and Ethical Considerations: We note that while conversion therapy bans aim to prevent harmful practices, the church's approach does not fall under such definitions. The pastoral care is meant to be compassionate, voluntary, and respectful of individual rights.

7.4.5. Role of Families and Parental Guidance

1. Raising Children in God's Design: We encourage parents to guide their children to embrace their biological sex lovingly. This involves raising sons and daughters to accept and appreciate their masculinity or femininity as good gifts from God.
2. Responding to Societal Trends: Acknowledging the growing trend of parents raising children without a designated gender or encouraging gender transition, the church urges Christian parents to uphold biblical teachings in nurturing their children's understanding of gender and sexuality.
3. Support for Families: Pastors are advised to provide counsel and support not only to transgender individuals but also to their families, recognising that family members may experience fear, anxiety, or confusion. The church community is encouraged to provide comfort and guidance for families navigating these challenges.

7.4.6. Emphasis on Christ's Forgiveness and Grace

1. Centrality of Christ: Pastoral care aims to lead individuals to Christ, who offers forgiveness, healing, and the power to live according to God's will.
2. Sacraments as Means of Grace: Baptism and Holy Communion are highlighted as vital practices that convey God's grace, strengthen faith, and empower individuals to resist sin. Transgender individuals are encouraged to participate in these sacraments unless they openly reject the church's teachings and remain unrepentant.

3. **Role of Confession and Absolution:** Pastors are encouraged to utilise the orders of individual confession and absolution to facilitate repentance and assure individuals of God's forgiveness. This practice is seen to support transgender persons in their spiritual journey and commitment to live according to biblical teachings.
4. **Community Support:** The church community is called to embody Christ's love, offering support, prayer, and fellowship to those struggling with transgenderism. This reflects the belief that transformation occurs within a loving and supportive faith community.

7.4.7. Pastoral Self-Care and Support

1. **Pastoral Vulnerability:** Recognizing the complexities involved in ministering to transgender individuals, pastors are advised to acknowledge their inadequacies and vulnerabilities.
2. **Building Support Networks:** Pastors are encouraged to seek counsel and support (such as the bishop and fellow pastors). Keeping church councils informed and consulting with Christian professionals are recommended practices.
3. **Training and Preparation:** Pastors may form support groups within the church, consisting of trained lay leaders with a burden to minister to transgender persons. Familiarity with the church's theological position and skills training are emphasised to ensure appropriate and effective ministry.

7.4.8. Legal and Societal Considerations

1. **Understanding Conversion Therapy Legislation:** We acknowledge the concerns raised by the LGBTQ+ community regarding conversion therapy and note the government's position on the matter.³
2. **Navigating Legal Boundaries:** We know that pastoral care practices can be misconstrued as conversion therapy, but we clarify that its methods are pastoral and not coercive. The focus is on voluntary engagement, respect for individual autonomy, and adherence to legal and ethical standards.

³ MOH, News Highlights: "Government's Stance on Changing One's Sexual Orientation Through 'Conversion Therapy'", 4th May 2020, accessed 5th Oct 2024. <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/government's-stance-on-changing-one's-sexual-orientation-through-conversion-therapy>

3. Advocacy for Religious Freedom: We suggest that overly broad definitions of conversion therapy may impinge upon religious freedoms, particularly the right to express and practice deeply held theological convictions. The church advocates for the ability to offer pastoral care in a manner consistent with its beliefs while respecting the rights of individuals.

7.4.9 Conclusion

We present a framework that upholds traditional Christian teachings on gender and sexuality while advocating for a pastoral approach that is compassionate, respectful, and grounded in biblical truth. Transgender individuals are to be treated with dignity and love, receiving guidance and support aimed at leading them towards repentance and life aligned with God's design. The church seeks to balance adherence to its theological convictions with a sincere commitment to ministering to all individuals in the spirit of Christ's love and mercy.

By emphasising the importance of building trust, offering compassionate counsel, and providing community support, the church aims to be a place where individuals struggling with transgenderism can find hope, healing, and transformation through the power of the Gospel.