



From Bishop Donald To the Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers

cc *Bishop's Council, Diocesan and Cathedral Staff, Diocesan Registrar,
Diocesan and Deanery Lay Chairs, Yaxley Deanery Clergy and Lay Chair*

Dear friends

Transgender affirmation

There has been some controversy, and some concern, following the House of Bishops Guidance on ministry to transgender people. I want to say a number of things about this. Points 1-6 below are matters of context. Points 7-12 are my comments on all this. I do not expect everyone to agree with me on all points, but I do hope, pray, and urge, that we talk about these matters in a spirit of mutual respect, unity, and love.

1. The Guidance, issued last December, was in response to a General Synod request to the Bishops, passed by a very large majority in July 2017. Lying behind that request was a wish on the part of some for doctrinal clarity, and for new liturgy, to mark and welcome someone's transition from one gender to another. The House of Bishops discussed this request in 2017, and, I think unanimously, agreed:
 - that there was no need for either a doctrinal statement or any new liturgy;
 - that the idea of "re-baptism", suggested by some, was totally inappropriate;
 - that we were content with the guidance we had given in 2003 that Christians could validly accept the new gender of those who had transitioned;
 - that we didn't want to pre-empt the work of the group preparing a major publication on all areas of sexuality for 2020;
 - that the "Affirmation of Baptismal Faith" service in *Common Worship* was a good way of marking any major life event or transition;
 - that we would ask a sub-committee to draft new Guidance from us, putting these decisions into effect.

The sub-committee reported back to the House in December 2018 (we only meet as a full House in May and December each year, prior to the General Synod meetings in July and February). Their draft was accepted, and the new Guidance was published.

2. I think there was a slight failure of process at that meeting last December. (Unusually, I was not able to be there for family reasons, so I'm not really in a position to comment, but I'm pretty sure that what I am saying is accurate.) We have lots of papers to read in advance of our meetings, but the draft guidance produced by the sub-committee wasn't included. Apparently it was just read out at the meeting and agreed without people seeing it in print. I would have been unhappy with that if I had been there, but it doesn't make a significant difference to my overall position on the matter.
3. The Guidance as issued states that:

The Church of England welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the body of Christ, and rejoices in the diversity of that body into which all Christians have been baptized by one Spirit.

It then goes on to suggest, in some detail, how the service of "Affirmation of Baptismal Faith" in *Common Worship* could be modified and used for people who wish to be acknowledged or welcomed by their church. In case you haven't read it, I am appending the full text to this letter. It is also available online.
4. The General Synod Human Sexuality Group, coming from a "liberal" or "progressive" position in our Church, welcomes the Guidance, and suggests ten things that transgender people might be looking for their church to do:
 - signal that trans people are welcome;

- be a safe space for them, and for family and friends journeying with them;
 - listen and learn from their experience;
 - be a place where they are not required to hide who they are;
 - recognise the honesty and integrity of their particular journey within the love of Christ;
 - understand that their experience is about being true to their own sense of self;
 - have their loved ones supported and their relationships affirmed;
 - be open to their requests for prayer, and offer resources to mark significant life events;
 - treat them equally with everyone else in the mission and ministry of the church;
 - not presume that they have automatically fallen from grace just for being who they are.
5. On the other hand, an Open Letter has been sent to the House of Bishops, representing a more “conservative” or “traditional” position. This has been signed by over 3,000 people including about 25 of our clergy and a good number of our readers, lay ministers, churchwardens, ordinands, and others. It calls for the Guidance to be “revised, postponed, or withdrawn” until certain changes are made. The letter raises a number of real questions about the science behind transgender issues, the theological and pastoral wisdom of the guidance, and what its signatories describe as the misuse of liturgy. In addition, a number of the signatories have spoken or written to me personally, making similar points, and asking me to respond.
 6. This comes in the context of rapid changes in society. There is a much greater public awareness of transgender issues. I think it fair to say that by and large most people in Britain today understand that a small proportion of us face real difficulties with their gender identity, and that they should be helped, and affirmed. Problems do arise in a few cases with trans women (people who formerly identified as men, but now present as women), especially with regard to changing rooms, prisons, and sports. These are issues only affecting a small minority, but they gain significant publicity, and make the whole subject rather more complicated.
 7. I want to stress that no clergy are under any compulsion to conduct this sort of service. All that is being offered is suggestions for those who want such a resource or some ideas. I regret that the Guidance wasn’t explicit about this. I am sorry that some clergy have been worried that they might be forced to offer ministry contrary to their conscience. I assure you that I will always defend clergy who, as a matter of conscience, choose not to offer forms of ministry which are available but not compulsory.
 8. Those who signed the Open Letter, and others who like them are uncomfortable with the Guidance, have my full respect and support. I accept their views on this matter as fully within the letter and the spirit of the Faith as we have received it. I understand their concerns about what they see as the Church’s direction of travel.
 9. Equally, the points made in paragraph 4 above, seem to me to be uncontroversial, and I hope that that all our worshipping communities will be able to affirm them. Accepting and welcoming all people, especially those who feel or who are marginalised, is clearly mandated by the Gospel.
 10. I want to resist the view that the House of Bishops is in some way promulgating new doctrine or liturgy in this area. It cannot do that without agreement by two-thirds majorities in all three Houses of General Synod, and indeed without consulting all forty Diocesan Synods, and getting agreement from a majority of them. It has specifically stated that it is not intending to do any such thing. In fact, the new Guidance seems to me to be fully in line with the 2003 House of Bishops statement that Christians could validly accept transgender people’s identity, and with such developments from that as the marriage in church, and the ordination as priests, of some transgender people. With all respect, I think that those objecting to the 2018 Guidance as new doctrine should really be objecting to that 2003 decision. Similarly with liturgy, I have heard the complaint that the House of Bishops is doing something new here, but the flexibility of *Common*

Worship resources would have allowed such a service as is envisaged without any Guidance being published.

11. The major publication commissioned by the House of Bishops for 2020, currently under the working title of *Living in Faith and Love*, will lead to much thought, prayer, discussion and debate. The intention is that it will present biblical, historical, scientific, and cultural thinking on the whole area of sexuality and relationships, and become a major resource for future thinking and action. The new Guidance on transgender people in church doesn't attempt to anticipate any of the thinking of that document or any decisions which might ultimately flow from it. It simply aims to meet an expressed pastoral need in one area, without making any definitive statements or any changes to our current teaching.
12. Personally, my preference and my own practice in many areas of sensitive or controversial ministry, has usually been to start with the idea that private or low-key ministry should be considered before moving to major public celebrations. I don't rule out the more public way commended in this Guidance, and I can see that in some cases it will be helpful, but I am sorry that the idea of a low-key approach isn't offered more clearly and prominently in the Guidance. I do commend that for those who might find it helpful.

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Pastoral Guidance from the House of Bishops for use in conjunction with the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith in the context of gender transition

1. The Church of England welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the body of Christ, and rejoices in the diversity of that body into which all Christians have been baptized by one Spirit.

2. If a transgender person is not already baptized, then baptism itself would be the natural liturgical context for recognizing and celebrating their identity in Christ and God's love for them. Where such a person has already been baptized, the House of Bishops commends the rite of Affirmation of Baptismal Faith as the central feature of any service to recognize liturgically a person's gender transition.¹ Where rubrics within that Rite allow, the House encourages ministers to respond to such requests in a creative and sensitive way. 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 as the sacramental beginning of the Christian life, 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. Our shared identity as followers of Jesus is the unity which makes all one in Christ (Galatians 3.27–28).

3. Everyone's journey through life is unique. Baptism is the place where we find our true identity in Christ. As with all pastoral encounters with people negotiating major life events, ministers will wish

to respond sensitively and creatively to the person's circumstances. Trans people are as diverse as any other social group and ministers should avoid stereotyping. It is appropriate, however, to identify the preference of a transgender person in respect of their name and gendered (or other) pronouns. It should be noted that the term 'transgender' is typically preferred to transgendered. For example, the terms 'trans man' (referring to someone who has undergone female-to-male transition) and 'trans woman' (male-to-female) are sometimes preferred by the individual concerned.

4. It is important that the occasion should have a celebratory character, and in preparation for the service, the minister will wish to meet with the candidate to understand better their personal journey. The minister should be guided by the wishes of the candidate regarding the way in which past experiences may be mentioned or reflected upon, either in the introduction to the service or if the candidate is to share their testimony. If members of their family are to be present, the minister will wish to be sensitive to their pastoral needs.

5. The sacrament of baptism provides the minister with a rich vocabulary of images which can be explored both in preparation for the service and in any sermon that may be delivered. In the journey of a trans person this liturgy will probably constitute a watershed in their Christian discipleship. It may be appropriate therefore for the minister to incorporate the Affirmation of the Christian Way (CW:CI p.36) in shaping the service. Obviously, the nature of the service will be determined in part by whether the Affirmation occurs in the company of other candidates, perhaps in the context of the Eucharist, or whether it is a stand-alone service at which only friends and family are likely to be present. The use of this Rite should be in keeping with the Notes in Common Worship: Christian Initiation, which help to explain how the rite can be used in Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic worship of different kinds.

Readings

6. The choice of readings should be governed by the rules in Common Worship (Main Volume, pp.539 ff). When it is permitted to depart from the lectionary provision, other appropriate readings, such as those listed below, may be used. A celebration of the Eucharist must always include a Gospel reading.

Genesis 17.1–7, 15–17: God changes the name of Sarai to Sarah

Genesis 32.22–31: Jacob wrestles at Peniel and is named Israel

Exodus 3.1–15: Moses is called to serve the God named I AM

Isaiah 42.1–9: God's promise concerning God's servant

Isaiah 43.1–7: God's restoration and protection is promised

Isaiah 56.1–8: The maintenance of God's justice and welcome of all to the house of God

Psalms 8: God's divine majesty and human dignity

Psalms 23: The Lord is my Shepherd

Psalms 96: Sing to the Lord a new song

Psalms 139: O Lord you have searched me out and known me

Matthew 5.1–11: The Beatitudes

Matthew 7.7–11: Ask and it shall be given

Matthew 16.13–19: Peter's declaration about Jesus and upon Peter God will build God's church

Matthew 22.37–40: Jesus' Summary of the Law

Luke 15.11–32: The Prodigal Son

John 20.11–18: The risen Lord calls Mary by name

John 20.19–29: Blessed are those who have not seen but believe

John 12.27–36: When Jesus is lifted up, he will draw all people to himself

Romans 8.12–22: All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God

2 Corinthians 5.14–21: In Christ, there is a new creation

Galatians 3.27–4.7: In baptism into Christ there is no longer male and female

Galatians 4.1–7: God sent God's Son that we might receive adoption as children

Philippians 3.4a–end: Our citizenship is in heaven

1 John 3.1–3: What we will be has not yet been revealed

1 John 3.18–23: Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action

1 John 4.18–5.6: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear

Revelation 21.1–6: The new heaven and the new earth

Presentation of the Candidates

7. When the candidate is presented there is an opportunity, should the person so wish, to share testimony (see note, CW:CI p.30). This could provide both the candidate and congregation with an opportunity both to understand the person's Christian journey and to affirm them in their identity. Testimony may culminate with the president inviting the whole congregation to welcome and uphold the candidate in their life in Christ.

Water

8. In commemoration of their baptism, the president may sprinkle candidates, or invite them to sign themselves with water from the font. As in other circumstances, it is important not to give the impression of a second baptism.

Use of the Name

9. In response to the candidate's affirmation of baptismal faith, the Rite makes provision for the president to lay his/her hand on each candidate, saying:

N, may God renew his life within you that you may confess his name this day and for ever.

10. For a trans person to be addressed liturgically by the minister for the first time by their chosen name may be a powerful moment in the service. Some trans people may not wish their former name or gender to be mentioned. It should be noted that the giving or adoption of a new name has a long history in the Judeo-Christian tradition as may be evidenced from Scripture. In some Christian circles, for example, it is customary for candidates to adopt an additional or saint's name at their confirmation. In monastic communities it is not unusual for a person, either on receiving the habit or at profession, to take a new name.

Anointing

11. The Rite for the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith makes provision for the candidate to be anointed with the oil of chrism (CW:CI, pp.347-348). The use of oil may allow those involved to enter into a wealth of biblical imagery about the blessings of the Messianic age.

Giving of gifts

12. The service may conclude with the giving of gifts or a copy of the Bible (which could be inscribed with the person's new name. See CW:CI p.30).

Certification

13. As with all public services, a record of the service should be entered in the parish register. It may be appropriate for the minister to provide the person with a record of the event. This does not constitute a certified copy of an entry in a baptism register (which legally cannot be changed) but in the story of a trans person, such recognition may be pastorally appropriate because it constitutes a public recognition of their identity and welcome in the life of God's church. A possible form of wording may be:

This is to certify that on [date of affirmation] N. reaffirmed the promises first made at their baptism.

An appropriate prayer such as

God of mercy, by whose grace alone we are accepted and equipped for your service: stir up in us the gifts of your Holy Spirit and make us worthy of our calling; that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace.

may be added to the certificate

¹ Affirmation of Baptismal Faith is a service designed to be used normally for those who have already been confirmed. However, if a trans person has not already been confirmed, it might still be pastorally appropriate for the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith to be used because of the flexibility and pastoral adaptation it offers. In such a case, confirmation might follow in due course. Whether the liturgical recognition of gender transition takes place in the context of baptism, confirmation or Affirmation of Baptismal Faith, the House of Bishops encourages ministers to respond to all requests with

as much creativity and sensitivity as the rubrics and Notes allow. The guidance that follows assumes the use of the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith, but much of it could be adapted for baptism or confirmation if that were more appropriate.