When General Synod debated whether to ask the House of Bishops to consider producing liturgy to mark gender transition, a very important amendment was rejected. It called on the House of Bishops to consider the substantial theological and pastoral issues that gender transition raises. Consequently, this pastoral guidance fails to address these important issues.

A. The guidance ignores what the BIBLE says about sex and gender

Jesus taught, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ (Matthew 19:4) referring to the opening chapter of Genesis. The same binary understanding of sex and gender is worked out throughout the scriptures with our maleness and femaleness playing a part in reflecting the image of God. Sadly, much of the transgender/ genderqueer movement seeks to diminish and distort these distinctions. Galatians 3:27-28 speaks of equality in Christ, not the removal of all distinctions.

The Bible teaches that God created us to be an integrated body, soul and spirit (1 Thess 5:23 echoes Gen 2:7). As a result of the Fall, this integration can be marred. A tiny minority of babies are born intersex – neither male nor female. Other people experience a deeply felt confusion about their gender identity. However, to view our body as something ‘other’, that can be altered to fit an inner ‘real me’, has more in common with Gnosticism than Christianity.

As Christians, we need to critique the stereotypes of what it means to be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in order to help us develop healthy gender identities. The growth in child and adolescent referrals to gender dysphoria clinics suggests this is particularly important for young people.

B. The guidance ignores the substantial PASTORAL issues raised by the decision to celebrate when transgender adults transition.

The House of Bishops have offered no pastoral guidance to those ministering to individuals struggling with gender dysphoria, beyond the need to offer “unconditional affirmation.” While churches should offer a safe place for all of us to be honest about the struggles that we face, and all should be loved and welcomed, we are not convinced that this requires unconditional affirmation. We all need to be pointed to Christ so we can understand how our thoughts, feelings and actions need to change in the light of God’s revelation.

The idea of a ‘celebration’ fails to take seriously the potential hurt and confusion felt by family members and loved ones of the person who wishes to mark gender transition; for example, a wife or husband who can no longer know the intimacy of sexual union or who has been abandoned; or parents who long to help their child but at the same time may feel they are grieving the loss of their daughter/son; or children who feel they are losing a parent. These are deeply complicated relationships and the church needs to be able to offer a home to all involved.

There is no mention of how a de-transition should be marked, suggesting that such a decision is less worthy of celebration.

C. The guidance ignores the substantial ETHICAL issues involved in gender transition therapy

The medical profession admits that there are complex ethical decisions involved in the treatment of trans people. Many clergy are concerned that by offering services that mark or celebrate someone’s transition they are being asked to encourage and collude with the medical intervention that has taken place.

The Church of England appears to be giving contrary advice; unconditionally affirming and supporting the medical treatment of those who wish to move away from their unwanted biological sex, while banning any attempt to move away from unwanted same-sex desires.

D. The guidance ignores the fact that the Lord Jesus calls us all to repentance and faith

The guidance says that “The Church of England welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people...”

It is good that the guidance suggests that trans people are equal. This is true and our welcome to trans people must mirror our welcome to anyone else.

The Bible teaches us that as human beings we are fearfully and wonderfully created in the image of God and that we are loved by Him. It also teaches us that that image is broken, that we have wandered and strayed like lost sheep and followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts; or as Paul writes to the Roman church, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). To say otherwise denies the very heart of the gospel.
Just before Christmas, the House of Bishops published pastoral guidance which “welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people” and encourages clergy to use existing liturgy (of Baptism, Confirmation or the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith) if a transgender adult wishes to reaffirm their Christian faith and mark their transition.

This has caused considerable concern amongst lay and ordained members of the Church of England for a variety of theological and pastoral reasons. This briefing seeks to summarise some of those concerns and suggest ideas for further reading.

In his Epiphany letter, Archbishop Nicolas Okoh, Archbishop of Nigeria and Chair of the Gafcon Primates said,

“Although Lambeth Resolution I.10 of 1998 did not directly address gender transition, by taking this step, the Church of England is rejecting biblical authority in a similar way to TEC and other revisionist Provinces which have permitted same sex marriage.

So, much as we thank God for the rich history represented by the See of Canterbury, we cannot avoid the sad truth that insistence on full communion with Canterbury as an essential mark of belonging to the Anglican Communion now risks jeopardising the apostolic faith itself. Let us pray that there will be repentance and that God will give courage and boldness to those who remain faithful.”

In baptism we identify with the Lord Jesus in his death and resurrection, dying to sin and self and seeking to live a new life under his rule.

At confirmation we confirm the promises our parents and godparents made for us as infants.

By suggesting that baptism should be used as a way of marking gender transition, as well as a public proclamation of faith, the guidance confuses and undermines the biblical understanding of baptism in at least three ways:

1. It suggests that baptism is merely about welcome and the unconditional affirmation of our chosen identity – rather than repentance and joy at finding our identity in Christ.
2. It focuses on a self-determined transition from one gender to another, rather than the miracle of the gift of transition from death to life through repentance and faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. By adding and/or refocusing upon additional elements of ‘naming’ and/or physiological changes, neither of which are in the biblical record.

Placing this guidance in the rubric for Common Worship formalises the repurposing of this liturgy.

For further study:

Transformed by Evangelical Alliance - a downloadable booklet and video interviews

'Rewriting Gender? You, your family, transgenderism and the gospel' by David Martin – a book which takes form of letters between a father and son.

Transgender – A short introductory book by Vaughan Roberts


Gafcon UK sends out regular prayer updates and briefings to members.
For more information contact susie@gafconuk.org