

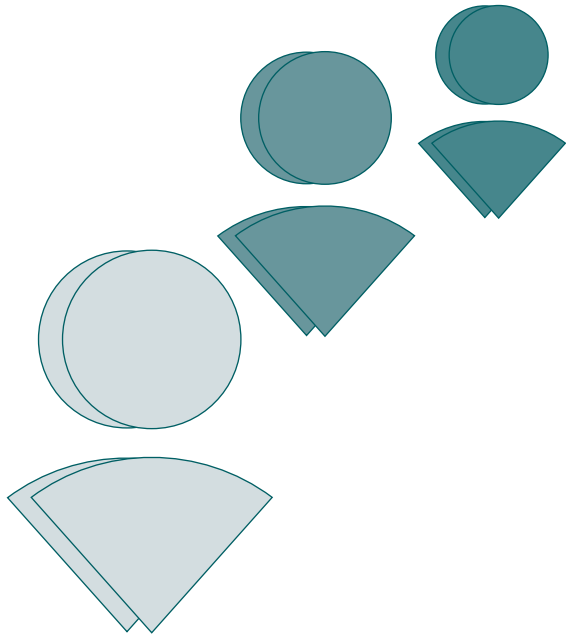
# Including Transgender, Intersex and Other Gender-diverse People in Church Life

Module

# 5.2



Equality, Diversity  
and Inclusion Toolkit



The EDI Toolkit is updated according to a regular schedule. If you see anything you think needs revising, or have any other feedback, please get in touch by contacting [equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk)

If you would like to request this resource in an alternative format, please contact us to discuss your needs at [publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## REMINDER

### The Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work

A document called *Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work* is provided separately. All participants should have a copy of this when they attend their first session. It does not need to be considered in detail every time, but participants should be introduced to it at least once, and made aware that this is the starting point for all our work on EDI issues in the Methodist Church.

## Module 5.2

### Transgender and Intersex Inclusion

#### Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Opening worship</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>EXPLORE</b>	<b>8</b>
2 Introductory activity – art and images	8
3 Introduction to gender diversity	10
4 The journey to date: the Church and the law	14
6 Sensitivity and support during transition – resources	21
7 Use of language – Pronouns	21
<b>APPLY and REFLECT</b>	<b>23</b>
1 Case studies	23
2 Summary questions and learning points	35
<b>EXTEND</b>	<b>38</b>
1 Scripture and theology	38
2 Gender reassignment and transgender identity: Glossary	40
3 Tips, reminders and frequently asked questions	47
<b>Closing worship</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1 - References</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2 - Introductory activity: Art and images</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3 - Further resources</b>	<b>58</b>

## Introduction

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) toolkit builds on the mandatory EDI training for all those in leadership within the Methodist Church, including Ministers, Stewards, Local Preachers and Worship Leaders, and employed Lay Workers. The mandatory training introduces EDI work within the Methodist Church, including examining the legal context, the role of unconscious bias, and the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity adopted by the Methodist Conference of 2021. One of the learning objectives of the mandatory training was to “be able to continue personal EDI development through self-directed learning.” The EDI toolkit provides an opportunity to do that through a series of modules which build on the mandatory training. It begins with an Introductory Module, which includes the Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work, and then consists of a series of main modules.

The EDI Toolkit can be used in various ways. It is suitable for any area of church life, including house groups, leadership teams and continuing learning for preachers and worship leaders. This module can be completed as a single session. Alternatively, these materials can be used as a resource to respond to a particular issue. Selected resources or activities from this module could be used or adapted for use in worship or small groups. The materials can also be read by individuals as part of their individual commitment to EDI learning.

### How long does it take?

The module can be used in various ways, and you will need to adapt the timings according to your group and context. However, if you are completing this module in one 90-minute session, you may find these suggested timings useful:

Welcome	Worship	EXPLORE	APPLY and REFLECT	EXTEND and preparation for next session	Worship
5 mins	10 mins	20 mins	45 mins	Minimal	10 mins

## **Pastoral concerns**

This session was designed, as far as possible, to encourage full participation of all those attending. The facilitator needs to be aware that people may be reluctant to contribute, perhaps because of personal experience of discrimination, bullying or prejudice. We would therefore recommend that you encourage participants to respect one another – particularly respecting confidentiality (where it does not infringe on good safeguarding protocol).

There may be a danger of some participants dominating the discussion if they have a lot to say. We therefore encourage you to circulate the discussion groups if you think this will help. You could also introduce different facilitation tools, such as using a 'speaking object' (like a ball, talking stick etc) or allowing people to write feedback as well as verbalising it. This can maximise opportunities for all to participate.

Finally, there is also a risk that some people participating in this session will be upset by the topic under discussion. The sensitivity of the subject needs to be acknowledged at the start of the session and participants need to be aware of the different ways in which they can seek support to help deal with issues – both during the session and afterwards. Whilst it is important, as outlined above, that participants have equal opportunities to speak if they wish, this should always be optional.

You may want to have a separate space for worship, which could also be used as reflective space if anyone needs to take time out. You should also consider Chaplaincy provision, during the event if possible or afterwards if necessary. Your district or local EDI Officer may be able to assist you in sourcing appropriate Chaplaincy provision.

## **Equality Impact Assessments**

The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment at: [methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/eia](https://methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/eia)

This is a way of reviewing the things we do now and those we plan to do in the future. This process helps ensure that our

practices are fair and inclusive, and that no individual or group of people is inadvertently disadvantaged. This enables us to anticipate and remove or reduce any negative impact.

The EDI Toolkit is designed to help us learn about a range of issues that can affect people within our fellowship and society. But learning is not sufficient. We also need action, to change our processes and procedures to ensure church meets everyone's needs, including those who do not attend. The Equality Impact Assessment also prompts us to think inclusively. We may have a brilliant idea that will meet the needs of some people in our church or community. Collaboratively completing an Equality Impact Assessment ensures a range of different voices are involved in planning and decision making, so that all people are taken into account in our activities.

## Opening worship

Just as I am  
*Singing the Faith* 556

There is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.  
Galatians 3:28b

### **Prayer**

Blessed of all things, you created us in your likeness and in your image, and then pronounced us good. We give you thanks for the gift of life itself, and for our uniqueness. God of transformations, you set us free to change and grow; you hold us close in love and grace. We rejoice in our ... lives, different, strong, dynamic, and loved.  
Amen.

(Justin Sabia-Tanis, 2003)

## EXPLORE

### 1 Context

In 2016, The Methodist Conference received the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group (2014-16). The Methodist Conference directed the Methodist Council “to ensure that work be progressed to identify the key issues for the Methodist Church to consider in order to ensure that people who are intersex and transgender are included in the life of the Church.”

At the same time, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee published its EDI Toolkit, which includes a module on Gender. This module does include some guidance on transgender, but gender is diverse and society’s understanding of gender diversity is developing.

Module 5.2 aims to help churches and individuals better understand gender diversity, and to encourage churches to welcome, recognise and affirm people who are transgender, intersex or gender diverse. The module’s approach is to support participants to learn from people’s stories and identify the key aspects of Church life that matter most when considering gender identity.

### 2 Introductory activity – art and images

#### Learning objective

The purpose of this exercise is to develop participants’ understanding of how gender is labelled and how depictions of Christian gender identities are portrayed in images. The images depict the fluidity of gender roles and stereotypes, challenging traditional assumptions. There may be differences of opinion and you may need to help participants see that they live with differences of opinion all the time. This is important because the Bible is interpreted and understood differently by different groups of people. Though the Church has not resolved this difference of view, it does expect people to respect others.



This introductory activity should take about twenty minutes and every member of the group needs to have time to speak. It is recommended that people work in groups.

Use the images in Appendix 2.

Each group should take their time to look at the images. They should work through the following questions:

- What is your immediate response to the image?
- What does the image show?
- How do the details in the image help you to make sense of the image?
- Think about the variety of ways people could interpret and relate to this image.
- How does the image portray gender?

Bring the groups together to take feedback considering:

- What do these images suggest about depictions of gender?
- How have our understandings of gender changed over time?
- Are there cultural differences in understandings of gender?

### **3 Introduction to gender diversity**

#### **3a The gender module**

Module 5 of the EDI Toolkit provides an introduction to gender. For ease, some of that information is repeated in the paragraphs below along with further information on gender identity.

First, it is important to understand what sex and gender are. The World Health Organisation provides definitions of sex and gender:

‘Sex’ refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

‘Gender’ refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. These vary from society to society.

Put simply, ‘sex’ is about our bodies and ‘gender’ is about our culture and how we express ourselves in terms of masculinity and femininity. Ideas of what is masculine and feminine vary a great deal from society to society, within societies and even from person to person. So importantly, people are not defined by their sex.

Some people are intersex (they are born with or develop sexual characteristics that are ambiguous – of both sexes or neither). Some people are transgender (they have the anatomy of one sex at birth, which may be inconsistent with how they feel or think about their gender, or the gender of their consciousness).

Sex and gender can be complex issues, but individuals should be recognised for who they are, not who they are assumed to be because of their sex or gender.

## 3b Complexity and diversity of sex

### Sex

A sex is assigned to a baby at birth and that sex is recorded on all birth certificates.

'Intersex' is a term used when people have the physical characteristics of both male and female sexes.

A person's sex is determined by a complicated combination of biological factors. These include chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs and the gametes they might make, external genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics (such as bone structure, body fat distribution, body and facial hair). Because humans need two sets of gametes (an egg and a sperm) from two different people in order to reproduce, sex has been considered binary. This can lead to the false assumption that all sex characteristics can be divided up into two distinct categories, and that where a person has one feature from a category, such as XY chromosomes, their other features will be from the same category, for example, a penis, more testosterone than oestrogen, and facial hair after passing through puberty. This can also lead to an assumption that a person of a certain sex will come to identify with a specific gender.

In reality, sex is far more complicated than two simple categories.

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit binary notions of male or female bodies.<sup>1</sup> These can include genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns. There are different kinds of intersex conditions which may originate in someone's chromosomes, hormones, internal organs, genitals or a combination of these. It is important to note that an intersex person is not a 'hermaphrodite': this word is considered offensive and should never be used to refer to a person.

While in some countries there is a third option, most intersex people will still be assigned to the sex of either male or female

at birth. Some intersex people come to identify with the gender related to their assigned sex meaning they are cisgender. Others feel this is inaccurate meaning they are transgender. Not all intersex people are transgender and not all transgender people are intersex.

### Gender

Gender is not binary (concerned with two different and opposite things), but a spectrum. Most people feel comfortable at or towards the male or the female end of the spectrum, though this is not the case for everyone. Those who do not have a fixed gender identity, or whose gender identity changes over time, often identify as 'gender fluid'.

'Trans' is a Latin prefix which means 'to travel' or 'to change sides.' Its opposite is 'cis' which means 'on the same side' or 'to remain fixed' (the ancient Romans used to refer to Gauls who lived on the same side of the mountains as Rome as 'Cis-Alpine Gauls' and the Gauls who had to travel over the mountains to reach Rome as 'Trans-Alpine Gauls').<sup>2</sup>

When describing gender, cisgender is where a person's gender identity is the same as, or similar to, their sex.

- **Cisgender woman** – someone born with female sex characteristics, and who has been assigned at birth and identifies as female.
- **Cisgender man** – someone born with male sex characteristics, and who has been assigned at birth and identifies as male.

Transgender describes a person's gender identity that is not the same as, or similar to, their sex.

- **Transgender woman** – someone whose gender identity is female who was assigned male at birth.
- **Transgender man** – someone whose gender identity is male who was assigned female at birth.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same thing. Transgender people, like cisgender people, can be straight, gay/lesbian, bisexual or asexual. Information on sexual orientation is provided in Module 7 of the EDI Toolkit.

A wider range of gender-diverse identities is explained in the Glossary in the EXTEND section of this module.

### **Gender and the Church**

As with most other world religions, Christianity has assigned leadership and power privilege to men over women, emphasising masculine imagery and language to describe God. Yet the language and imagery of the Bible is more diverse. Texts that were seen as proscribing female speech and behaviour in church and in relation to men have been reinterpreted. There are also examples of diverse ideas of gender.

For example:

- Male-centric language, like 'Father' and 'King', is commonly used in the Bible to describe God. Yet the Bible also uses female metaphors to describe God giving birth to creation. God is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female and the Bible uses both male and female metaphorical language and imagery to describe God.

Female language is also used when describing the Church as the bride of Christ. In this metaphor, the collective group of all believers is described as female whatever the earthly gender of individual believers. The report of the Methodist Conference of 1992, 'Inclusive Language and Imagery about God', states that "all human words are inadequate to speak of God" and that "those drawn from the human male need to be complemented by those drawn from the human female – as well as from other aspects of God's creation."

- In Genesis 37, Jacob gives his son Joseph, the firstborn of his preferred wife, a special garment. This is often translated as an 'ornate robe' or 'gown' (Genesis 37: 3,

23, 32) and is depicted in the musical as a coat of many colours. Yet in 2 Samuel 13: 18–19, the same word is used for the dress being worn by Tamar, which is described as the kind of garment that the virgin daughters of the king wore.<sup>3</sup> Not only was Joseph given a ‘princess dress’ to wear, he remained home while his brothers went to graze the flocks (Genesis 37: 12–13). This may have been because he was significantly younger than most of his brothers or could be taken to suggest he was completing the domestic activities customarily assigned to women.

### **Pause and reflect: Transitioning**

Throughout our lives human beings are transitioning, growing and developing. For example, we transition from children to adults. Some of us move from single to married and, in some cases, to divorced.

Reflect on how your own identity has changed over time.

How have you grown? Did you grow closer to God during these times of transition?

## **4 The journey to date: the Church and the law**

The Methodist Church in Britain’s Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity, adopted by Conference in 2021, recommended the expansion of the Church’s EDI Toolkit to include material on transgender, intersex and non-binary experience of human diversity. In doing so, it acknowledged the place of gender diversity within church life. Since 2017, the Methodist Church in Britain has also had transgender ministers, whose ministry has been recognised and affirmed by the church and its leaders.

The legal situation on gender identity is set out in the Equality Act 2010. Module 1.3 of the EDI Toolkit (The Law) contains further information on this Act. ‘Gender reassignment’ is one of the protected characteristics in the Act, making it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their gender reassignment status. The table below gives a brief guide to the protected characteristics of ‘gender reassignment’ and ‘sex’. Note that the language and concepts have developed

considerably since the Equality Act was passed in 2010, broadening gender reassignment to gender identities (see section 3 of this module's EXPLORE section above).

Protected characteristic	What is covered?	Exceptions, exemptions and limitations
Gender reassignment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This relates to people who have undergone gender reassignment or who are transitioning gender.</li> <li>2. Different terminology for 'gender identity' and 'gender reassignment' can be used which can be confusing. Put simply, if a person identifies as being transgender, they must not face discrimination because of that.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A There are no exceptions or exemptions related to gender reassignment.</li> <li>B Single-sex institutions and services are permissible, including those specifically for transgender people, provided that there is a legitimate reason for them and/or suitable alternative provision. For example, services for survivors of abuse may be specific to particular groups of people, such as people of the same sex or gender identity, if there is a clear and justifiable reason, such as personal safety.</li> </ol>
Sex	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Discrimination between males and females is illegal, unless there is a specific religious exemption.</li> <li>2 The wording refers to males and females, not just men and women. Children are also protected from sex discrimination under the Equality Act.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Specific religious exemptions must be related to the theology of the religion. eg the Roman Catholic Church does not have female priests due to its theology, and that is permitted in law. NB the Methodist Church is of the view that there must not be discrimination on the grounds of sex.</li> <li>B The law around sex is not clear on matters such as intersex people or people who don't identify as exclusively male or female. However, such situations may be covered in combination with the protections around gender reassignment.</li> <li>C Single-sex institutions and services are permissible, provided that there is legitimate reason to do so and/or suitable alternative provision. For example, single-sex state schools are permissible, provided that there are sufficient state school places for all pupils. Services for survivors of abuse may be gender specific if there is a clear reason, eg personal safety. See also B in gender reassignment above.</li> </ol>



## Entry into the Church

A question that some transgender people ask is whether they can or need to be baptised again after transitioning gender. Methodist theology and practice is that there is only one baptism so it is neither necessary nor possible to be baptised a second time in the Methodist Church. A person is not baptised as a particular gender. Many people at different points in their journey of faith adopt a new name, or come to a new understanding of who God intends them to be. This does not mean they need to be baptised again.

However, it is sometimes very important to transgender Christians to seek the Church's acknowledgement of their 'new' identity – although it is more accurate to understand their 'new' identity as a realisation of who they are and often always have been. Methodist Worship provides a liturgy for the celebration of Christian renewal through The Reaffirmation of Baptismal Faith Including the Use of Water. Unlike baptism, this may be repeated in response to pastoral requirements and can be found at [methodist.org.uk/media/1071/liturgy-for-reaffirmation-of-baptismal-faith-0416.pdf](https://methodist.org.uk/media/1071/liturgy-for-reaffirmation-of-baptismal-faith-0416.pdf). Pastoral prayers and services of thanksgiving and celebration may also be offered.

A baptism certificate is not a legal document and some people choose a baptism name. This means that anyone whose preferred name is not the same as their legal name can be baptised in their preferred name if they choose.

## Marriage

The Methodist Conference of 2021 confirmed the resolutions in the 'God in Love Unites Us' report 2019. In doing so, the Conference affirmed that there are two understandings of marriage within the Methodist Church and that the Church would respect and make practical provisions for both. These are the view that marriage can be only between a man and a woman, and the view that marriage can be between any two people.

A person's sex must legally be recognised according to its legal status, which is the sex that is on their birth certificate.

This includes a birth certificate that has been reissued if a person has applied successfully for a Gender Recognition Certificate.

If someone was married prior to transitioning, their marriage continues legally unless the couple agree that it should be dissolved. Where a couple continues to be married, it may be that they wish to renew their marriage vows or seek the Church's acknowledgement of their continuation in marriage. Pastoral responses should be offered in such circumstances. Prayers of thanksgiving and celebration, or informal liturgies may be offered. The 'God in Love Unites Us' report states that liturgy for the Blessing of a Marriage Previously Solemnised can be used for any marriage where it can be shown that appropriate legislation has been followed. This includes same-sex couples and those where one or both partners have trans or non-binary gender identity.

In 2021, Conference commended the use of a Liturgy for the Blessing of a Marriage of any two Persons Previously Solemnised, which can be found at [methodist.org.uk/media/23098/blessing-of-marriage-of-two-persons-liturgy-approved-by-the-2021-conference.pdf](https://methodist.org.uk/media/23098/blessing-of-marriage-of-two-persons-liturgy-approved-by-the-2021-conference.pdf).

Remember that people who are intersex, or have a non-binary or fluid gender identity might not identify as male or female. This can lead to complications around marriage or civil partnership. For someone for whom the sex registered on their birth certificate is not the same as their gender identity, the legal status of any marriage would be different from how they might want that marriage to be considered. They might, therefore, choose to be in a relationship which has no legal status despite having all the characteristics of marriage. In 2021, the Methodist Conference confirmed the resolutions of the 'God in Love Unites Us' report 2019. This affirms that the Church recognises that the love of God is present within the love of those who freely enter into some form of committed relationship with each other, whether informal or formal, and that as a church we wish to celebrate that love of God and encourage people to respond to it by deepening their commitment (by whatever means).

### **Funerals and related services**

A person has a legal right to be recognised according to their 'social gender' at every stage of life, including at the end of life and in death. 'Social gender' means the gender they identify with, regardless of their sex assigned at birth. In its Introduction to Funeral and Related Services, the Methodist Worship Book states that we entrust those who have died to the infinite mercy and love of God, and that the rites used need to reflect (a person's) local traditions and culture. Care should be taken, therefore, to respect the gender identity of the person who has died even if this is pastorally sensitive for surviving relatives. This is important even when a person's social gender differs from the sex recorded on the death certificate, which legally must match the birth certificate.

### **Verifying identity for Church purposes**

Many of the perceived issues for transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people in church life are often straightforward and have parallels with other circumstances where people's identification documents have changed. For example, the Church already has processes in place for dealing with situations when people change their name on marriage or by deed poll. Situations that can be affected by a person transitioning gender include:

- Stationing
- Employment and recruitment
- Ensuring entries on official records are updated appropriately, including updating the Connexional Database and informing local authority Registration Services of the correct names of persons authorised to register marriages
- Verifying documents for DBS. This should be carried out sensitively as all past names must be disclosed on the form. Checks should not be carried out in a public setting. The Disclosure and Barring Service offers a sensitive DBS service. This enables checks to be made on all previous names whilst also keeping them confidential.

A person's birth name can be a difficult subject for some trans people, bringing up negative memories of a challenging part of their life. This can lead to anxiety at the thought of the name being exposed publicly. Sensitivity is required to ensure privacy is protected with dignity and respect.

Importantly, the information that a person has a Gender Recognition Certificate is extremely sensitive and private, and has legal protections. It is unlawful under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to reveal this, or disclose that a person is trans, without their consent. The only exceptions are someone telling their own supervisor, or to inform decisions regarding someone's marriage or position within the church.

### **Gender-specific groups**

The law does not allow discrimination on the basis of sex or gender identity. However, single-sex and gender-identity-specific groups and services are permissible provided there is a clear reason and purpose for them. For example, it is legal to have single-sex schools and women's organisations to promote women's democratic or economic participation in society. As the purpose of gender-specific groups and organisations is to promote equality in society, and in church life, it is possible to have groups, organisations and services specifically for any gender group. This includes transgender, intersex and gender-diverse identities.

Under the Gender Recognition Act 2004, a trans person who has a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is protected from discrimination on the grounds of sex under their legal sex. This makes it unlawful for a trans woman with a GRC to be excluded from a women's only group because they are trans, or a trans man with a GRC to be excluded from a men's group. This also applies to toilets. Where a trans person does not have a GRC, they are protected from discrimination under the gender reassignment characteristic of the Equality Act 2010. This means they cannot be excluded from a single-sex service or activity unless this is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

## **6 Sensitivity and support during transition – resources**

The period of transitioning is a time when people need a great deal of support. Coming out and transitioning are sensitive times for people with trans identities. They can be particularly vulnerable to abuse, misgendering, bullying and microaggressions. It is important for churches to create a safe space through their language and through avoiding dividing people unnecessarily by gender. They must have effective safeguarding practices and be aware that it is unlawful to disclose to others that a person is trans without their consent.

There are resources and groups that can give specific information. The collaborative ecumenical project Creating Sanctuary has created a range of helpful resources. These are based on the common conviction that although we may hold different views on how the Bible might be read in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, our churches should be safe spaces for all people.

Their pastoral and safeguarding resources include Trans Safeguarding in Practice,<sup>4</sup> which includes guidance on safe responses to someone disclosing their gender identity or going through transition. It provides guidance on how to manage disclosure; how to avoid the church controlling the direction or speed of the process, even unintentionally, including by medicalising trans identities; and the effect of gendered spaces and groups.

Further resources are referenced in Appendix 3.

## **7 Use of language – Pronouns**

Third-person pronouns (he/she/they/ze; him/her/them/zem; himself/herself/themselves/zemself etc) refer to people that you are talking about. In English, many are gendered. Using them requires identifying the gender of the person to whom you are referring. Similarly, many third-person possessive determiners (his/her/their/zir etc) also signify gender and so are included when considering pronouns. People should feel empowered to choose how they would like to be addressed,

through pronouns which reflect their gender identity or are gender neutral.

You cannot always know someone's gender identity by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is a basic way of showing respect for their gender identity. Assuming someone's pronouns based on external factors like their clothing, physical characteristics or name may make them feel uncomfortable, disrespected or invalidated.

If you make a mistake and use the wrong pronoun for someone, the best thing to do is straight away to say something like: "Sorry, I meant (insert pronoun)." If you realise your mistake after the fact, apologise in private. To repeatedly refer to how bad you feel that you made a mistake, or how hard it is for you to get it right, may make the person who was misgendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you. This is not their responsibility.

More detail can be found in the Methodist Church's Inclusive Language Guide at [methodist.org.uk/inclusive-language](https://methodist.org.uk/inclusive-language).

## APPLY and REFLECT

### 1 Case studies

This section contains case studies to consider.

In small groups, consider two or more of the following stories.

Each of these is a true story, although names and some details have been changed to maintain anonymity. They were provided by the individuals concerned and so reflect their choice of language to describe their story.

At the end of each story, there are questions to consider. You may want to refer back to the SCIP classification in Module 1.1. The SCIP classification looks at how discrimination occurs in four areas:

- Structural– eg legal and political structures, policies, committees
- Cultural – the cultural norms of a group or society, commonly held views
- Institutional – practices, how things are done
- Personal – personal behaviours and practices.

Consider the questions that follow each story. As you do so, reflect on what the key words, emotions and issues are for the people in the stories and for you.

## Martin's story

Martin is a transgender man, who had previously been known as Marta, and had been ordained as a presbyter. Martin had identified as male for many years, but had only recently decided that he needed to transition gender formally, as he had got to the point that he could no longer live life as he had been. His male identity is important to him as an authentic expression of his life and ministry. As part of his transitioning Martin put in place a series of "coming out" meetings with all the senior stewards from all the churches and prepared a letter to be read to each church. At one of the meetings, a well-respected local preacher gave Martin a hug and a visible show of support. This

was important in helping church members to understand Martin's journey. Martin received many messages of support, cards and even cake from church members. He said that he felt truly loved and supported. However, one person told Martin that he had destroyed the church and caused division between families, and that he had put his own mental health and wellbeing above the church. On the other hand Martin received a letter from a church in the circuit where he hadn't yet preached, supporting him and saying he would be very welcome there. Martin said that he kept reminding people that he was "still me, the same person who cares about the church and the community".

### Questions

#### Experience

- How well does your church cope with unfamiliar diversity?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

#### Learning

- How significant were senior leaders' actions in this situation?
- How do you think Martin felt about different people's reactions to him?
- What impact might people's reactions have had on Martin's ministry?

#### Action

- How could you and your church support someone in Martin's situation?
- What does Martin's story inspire you to do in your church?



## Ruth's story

Ruth, 22, was born in a male body but knew from the age of 16 that she was female. Ruth came from a long line of Methodists who were proud and active members of the Church and she had played an active role within the Church all of her life. Ruth tried to confide her feelings to her family and members of the Church but these were shrugged off as adolescent confusion. Her minister said that things would be clearer once she met someone and settled down. This advice did not help Ruth who reacted by withdrawing. Though she wanted to attend church, she felt that she had been rejected.

Eventually, Ruth decided that she could no longer live a lie and resolved to go down

the medical route. This was not an easy decision. When she told her parents about this, they just could not understand and throughout the procedures they kept telling her that it was OK to change her mind. They were torn between her choice and their love, so much so that they even asked the church members to pray for a change of heart. In the end Ruth decided to leave home, the area she was born and raised and the church. She saw this as her only hope of a more content and happy life. She needed to be somewhere where she was accepted for who she was. Ruth has started to attend church in another area far from where she was born, though she has not confided in anyone. She feels more at peace and less judged.

### Questions

#### Experience

- How does Ruth's story make you feel?
- The Methodist Conference of 2021 voted to "call on all Methodists to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form and that no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the Methodist Church". Given that, how did you feel reading that church members prayed for Ruth to have a change of heart?
- How aware are people in your church of this decision by the Conference?

#### Learning

- What were the main reasons that Ruth could not stay in her old church?

#### Action

- What support is there in your church if someone identifies as transgender?
- How could you and your church support someone in Ruth's position regarding their gender identity?

## Louisa's story

When Louise was born she was identified as a boy, and given the name Luke, but knew from the age of 8 that she was female. At school she struggled and found it impossible to disclose her feelings about her gender identity to her parents. She felt her mother would have been confused and her father hostile. When she transitioned she belonged to a church (but not a Methodist Church) and was very active, leading Bible study as a lay preacher, but she was rejected. Members of that church quoted Bible references about homosexuality to her, and refused to understand that she was transgender or listen to her story. Someone suggested to her that she attended a Methodist church where there was a more welcoming membership and a Minister who was open to understanding transgender perspectives. Initially Louise still looked male, and attended church as Luke, but as she was transitioning some people in the church were confused – on one occasion people asked the Minister if Louise was Luke's sister; the Minister clarified that Louise was Luke, and people were fine with that. Louise says that the crunch came when she started to date a transgender man, and some people made

life difficult because they were in what was perceived to be a same sex relationship. Life became difficult at church. After transitioning gender, Louise returned to her former church, where she was not initially recognised. Once they realised who she was, there was pressure put upon Louise to revert back to being Luke, which they said was God's will. After some years Louise went to another Methodist church where she was welcomed and felt supported. She was delighted that people there were not concerned that she was dating another transgender person. Recently though, with a change in Minister Louise has felt like withdrawing from the church, because the new Minister, whilst accepting of transgender people, is not actively supportive.

Louise says that, having been in various churches, accepted and rejected at times, the barrier to acceptance isn't theology or style of worship; it's the preconceptions of those leading worship and fellowship. There is nothing more horrible than to be told repeatedly that what you are doing is a sin and against the will of God, and no-one supports you or challenges those who criticise you.

## Questions

### Experience

- How well does your church cope with unfamiliar diversity?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

### Learning

- How significant were the actions of the ministers and other leaders in this situation?
- How do you think Louise felt about people's different reactions, and what impact might they have on her?

### Action

- How could you and your church support someone in Louise's position?
- What does Louise's story inspire you to do in your church?

## Jacob's story

Jacob is a transgender man, who says that he believes that God made him as trans for a spiritual purpose, to embody a Gospel of inclusion.

Jacob's father is a Minister, so he grew up experiencing many churches, and travelling a great deal. Some churches have been inclusive and welcoming places, others less so. There was an occasion when he had the opportunity to lead some Bible study with a group of young people, having previously supported his father on a number of occasions. People were really keen for him as a young person to be so involved. Jacob felt it was important to be authentic and tell the group about his trans status, and there was an immediate change in how people treated him. There was nothing explicit just an over-emphasis on checking his credentials, beyond the level of other people who led groups and studies. His father, as his minister, made a point of attending the leadership meeting to challenge what was happening. People said they did not have an issue with Jacob per se, but they had reservations about a transgender person leading and teaching their children. Jacob felt that this was a rejection not only of his ministry but of himself. Fortunately, his father was able to advocate for him, and the church

eventually accepted him, with positive results. Without his support, the outcome could have been very different.

The incident provided an opportunity for several people to see and speak to Jacob, many of whom sought support with relating to LGB and trans family and friends of their own, and others who had felt excluded and unwelcome at the church themselves. Jacob believes this wouldn't have been possible if he hadn't chosen to come out.

Jacob says the church needs to be ready to accept Jesus wherever and in whomever you might meet him. He says "when you are repulsed by me, you are repulsed by Jesus. When you welcome me, you welcome Jesus". He believes that the presence of transgender people in the world and in the church helps others to learn how to love the unfamiliar, which will make it easier for us to love all.

Jacob feels that if people have a problem with him, it's their problem not his, he has a right to exist no matter how anyone else feels. He is reassured by Hebrews 13:5 because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

## Questions

### Experience

- How well does your church cope with diversity that is unfamiliar to them?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

### Learning

- What do you think the unfounded concerns about Jacob leading the youth bible study might have been?
- What is it about Jacob's story that gives the church an opportunity to learn about the radical nature of God's welcome for all?

### Action

- How could you and your church support someone in Jacob's situation?
- What does Jacob's story inspire you to do in your church?

## Alex's story

Alex is 53, a local preacher and a mother. She was previously married to a man, who is the father of her two adult daughters. Throughout her life, she has not always been comfortable identifying as a woman, but she generally does, and prefers to use female pronouns (she). She has been a Christian for 30 years and a local preacher for 10 years. Through her study of scripture and her prayer life, Alex has been encouraged to be as authentic and open as possible in her ministry and in her life, generally. Over time, this feeling has developed and she now identifies as gender fluid.

Recently, in church, she preached on the creation of humankind as being in God's image, both male and female – and

disclosed to the church that she cannot always identify as a woman, but as (in her words) 'in the middle'. The reaction from the Church was very mixed, whilst many people have supported her, some have accused her saying that it is inappropriate for her to continue as a local preacher, and want her taken off the plan. The Superintendent, Margaret, struggled to manage the negative behaviours in one of the churches, which made life difficult for Alex and for the rest of the circuit. Margaret has decided, for the time being, not to put Alex on the plan at that church. Alex feels upset by this, feeling that both she and Margaret have been bullied by this particular church. As a result, Alex is considering withdrawing from preaching altogether.

### Questions

#### Experience

- How well does your church cope with unfamiliar diversity?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

#### Learning

- What do you think might happen if Alex does not preach in that circuit again?
- Is bullying ever acceptable in church life? The answer, of course, is no. So what is the real problem here?

#### Action

- How could you and your church support Alex and her situation?
- What would you do if people in the church were being hostile towards a gender fluid person?

## Jeremy's story

Jeremy is 58, and the mother of two adult children, a son and a daughter. Jeremy was born with a female body, and given the name Gemma. One of his earliest memories is of praying "Dear God, please make me a boy". He grew up, as Gemma, married and gave birth to two children.

Throughout life as Gemma, he has a sense of (in his words) 'not feeling right', and suffering from bouts of depressive illness as a result. In church, as Gemma, he became musical director and organist leading the children's choir. Once his family grew up, so did the feelings of dissatisfaction, and his early prayer "Dear God, please make me a boy" came back to him. After many years of internal reflection, at 54 Jeremy decided he needed to transition as a man. He was immediately dismissed from his position as musical director following complaints from two

parents in the church, and left the church to find a more welcoming place to worship. Some of the families who appreciated his musical leadership, and the way in which he led and taught their children in music and in faith, have also changed to his new church. This acceptance has also helped Jeremy's children in developing their relationship with him, but it took time and good pastoral support from the church and other friends and family.

Despite the difficulties Jeremy is much happier now than he has been at any stage in life. A key factor for Jeremy was that the minister in the new church always treated him as Jeremy, and not as Gemma from day one. Simple actions such as a handshake and referring to Jeremy by his name and correct pronouns made a big difference.

### Questions

#### Experience

- How well does your church cope with unfamiliar diversity?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

#### Learning

- What were the factors that made Jeremy leave his first church?
- What was better about the new church?

#### Action

- How could you and your church support someone like Jeremy?
- What would you do if people in the church were being hostile towards a transgender person?

## Reuben's story

Reuben grew up a Christian, though as Baptist rather than Methodist. They were identified male at birth, and identified as such until recently. Having worked in multiple churches from other denominations, and ending up leaving with a lot of hurt and negative feelings towards the Church, they were very surprised and relieved to discover a local Methodist church that was gentle, encouraging and LGBT+ affirming. Though Reuben still identified as cis at the time, it had become a major factor for them in feeling comfortable within a church as a LGBT+ ally.

Several years later when Reuben came to understand themselves as non-binary, the idea of telling their church family was terrifying. This was despite knowing their church was LGBT+ affirming, as while they had heard plenty of support for same-sex marriage, they hadn't heard any views on gender identity.

Reuben found the first time they attended a service after realising their gender extremely difficult. They sat at the back and didn't talk to anyone, though they are normally very social. After the service, Reuben took themselves to a side room and had a panic attack. They found the uncertainty of whether people would really accept them once they knew the real them

very distressing. Even as Reuben slowly came out to friends and family, church remained a difficult place, and they often found they weren't able to attend at all.

Eventually, with the support of their wife, Reuben decided they needed to come out so they could attend church without fear. They decided to do this via a message to those they knew best, and who they thought most likely to be accepting. Responses were positive, which made them feel better about coming out more generally. The next week, Reuben decided to take a leap, and at an informal service stood up to share with everyone.

Reuben didn't face any opposition, but equally did not feel particularly supported. A member of the congregation who is out as gay came up to make sure they were ok as they were visibly very nervous afterwards. However, most of the congregation didn't say anything about it at the time or since. As a result, Reuben remains somewhat unsure of exactly whether people are affirming or just tolerating them. They struggle now with the idea of talking to people about it as they don't want to be seen as 'banging on about it', and so while they are slightly more comfortable knowing they do have allies, church remains somewhere they find stressful to be.



## Questions

### Experience

- How well does your church cope with unfamiliar diversity?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

### Learning

- How do you think Reuben felt about the different reactions they received?

### Action

- How could you and your church support someone in Reuben's position?

## Davis's story

Davis is 17; they were born in a male body. They grew up in the church and were recently confirmed and received into membership. They are a Youth Rep and are coming to the end of the One Opportunity internship with their local church. Davis also has both a learning disability and physical disability. They don't know how best to define their gender identity but do not feel either male or female. They prefer they/them pronouns, but in practice use any pronouns depending on who they

are speaking to. They wear nail polish and have long hair which is dyed pink and tied back. They like to wear bright clothing, sometimes a mixture of men's and women's fashion. They have been accepted in their church for who they are and do not feel they need to put a label on that – they feel 'unique'. People in church often compliment them for their bright clothing and nails. Their local church is a place where they feel safe.

### Questions

#### Experience

- How well does your church cope with unfamiliar diversity?
- Do people try to listen to and understand people's stories, or are they quick to make judgements and assumptions?

#### Learning

- What do you think it is about Davis' church that has enabled them to feel this sense of belonging and safety?

#### Action

- How could you and your church support someone in Davis' position?
- What does Davis' story inspire you to do in your church?

## 2 Summary questions and learning points

### Summary questions

Thinking about your answers to the questions and issues raised in the case studies, we now invite you to reflect on:

- What did you learn?
- What might the stories mean in your church?
- What will you do?
- Who is responsible for making your church a safe and welcoming place?
- What are the characteristics of a welcoming church?
- What are the consequences of excluding people?
- What does your church gain by including all people?

### Learning points

- Good leadership makes a difference in ensuring everyone feels welcome.
- People should feel accepted and welcomed for all they are.
- Use simple, practical ways to visibly acknowledge and welcome transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people through use of gender-neutral language.
- An ideal welcome is to ask: "What's your story? We'd love you to tell us."
- You cannot tell gender from appearance. You may have people in your congregation who are trans or non-binary without your being aware of it.
- People transitioning gender say: "I'm still me – just being more real about being me".
- Prejudice needs to be challenged.
- Many people need help, support and good leadership to cope with change. This applies to church members generally, and especially to transgender people, their families and friends.
- Transgender people are usually the best people to advise on trans issues. Support them to tell their own story.

- Remember that it is unlawful to disclose that someone is transgender without their consent, except for a specifically defined purpose (see *Verifying identity for Church purposes* in the EXPLORE section of this module for more information).
- The Disclosure and Barring Service offers a sensitive DBS service, which enables checks to be made on all previous names whilst keeping them confidential. This is important as, for some people, their birth name can be very sensitive (see also *Verifying identity for Church purposes* in the EXPLORE section of this module for more information).

More advice is given in *3 Tips, reminders and frequently asked questions* within the EXTEND section.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of our social characteristics: our ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and so on. These overlap and create interdependent systems of discrimination and advantage. Being aware of intersectionality means we can better acknowledge and understand the differences among us.

There is no hierarchy of protected characteristics. There is no hierarchy of discrimination. Different forms of discrimination and exclusion will affect different people in different ways and at different times, but no single characteristic is more central to our experience of being human. Within the Methodist Church, we aim to go beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Acts of Great Britain and the Isle of Man; the Discrimination (Jersey) Law; the Prevention of Discrimination (Guernsey) Ordinance; and the Equal Opportunities Act in Gibraltar. Instead, we consider all power dynamics within the church, such as socio-economic factors and the relationships between lay and ordained. In all our relationships and processes, we seek justice; for all to be treated with dignity; and to stand in solidarity with those who have experienced discrimination or exclusion.

None of our characteristics are lived in a vacuum. We all have a range of other personal and social attributes that affect our

lived experiences. Therefore, each of our lived experiences will be unique.

For example, all trans people will have different experiences of being trans. Some will be heterosexual; others homosexual or bisexual. Some will be intersex; others will have been born with only male or female sex characteristics. Gender variance is more common amongst those who have autism spectrum condition, but not all gender-diverse people have traits of autism. For some people, the discrimination and transphobia they face will be exacerbated by also experiencing racism or sexism. The degree to which trans people feel safe to be public about their gender will vary considerably depending on their age and the country and community in which they grew up.

These are just a few examples, and we cannot possibly consider all the different experiences people have of being trans. The important thing is to be mindful that being trans is experienced in many ways, and to always consider how different personal and social characteristics intersect to form our unique lived experiences. The same applies to other gender-diverse people too. We therefore cannot make assumptions and should always listen to and learn from the experiences of others.

We are all made in the image of God, across all our differences. Together in our diversity we make up the Body of Christ. So, as we learn more about one another, we draw closer to Christ. Becoming more aware of intersectionality helps us to do this.

If you know of a story that may help improve the diversity of experiences within the case studies in this module, or would be willing to share your own story, please contact [equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## EXTEND

For further study or personal reflection. Keep for use with other modules.

### 1 Scripture and theology

#### The status of eunuchs in ancient society

In the ancient Mediterranean world, eunuchs were socially marginalised and often enslaved. They were not seen as men because of their castration and were often categorised alongside women as inferior to men. Young men sold into slavery were often forcibly castrated. They were highly valued by wealthy households as they could not father children and it was assumed they would not desire sexual relations with the women of the household. Eunuchs castrated before puberty did not develop male secondary sex characteristics such as a deep voice, facial hair or baldness. As a result, eunuchs were viewed as being gender ambiguous in Greek and Roman culture.<sup>5</sup> The Galloi, an order of priests serving the goddess Cybele who was a member of both the Greek and Roman pantheon, castrated themselves to become eunuchs and were often depicted with feminine clothing and other gender markers.<sup>6</sup> People born intersex and viewed socially as neither male nor female were also referred to as eunuchs.<sup>7</sup>

As with other marginalised groups, the Bible contains examples of privilege being accorded to eunuchs. Nehemiah, the cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes I, is recorded as being in the Queen's presence (Nehemiah 2:6), suggesting he was a eunuch. Indeed, the Septuagint, the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible from the second century BCE, explicitly refers to him as such. Yet Nehemiah is appointed Governor of Judah. He rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. Gender ambiguity is not a disqualifier from prophethood.

In Matthew 19:12, Jesus refers to people who are born as eunuchs (intersex), as well as those who have been castrated to become eunuchs and those who live like eunuchs for the sake of serving the Kingdom. That eunuchs could be full

members of the Kingdom is also shown in Acts 8:26–40 when Philip baptises a eunuch. Despite this, by the third century CE eunuchs were listed by Hippolytus as impure and not compatible with a Christian life.<sup>8</sup> Roman Christians viewed the gender ambiguity of the Gallois as a sign of their moral depravity and evidence that their polygamous idolatry was a disgrace to heaven.<sup>9 10</sup> The First Council of Nicaea 325 CE decreed that eunuchs may be ordained as clergy, but those who castrated themselves could not.<sup>11</sup> This affirmed the baptism of eunuchs shown in Acts but decreed that Jesus' reference to living like a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom could not be taken literally.

### **Contrasting language in Scripture**

Compare the language of these verses from Genesis and Galatians:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27)

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)

In a sense, both are inclusive, but both also raise problematic questions. Genesis declares that God created our gender, and our gender differences, as part of creating us in the image of God. This demonstrates that even though male-centric language is used to describe God, women are also created in the image of God. Yet it refers to sex in binary terms. Galatians states that when it comes to the unity of all in the body of Christ, all are included equally, regardless of gender. Yet our gender is still part of our human experience and an important part of our identity and lived experience; not acknowledging gender can feel disrespectful.

This is not the only example of language shifting within the Bible. For example, in the New Testament, Paul tends to avoid traditional 'Israel-centred' expressions such as 'the God of Jacob'. So within the Bible itself, there is evidence that the

language used to describe God was subject to reevaluation and change and not fixed for all time

Question

- What other shifts in language are you aware of in the Bible?

### **The language of worship**

Although the word 'man' may have two meanings, to refer to male human beings or to refer to all humans, the second meaning is increasingly falling out of usage. This is because it is seen to reinforce the belief that male is the human norm. This conflicts with a belief in the equality and full humanity of all people across all gender diversity. For this reason, many prayers and hymns have been adjusted to avoid this use of the word.

Male-centric language is commonly used in the Bible to describe God. Yet the Bible also uses female metaphors to describe God giving birth to creation. God is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female and the Bible uses both male and female metaphorical language and imagery to describe God. Since God is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, and can be described using both male and female language, it follows that there are no theological objections to using gender-neutral language in worship of God. Replacing language that reinforces male as the human norm with language that reinforces the idea that male and female are the only human norms may be considered a step in the right direction. Yet there is no reason we cannot use language that is inclusive of all genders in our worship of God.

## **2 Gender reassignment and transgender identity: Glossary**

Language is evolving. What is seen as fine today may be considered offensive or inaccurate tomorrow. Individuals will have their own opinions about what words are appropriate to them.

You will get it wrong from time to time. More important than always trying to be correct is to be sensitive to and respectful of the feelings of the person or people you are talking about.



**Agender** – a term relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender but who identifies as having no gender. It implies the concept of gender is not meaningful to the person. The terms **Genderfree** or **Genderless** are also used.

**Androgynous** – partly male and partly female in appearance.

**Cisgender** – a term that describes people who have a gender identity that matches their biological identity (ie their gender and sex are the same). Trans people who have transitioned to a point where they are comfortable might also regard themselves as cisgender.

**Crossdresser** – a term for someone who wears clothes stereotypically associated with the opposite gender. They might also use the term transvestite. It should not be assumed that people who cross dress identify as transgender.

**Drag King / Drag Queen** – a term for someone who cross-dresses as a form of entertainment, using exaggerated forms of gender expression. Drag performers will usually embody a character of a different gender to their own. However, some drag performers simply portray a character of the same gender, but in a more exaggerated form. It is important to remember that the persona on stage is separate from the person in their everyday life.

**Gender binary** – the categorisation of sex or gender into two distinct opposites: ie male and female.

**Gender confirmation treatment** – those transitioning permanently usually have gender confirmation treatment. This includes hormone therapy and often surgery to bring the sex characteristics of their body more in line with their gender identity. Such surgery is sometimes referred to as gender- or sex-reassignment surgery, though this term is often reserved for genital surgery. The combination of hormone treatments and surgeries, along with other therapies, such as laser hair removal, is often described as

‘medical transition’. This distinguishes the process from the social transition an individual is likely to have already undergone or be undergoing. The term ‘sex change’ is considered inappropriate by many people.

**Gender expression** – this is the external expression of gender through clothing, behaviour and mannerisms. Some trans and non-binary people use prosthetics and other garments to enhance or diminish certain gendered aspects of their body. See also **gender role**, below.

**Gender fluid** – Some people do not have a fixed gender identity. Their gender identity may change over time or in different situations. They might describe themselves as ‘gender fluid’. See also questioning, below.

**Genderfree** – see **agender**, above.

**Gender identity** – this term describes how an individual identifies themselves psychologically in terms of gender. It is usually as a boy/man or as a girl/woman. There is a common assumption that this will be consistent with sex appearance. However, some people experience a gender identity that is completely inconsistent with or opposite to their sex appearance, or which is neutral. Other people identify as having aspects of both a man and a woman.

**Genderless** – See **agender**, above.

**Gender role** – this is a social role. Different cultures assign differing gender roles to, for example, men and women. Through cultural interactions a person’s gender identity is reinforced. Despite the move to gender equality in the UK, assumptions remain about what is appropriate for a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. These assumptions can be based on a person’s work and domestic arrangements, dress and leisure pursuits, the subjects they studied at school or university, their choice of friends and, especially, their appearance.

### **Gender variance/gender dysphoria/gender identity disorder**

– there is evidence that the sex differentiation in the brain of some individuals may be inconsistent with their other sex characteristics: it is now understood that one's gender identity may be influenced by the brain rather than the sex of the genitalia. This results in individuals dressing and/or behaving in a way which is perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms for what is perceived to be their sex.

Where conforming with these norms causes persistent personal discomfort, this may be described as 'gender dysphoria'. This may include some level of disgust with their body, which contradicts their inner sense of gender identity. This discomfort is a symptom that can be treated clinically.

Using **gender dysphoria** too broadly is inappropriate since gender variance does not always lead to discomfort. There can be an assumption of a clinical diagnosis of **gender identity disorder**, which can imply the existence of a mental illness. The term **gender variance** is preferable. It reflects the diversity of gender identity and is medically neutral.

**Hermaphrodite** – a term referring to animals and plants that have both male and female reproductive organs. Most plants, many invertebrates and some vertebrates are hermaphrodites. When used to refer to an intersex person, it is a highly offensive term.

**Intersex** – this describes a person who is born with some or all of both male and female sex characteristics. People who are intersex may be assigned a sex at birth, which can include undergoing surgery. In some countries, as well as male and female, a third option is available. Some people with intersex bodies may be comfortable identifying as either male or female. Others prefer to identify as intersex or androgynous. See **androgyny**, above.

**Non-binary gender identity** – a term for someone who has both masculine and feminine characteristics and/or identifies as being neither male nor female.

**Pronouns** – Many English third-person pronouns are gendered (he/she/they/ze/co etc). Using them requires identifying the gender of the person to whom you are referring. People should feel empowered to choose how they would like to be addressed, through pronouns which reflect their gender identity or are gender neutral. See Identifying the points in church life which matter most when considering gender identity in this module for more information.

**Questioning (gender or sexual orientation)** – some people are unsure of their gender or sexual orientation and may describe themselves as questioning. See also **gender fluid**, above.

**Sex** – this generally refers to the male/female physical development of the body (phenotype). In infants, the sex is judged entirely on the child's genital appearance at birth. Other phenotypic factors such as chromosome differences are seldom tested unless a genital anomaly is present. There is an assumption that an apparently male infant will identify as a boy and an apparently female infant will identify as a girl. This assumption is not always correct.

**Sexual orientation** – this is associated with the emotional and sexual attraction between one person and another. This is different from the internal knowledge of one's own gender identity. **Cisgender** people (see above) may be gay, straight, bisexual or asexual. **Transgender** people (see below) may be gay, straight, bisexual or asexual. For trans people, sexual orientation may remain the same through the transition process or it may change. Another term that people may use for themselves is '**pansexual**', which is a term used if a person prefers not to identify their emotional and sexual attraction in terms of gender.

**Social gender** – this is the gender an individual identifies with, regardless of their sex assigned at birth.

**Transgender (trans)** – this term has had different meanings over time and in different societies. Currently, it is used as an inclusive term describing all those whose gender expression

falls outside typical gender norms. It includes those who cross-dress intermittently, as well as those who live continuously outside gender norms, with or without medical intervention.

‘Transgender’ is increasingly being used as a separate category to describe someone who lives in a gender other than that associated with their sex, but who does not wish to undergo gender reassignment (see transsexualism, below). For this reason, a movement is being made towards using ‘trans’ as an inclusive umbrella term in place of ‘transgender’.

**Transphobia** – dislike of or prejudice against anyone who does not conform to the binary gender they were assigned at birth, including transgender or transsexual people and those who are non binary or gender fluid. The core value underlying transphobia is a rejection of trans, non-binary or gender-fluid identities and a refusal to acknowledge the reality or validity of these identities.

**Transition** – a process through which some transgender people go when they decide to live as the gender with which they identify rather than the one assigned at birth. ‘Transition’ can also describe the moment when a person starts living full time in a new gender role. This is the point at which an individual takes on the dress, name, pronouns and social status that accord with their gender identity. It is a process that involves a number of ongoing changes in presentation. It is often – but not always – accompanied by medical treatments. These can include hormonal treatments, electrolysis and surgeries, but do not always. Some people start making changes or having treatments before they make their intended change public. Others make several changes in parallel.

**Trans men and trans women** – the expression ‘trans’ is often used synonymously with ‘transgender’. Many trans people who have transitioned permanently prefer to be regarded as just men or women. In cases where it becomes essential to refer to a pretransition status, the phrase ‘woman (or man) of transsexual history’ may be used.

**Transsexualism** – historically, a transsexual person was understood as someone who intended to undergo, or had undergone, gender reassignment. The word ‘transsexual’ should be used as an adjective, not a noun. Therefore, it is not appropriate to refer to an individual as ‘a transsexual’, or to transsexual people as ‘transsexuals’. The abbreviation ‘tranny’ is unacceptable.

### 3 Tips, reminders and frequently asked questions

#### A quick guide for welcoming people who identify as transgender, intersex and gender diverse

Do	Do not
<p>Love.</p> <p>Remember that all people, in all our diversity, are made in God's image. This remains true as we grow, develop and change through life.</p>	<p>Fear.</p> <p>Treat anyone as less than made in God's image.</p>
<p>Take an interest in transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people – listen, be aware of who they are. It is okay to ask questions, but be sensitive to whether a person is comfortable talking about themselves.</p>	<p>Intrude or scrutinise. People have a right to privacy.</p> <p>Never ask a transgender, intersex or gender-diverse person about their body, genitalia or sex life.</p>
<p>Recognise, affirm and celebrate people. Assume that transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people and/or their families are already part of Church life – so be welcoming in advance.</p>	<p>Be spiritually coercive such as by requiring people to repent of their gender identity.</p>
<p>Challenge and question stereotyping and marginalising of transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people.</p>	<p>Judge or make assumptions about transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people.</p>
<p>Remember that families are diverse and that children thrive in loving relationships in all sorts of families, including with parents who are transgender.</p>	<p>Forget that family members are affected by the treatment of their transgender, intersex and gender-diverse relatives.</p>
<p>Remember that gender is diverse. Whilst most people find it easy to identify as either male or female, this is not the case for everyone.</p>	<p>'Out' a person as transgender, intersex or gender diverse without their permission. This is actually a criminal offence.</p>
<p>Be someone who is willing to show visible support to a transgender, intersex or gender-diverse person.</p>	<p>Ask a transgender, intersex or gender-diverse person about their birth, previous identity or names.</p>
<p>Your own research. Useful information on transgender, intersex and gender-diverse identity can be found on the NHS website, and through organisations such as GLAAD at <a href="http://glaad.org">glaad.org</a></p>	<p>Tell a transgender, intersex or gender-diverse person they are wrong, misguided or 'going through a phase'. You do not know their journey.</p>

## Frequently asked questions

### **Are transgender people just confused?**

No. Gender is much more complicated and diverse than many people realise. Whilst most people are cisgender, it is a fact of psychology and biology that some people are transgender. Usually, once a person has started to transition their gender, they have been through a long process of internal reflection. Generally, they are secure and strong in their feelings.

### **Is it a choice?**

No. Being transgender is no more a choice than being left handed. It is a psychological and biological fact.

### **Are they gay?**

Sometimes, but not necessarily. Gender identity and sexual orientation are two different things.

### **Is it a sin?**

No. A person's gender identity is part of who they are. Many transgender, intersex and gender-diverse people are people of faith, who experience their identity as a gift from God.

### **Can they be cured?**

This is an offensive question as being transgender is not an illness. Transgender, intersex and gender-diverse identities are recognised as a psychological and biological fact. It is better for a person to work out who they are and live openly and authentically.

The Methodist Conference of 2021 voted to “call on all Methodists to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form and that no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the Methodist Church.”

We should recognise that many trans people suffer from mental health issues, largely due to the negative treatment and physical violence they face. It is useful for people to obtain psychological support before, during and after medically transitioning, but this is most successful when



it affirms a trans person's identity, rather than seeking to change or undermine it.

Some – though certainly not all – trans people may be diagnosed with a condition called 'gender dysphoria' which is a profound and persistent sense of unease with their body or certain gendered aspects of it. Medical interventions, including hormone therapy<sup>12</sup> and surgery, have been evaluated empirically with large clinical case studies and shown to be effective at harm reduction and improving quality of life and physical and mental health for those with gender dysphoria.<sup>13</sup>

### **Can they live just as they are without changing?**

There is a significant risk of depression and other mental illnesses if people are forced to live in a way that is not authentic to who they are. Living authentically as the gender a person identifies with is much better for their wellbeing: most transgender people testify to having a greater sense of happiness and of being a better person after coming out as transgender.

## Closing worship

For this is what the Lord says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name, better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.”

Isaiah 56: 4–5

### **Prayer**

From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth,  
From the laziness that is content with half-truths,  
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,  
O God of Truth, deliver us.

Amen.

(source unknown)

Let us build a house where love can dwell

*Singing the Faith* 409

## APPENDIX 1 - References

- 1 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Free & Equal Campaign Fact Sheet: Intersex*, (Geneva, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015)
- 2 William George Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman geography: Vol. 1*, (Boston, Little, Brown & Co, 1854)
- 3 Damien F Mackey, *Joseph and Tamar comparisons*, (Academia.edu, 2020)
- 4 Alex Clare-Young, *Trans Safeguarding in Practice*, Creating Sanctuary 2021
- 5 Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, (Indianapolis, Hackett, 2019)
- 6 Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, (London, H.G. Bohn, 1853)
- 7 Polemon of Laodikeia, as translated by Tamsyn Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics and Medicine Under the Roman Empire*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 118
- 8 Hippolytus, *On The Apostolic Tradition*, translated by Alistair Stewart Sykes, (New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001)
- 9 Julius Firmicus Maternus, *On the Error of Profane Religions*, translated by Richard E Oster, (Houston, Rice University, 1971)
- 10 Augustine of Hippo, *On the City of God*, as translated by Marcus Dods, (New York, Random House, 2000)
- 11 *The Canons of the 318 Holy Fathers assembled in the City of Nice, Canon I, 325 in Medieval Sourcebook* (New York, Fordham University, 1996), available online at [sourcebooks.fordham.edu/sbook.asp](https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/sbook.asp) (viewed on 29 June 2022)
- 12 CL Keo-Meier , LI Herman , SL Reisner , ST Pardo , C Sharp, JC Babcock, 'Testosterone treatment and MMPI-2 improvement in transgender men: a prospective controlled study', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 2015, 83(1): p. 143-56
- 13 L Gijs and A Brewaeys, 'Surgical Treatment of Gender Dysphoria in Adults and Adolescence: Recent Developments, Effectiveness and Challenges', *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 2007, 18(1): p. 178-224

## APPENDIX 2 – Introductory activity: Art and images

## Image 1 – Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch



Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn  
Oil  
1626  
Bridgeman Images

## Image 2 – Jael and Sisera



Jacopo Amigoni  
Oil  
1739  
Bridgeman Images

### Image 3 – Christa



Edwina Sandys

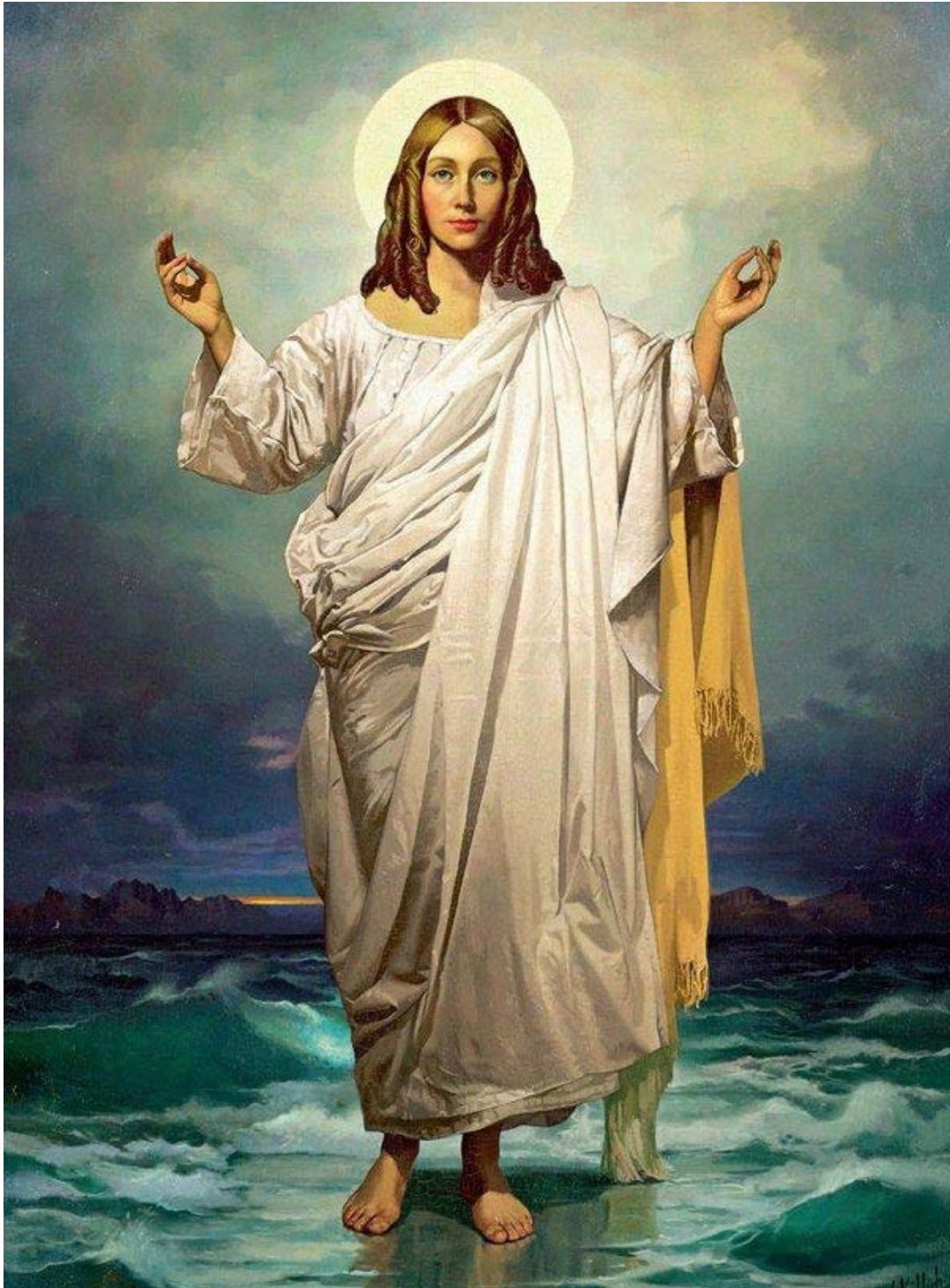
Bronze

1984

Photo: Keystone Press / Alamy Stock Photo.

Christa, Edwina Sandys © ARS, NY and DACS, London. 2022. Reproduced with permission.

## Image 4 – Female Jesus



Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland  
Print  
2007



## Image 5 – An Act of God



Zoe Lyons as God in *An Act of God*  
Play by David Javerbaum  
Publicity still  
Promotional Photo from Seabright Productions  
November 2019

## APPENDIX 3 – Further resources

### Books

- Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, *Trans/Formations*, (London, SCM Press, 2009)
- Christina Beardsley and Michelle Esther O'Brien (Editors), *This Is My Body: Hearing the theology of transgender Christians*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2016)
- Steve Chalke, *The Gender Agenda: Towards a Biblical Theology on Gender Identity, Reassignment and Confirmation*, (United Kingdom, Oasis Books, 2018)
- Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer Theology*, (London, SCM Press, 2011)
- Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex conditions and Christian theology*, (Oxford, Routledge, 2016)
- Chris Dowd, Christina Beardsley, Justin Edward Tanis, *Transfaith: A Transgender Pastoral Resource*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2018)
- Lise Eliot, *Pink brain, Blue brain*, (United Kingdom, Oneworld Publications, 2012)
- Cheryl B Evans, *What Does God Think?: Transgender People and The Bible*, (United States, Cheryl B. Evans, 2017)
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World*, (New York, Routledge Press, 2012)
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, (New York, Basic Books, 2020)
- Linda Herzer, *The Bible and the Transgender Experience: how scripture supports gender variance*, (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 2016)
- Rosemary Lain-Priestley, *Gender: The Inclusive Church Resource*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2015)
- Virginia R Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A trans-religious approach*, (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 2001)
- Outcome, *Bold I Approach: A worship anthology for an inclusive church*, (Outcome, 2013)
- Laurie Suzanne Scott, *God Doesn't Make Mistakes: Confessions of a Transgender Christian*, (United States, Tek-Chic Systems, 2018)

Justin Edward Tanis, *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith*, (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 2003)

Andrew T Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What does the Bible actually say about gender identity?* (Epsom, The Good Book Company, 2022)

### **Film**

Peterson Toscano, *Transfigurations: The Movie*  
[petersontoscano.com](http://petersontoscano.com) (viewed 11 June 2022)

### **Websites and web articles**

All About Trans – [allabouttrans.org.uk](http://allabouttrans.org.uk)

Dignity and Worth – [dignityandworth.org.uk](http://dignityandworth.org.uk)

Gendered Intelligence – [genderedintelligence.co.uk](http://genderedintelligence.co.uk)

GIRES (Gender Identity Research and Education Society) –  
[gires.org.uk](http://gires.org.uk)

Intersex Society of North America, How Common is Intersex?  
(2015) – [isna.org/faq/frequency](http://isna.org/faq/frequency), (viewed 11 June 2022)

Reconciling Ministries Network – [rmnetwork.org](http://rmnetwork.org)

Terry Reed, Transgender Equality Inquiry: Transgender  
Equality, 2015 – [data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/  
CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Women%20  
and%20Equalities/Transgender%20Equality/written/19292.  
html](http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Women%20and%20Equalities/Transgender%20Equality/written/19292.html), (viewed 11 June 2022)

TransFaith – [transfaith.info](http://transfaith.info)

### **Articles**

A Dolan (2018), 'Imagining a Feminine God: Gendered Imagery in  
the Bible', *Priscilla Papers*, 32 (3)

D Herbenick, M Reece, V Schick, SA Sanders, B Dodge, JD  
Fortenberry (2010), 'Sexual Behaviour in the United States:  
Results from a national probability sample of men and women  
ages 14-94', *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7 (suppl. 5): p. 255-65