

trans
ACTION
Preview
Edition

**A Transgender Curriculum for
Churches and Religious Institutions**

“I just want to worship my God in a community of faith-filled believers”

– A TRANSGENDER WOMAN

Most transgender Christians are searching for the same things that other believers want: a connection to their God within a loving community where worship and working for equality and justice are the focus of the Christian experience.

Unfortunately, these searching transgender people are too often left without a place to call their “church home” because most congregations and religious institutions are not ready to welcome them as their Christian companions.

transACTION is designed to help churches and institutions address this issue of understanding and welcome by providing step-by-step training about the needs, apprehensions and fears of transgender people – as well as the wealth of gifts and graces they bring – while responding to the concerns of the church or religious institution.

“When persons aren’t free to be their authentic selves, we all lose. The full potential of those individuals is lost to society in general and our churches and institutions in particular. God’s creative freedom is stifled because of our fear and prejudice.”

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel

Institute for Welcoming Resources
and Faith Work Director

SUMMARY

Transgender is an umbrella term that covers a variety of ways in which some people think of and present themselves in a manner that doesn't conform to society's expectations. The variety of gender identities and expressions is so extensive that many feel the term transgender is not inclusive enough. But, for our purposes, we will accept that limitation but continue to use the term because it has some legitimacy and many people have at least a basic grasp of its meaning.

SESSION ONE

How Do We Get to Understanding?

Our discussions and activities in this first session are designed to help people understand:

- ♦ What gender is and how society's expectations of gender have changed
- ♦ Who are transgender people, including basic definitions of transgender types.
- ♦ How gender identity differs from sexual orientation

END RESULT

At the end of these sessions, we expect that your congregation will be ready to offer a welcoming environment to any transgender people who walk through your doors.

SESSION TWO

How Do We Get to Acceptance?

In our second session we will explore:

- ♦ The biblical references to transgender persons and we will also talk about how churches respond to transgender people.
- ♦ We will also get specific about your congregation or institution and how prepared it is to have a transgender person as part of the worshipping community.
- ♦ We will give you an opportunity to talk about your own exposure or lack of exposure to transgender people and what concerns, apprehensions or fears you might have about a transgender person being in your congregation or institution.

SESSION THREE

How Do We Get to Welcoming?

In this session we will discuss – and develop a plan of action on:

- ♦ How a congregation or institution can make itself a place where transgender people feel welcome to come to worship; to be participate fully in the community; and to share their gifts and graces.
- ♦ And where the members of the congregation or institution can feel blessed to have transgender persons in their worship space and meeting rooms.
- ♦ What are ways in which we can take our welcome of transgender persons beyond the doors of our congregation or institution

Much of what will be presented is basic hospitality but there are some issues that pose special challenges to the transgender community and a welcoming congregation or institution needs to be prepared to deal with those concerns.

SESSION STRUCTURE

A. Creating Sacred Space

**1. Create a centering area on a low table, covered with a cloth.
Place an appropriate symbol on the table and light a candle.**

2. Read from Scripture: I Corinthians, 12:12-27 (one body, many members).

3. Prayer: ...

- ♦ Invite each participant to share a word or phrase without commentary in response to this question: “What is close to your heart as we begin this sacred time in community with the Spirit and in community with one another?”
- ♦ Leader shares a gathering prayer and may lead the group in a sacred song.

B. Creating a healthy and safe space for sharing and learning

I. Establish Ground Rules

- ♦ Listen carefully to others.
- ♦ Be willing to examine your own beliefs in light of what others say.
- ♦ Speak your mind freely, but strive to maintain an open mind.
- ♦ Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you.
- ♦ Don't monopolize the discussion.
- ♦ Address remarks to the group and not to an individual.
- ♦ Engage in friendly dialogue.
- ♦ What other guidelines are necessary so that we can be in respectful community with one another?

C. Work

**Refer to the outlines that follow for Session One,
Session Two, Session Three and Session Four.**

D. Closing

Close with prayer.

SESSION ONE

How Do We Get to Understanding?

Our discussions and activities in this first session are designed to help people understand:

- ♦ What gender is and how society's expectations of gender have changed
- ♦ Who are transgender people, including basic definitions of transgender types
- ♦ How gender identity differs from sexual orientation

ACTIVITY 1:

How Do You Think About Gender?

DISCUSSION 1:

Why All of This Talk About Gender?

ACTIVITY 2:

Cisgender Privilege Check List

DISCUSSION 2:

Transgender Definitions

DISCUSSION 3:

Relationship of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Preview
Edition

SESSION ONE

ACTIVITY I:

How Do You Think About Gender?

Most of us have an understanding of gender roles that have been shaped by the environments in which we were raised. Our families, friends, schools and churches all had an influence on how we think of gender.

We are going to spend some time thinking and talking about the gender norms or expectations that society has placed on all of us. And, then, we will talk about what effect those societal expectations can have on someone who doesn't match up to those attributes.

STEP 1:

Using a blackboard or a sheet of poster paper, write the words "Girl or Woman" across the top.

Ask the people attending this session to tell you what attributes they would list under this heading. You are looking for behavioral and personality traits they would use – or they have heard being used by others – to describe girls or women. Such things as: passive, caring, creative, smart, well-behaved, timid, flighty. The traits people call out may be positive or negative. There is no right answer. You are trying to get to how people's understanding of gender has been formed – some of that formation may be "right on" and some of it may be flawed.

Ask people to explain their suggested feminine traits – where did those traits come from? Home, school, work, play, church, etc.?

STEP 2:

Now do the same thing with another sheet of paper or blackboard, writing the words "Boy or Man" across the top. Ask for the same listing of attributes that would describe boys and men: aggressive, bold, risk-takers, handy, unemotional, etc.

Again, ask people to explain their suggested masculine traits.

STEP 3:

Ask people if they know any boys or men who exhibit any of the attributes that have been attributed to women? Ask them if they know any girls or women who have some of the attributes ascribed to men?

Has this been a problem for any of the people they mention?

Has it changed the participants' attitude toward the people they mention?

Have any of the participants ever found themselves exhibiting traits ascribed to the other gender? How did that feel? Was it an issue for you?

STEP 4:

Have each person take a sheet of paper, turn it sideways and draw a line horizontally across the paper. Make a short vertical line in the center as a mid-point. Put the number 0 at the left side of the line and the number 10 at the right side.

0 _____ | _____ 10

Go back to the list of attributes you have collected and, as you read each attribute, ask people to put that word at the appropriate point on the line for them.

If that attribute is an important element of who they are, they should place it near the number 10 and if it doesn't at all describe them, they should place it near the number 0.

When finished, ask if they were surprised by what they discovered – did they place any attributes that were usually not attributed to their gender near 10 – or past the midpoint?

Did any of the attributes that describe their gender get placed on the 0 side of the midpoint?

What did they learn about themselves, or about others?