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TRANSGENDERISM AND PASTORAL CARE

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# Introduction

In the United States today, life for transgender individuals is becoming both better and worse in various ways. On the one hand, transgender people face widespread discrimination in schools, workplaces, the military, courts, or other public places, while at the same time there has been notable progress as more trans-inclusive policies are being implemented due to large scale campaigns by civil rights groups. However, religious and secular groups remain polarized on the issue which hampers efforts to gain further inclusion. The discrimination results either from a lack of appropriate policies at the federal and local levels to adequately protect the civil rights of trans-Individuals or from virulent anti-transgender rhetoric in society stemming from religious and secular conservatism. When it comes to spiritual support, progressive theological education seeks to create an inclusive ministry for transgender or differently gendered communities and affirms that people belonging to all genders possess inherent dignity and worth. To do so requires providing quality pastoral care to transgender and queer church members who see pastoral counselors as a source of support. However, pastors will only be approached if there is a good reason to expect a compassionate and respectful response. Working with transgender people is a complex line of work that requires a deep understanding, and appreciation of their struggles, while integrating a psychotherapeutic approach into their care and counseling services.

In this essay, the best pastoral care approach towards transgender individuals will be explored by examining the background of the issue such as discrimination and tracing the theological and social aspects of it. It will then use evidence-based psychotherapeutic studies along with newer theological approaches to reveal a transgender-inclusive approach towards pastoral care. An examination of the various theological and evidence-based approaches suggest that the best pastoral care approach towards the transgender community is that of an unconditional acceptance of their identities. Devising pastoral care approaches based on acceptance will provide the necessary support and care necessary that transgender church members require to achieve physical and social well-being.

# History of Research/Practice

## Background: Public Treatment and Discrimination

A significant portion of the civil society today can be seen disseminating a similar one-dimensional account of how society and state policy should treat transgender individuals. Such discourse is often grounded on the values espoused by conservative groups which often ignore the lived experiences of transgender individuals. As a result of this conservative and right-wing advocacy, many laws in the U.S. continue to discriminate against transgender rights, ignoring the fact that a vast portion of trans-Individuals experience profound psychological and psychosocial turmoil as a result of the oppression and victimization they suffer. Additionally, the transgender community is faced with a struggle to have their identity as equal citizens of the state validated within both secular and religious spaces.

Consequently, many transgender or queer individuals who identify with religion face rejection by their religious communities that deny them the right to express their identities on the grounds of it being sinful or a result of a psychological disorder. In Christian colleges, transgender students experience a substantially high rate of sexual and verbal harassment, physical assault, threats, and anti-trans rhetoric in discourse within their campuses. These range from overhearing anti-trans slur or jokes, social rejection and isolation, lack of trans-inclusive topics in curriculums, general incivility, inadequate support, a lack of trans-role models to look up to, alongside a general feeling of invisibility[[1]](#footnote-1).

In the case of legislation, trans-people are disenfranchised or excluded in a majority of state legislation despite increasing activism by trans-allies and lobbyists. Moreover, they do not enjoy equal protections against discrimination in federal legislation which leaves them vulnerable to prejudicial and unjust treatment based on their gender identity[[2]](#footnote-2). The resulting social environment causes transgender individuals to feel that they are unworthy or dignitary and respect, and are unequal or illegitimate citizens, which produces further alienation. The internalized stress causes transgender and queer individuals to perceive themselves as defective, bad and ostracized by their community or religion, which in turn leads to mental health problems[[3]](#footnote-3).

## Individual issues faced by Transgender People

Transgender individuals experience a disjunction between their gender identities, i.e. their sense of womanhood or manhood, and their birth sex. This disjunction leads many of them to pursue physical surgery or hormonal therapy to align their bodies with their gender identity, while in certain cases some affirm their gender identity without the need to undergo any physical modification. The word transgender is fundamentally an umbrella term that encompasses all individuals who feel a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity. This also includes people who feel that their gender is fluid between female and male, nevertheless, having these gender variations does not entail experiencing gender dysphoria[[4]](#footnote-4). The current scientific understanding of the issue is that an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity is programmed into their brain structure before birth. Sexual differentiation occurs in the second trimester of pregnancy, considerably later than the sexual differentiation of the fetus' genitals. In the case of these two processes being independently influenced, transsexuality may occur resulting in varying masculinization or feminization of the brain compared to the degree of feminization or masculinization of the genitals. Social environment, in contrast, has not been found to have an influence on sexual orientation or gender identity[[5]](#footnote-5).

Today, transgender people exist in nearly every ethnic and racial group, every faith community and socio-economic class, and in nearly all walks of life. Likewise, they are a growing community within the church with some recently assuming leadership and ministerial roles within their faith community. Even as acceptance grew, transgender persons continue to encounter a range of problems at the individual level, starting with drug and alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism for the social stress and discrimination they face. Anxiety and depressive disorders are also a substantial problem within their lives, resulting from a lack of community or familial acceptance to hopelessness regarding their condition. In addition, the risk of AIDS and HIV is also high within the community[[6]](#footnote-6). Moreover, young transgender individuals are considerably more likely to attempt suicide, contemplate or engage self-harm, and experience suicidal thoughts.

One of the most frequent emotions associated with queer and transgender issues is a shame. Shame not only interferes with medical and mental health treatment but also leads to a range of other problems such as clinical depression, or substance abuse[[7]](#footnote-7). Non-affirming clergy and their persistent phobic reactions and ignorance have played a significant role in contributing to these feelings of shame. Thus, Individuals who identify as transgender and also traditionally religious report a significantly difficult struggle with the rejection and opposition they face from religious communities, either from other members of the community or the church leadership[[8]](#footnote-8). With sexual stereotypes strongly embedded in many faith communities, life for transgender individuals is the equivalent of modern lepers[[9]](#footnote-9), and consequently, many such individuals also report struggling with faith. They often begin to question why they weren’t saved by God from becoming a transgender, and eventually many leave their faith. In this case, their struggles with relationships, depression, a general feeling of inadequacy, as well as the guilt resulting from religious beliefs become the cause[[10]](#footnote-10).

## Christian Responses to Transgenderism

### Theological Response

A range of issues faced by transgender individuals stems from conventional hetero-patriarchal Christian beliefs about God, Jesus, gender, sex, and creation. Traditional Christians have conventionally ignored the live experiences of transgender women and men, and have remained committed to their literal, definitive, biblical and in some cases negative theological perspectives on gender non-conformity[[11]](#footnote-11). Some of these conventional beliefs stem from the Judeo-Christian story of Genesis which describes the creation of human beings by God in His Image, as male and female. Genesis 1 and 2 describe the female and male sex as part of God's design (Gen. 1:27). The woman was created to help and complement the man (Gen. 2:18-22), and as she was created out of a part of man, she joins him again during their sexual union to become one (Gen. 1:23-24). The dominant interpretation of these texts suggests a strictly binary construct of gender and sex with little flexibility. Consequently, any persons who identify themselves as outside of these constructs risks being seen as sinful or pathological.

The scriptures also make reference to non-binary identities, whose bodies differ from conventional male or female ones. For instance, Jesus referred to the existence of ‘eunuchs' whose bodies would fit the criteria of the intersex classification[[12]](#footnote-12). However, they seems to be little acceptance for other types of individuals in the conventional interpretation of the readings, which suggest that men should not sexually act like women (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:18-32), and should not dress like them (Deut. 22:5). This lens of viewing transgender people was termed the integrity lens by Yarhouse, one which sees the integrity of the femaleness or the maleness of the human body as sacred. Christians who view the issue of gender from the integrity lens find gender non-conformity as a matter of concern because it dishonors the creational order, basing their notions on Deuteronomy 22:5 or 23:1, and the female-male complementarity discussed in Genesis. 2:21–24. A similar problem exists with regards to homosexuality since it violates the notion of two individuals integrating into a sexual whole[[13]](#footnote-13).

The notion of gender complementarity and the sexual difference has been affirmed by the Catholic Church which views men and women to be irreducibly different persons, yet equal in their humanity. Hence, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reads:

 “Man and woman were made “for each other”—not that God made them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be “helpmate” to the other, for they are equal as persons (“bone of my bones...”) and complementary as masculine and feminine”[[14]](#footnote-14).

 The same notion was affirmed by Pope John Paul II to deepen the understanding of the Church with regards to sexual difference. He stated:

 “In creating the human race ‘male and female’ God gave man and woman an equal personal dignity, endowing them with the inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person. Yet within this equal dignity exists a profound personal difference”[[15]](#footnote-15).

These characteristics have also come to define the role and expectations of a priest when it comes to their bodily behavior. The priest’s sacredness is essentially a social notion and is fundamentally connected to the relationship between the Individual, society, and the Church. Thus, any pastor who does not conform to the normative conventional view of bodily behavior or gender is likely to create fear and awe in the social environment by challenging the hetero-normative conventional notions and gender boundaries adopted by the society[[16]](#footnote-16). Thus, it is even more difficult for transgender individuals to obtain church leadership let alone be accepted as an equal member.

### Social and Ethical Response

The other lens by which some Christians and faith leaders have come to view gender non-conformity is the disability lens. In this perspective, an Individual who experiences gender dysphoria is not the result of a moral choice, but a consequence of living in the fallen world. It views the condition the same way as the emotional state of a person suffering from depression, in which case the moral choice of the individual is not discussed. In fact, it is accepted that the condition arose from living among the fallen, even if certain ethical or moral choices made by the individual resulted in their depressive symptoms. The disability lens relies both on scriptural teachings about gender and sex alongside research on intervention and preventions for those suffering from gender dysphoria, yet the sacredness of female and male differences is still valued.

A key aspect of many transgender individuals’ lives is sexual reassignment. Clinicians, as well as Catholic theologians, question the ethical suitability of using such a procedure to treat gender dysphoria. Catholic theology values human bodies as a gift from God that have to be respected and valued in medical treatment. According to Pope Pius XII, “Because he [the patient] is a user and not a proprietor, he [the patient] does not have unlimited power to destroy or mutilate his body and its functions”[[17]](#footnote-17). Since reassignment surgery ignores this principle and is contrary to the totality principle, it is deemed unethical and unnecessary. The process involves mutilation of the organs while providing little physical benefit to the individual who consequently becomes unable to bear children through either way. The church, therefore, views hormone therapy, especially ones that inhibit or delay puberty, or sex reassignment procedures as a rejection of God's gift and sees it as a misguided attempt to modify God's creation in pursuit of psychological relief[[18]](#footnote-18). In particular, any experimental therapies associated with puberty-blocking or hormonal treatment for children should be avoided, since exposing young people to unproven treatments is neither proven nor safe or ethical[[19]](#footnote-19). Hence from both an ethical and Catholic perspective, pastoral care and treatment of gender dysphoria require psychotherapeutic methods to alleviate psychological distress.

The third lens with which some Church members and leaders view transgender individuals is the diversity lens, which involves revering, honoring, and celebrating the transgender experience. Currently, the society seems to be moving from the integrity and disability lens towards the diversity lens. Those given to this notion hold departure from traditional male or female presentation as something high in esteem, and reject the conventional norms about gender and sex, and wish to focus on answering existential questions especially with regards to one’s identity and their place in the community[[20]](#footnote-20).

## The function of Pastoral Care

The roots of Pastoral Care can be found in the teachings of the Christian church. The term has its roots from the Latin word ‘pascere’ meaning “to feed” and expressed by the influential metaphor of the Good Shepherd. The substantial integrative function of the ‘pastoral paradigm’ can be witnessed in connection to the life of the human community. This form of care is a relationship and it mainly deals with compassion, empathy, and human benevolence. Theoretically, pastoral care has no “official” set of standards to be followed, however, some primary proficiencies needed for this type of care are healing, sustaining, nurturing, guiding, listening, liberating and reconciling an individual towards others, God and self[[21]](#footnote-21). It comprises of different assisting actions aimed at nurturing, guiding, healing, sustaining of individuals whose issues and troubles rise in the perspective of routine interactions and eventual means and issues.

Moreover, healing is an added pastoral function is and it serves to overcome some damage by rehabilitating an individual to entirety and by guiding them to improve and develop as compared to their earlier situation. Sustaining aims at helping an individual to tolerate and to surpass a situation wherein recovery from their disorder or rebuilding to their earlier circumstance either seems impossible or dubious. Guiding- supporting confused persons to stay confident while making choices and taking decisions in life between alternative courses of action, when such choices seem to impact that individual. Reconciling- is all about pursuing to re-develop the connection between man and God and man and fellow man. It had two modes employed in history, discipline, and forgiveness. Nurturing- empowers people to advance their potentialities throughout their lives with all its boom and peaks. Two of the pastoral care functions, Nurturing and guiding intertwine education and counseling. Parents and teachers consider this function as essential in educational institutes for the attainment of their community’s educational mission[[22]](#footnote-22). The entire progress of pastoral care is dependent on exploiting all five components. It relies on the vibrant interaction and stable improvement within the institutional, educational and community of faith of these functions of care applied to the distinct needs of youngsters in the ever-changing and demanding society.

## Developing a Trans-Inclusive Care Approach

A majority of current pastoral care approaches and psychotherapy are unable to address the range of issues faced by the transgender and queer community. In many cases, they perpetuate the feelings of shame that they originally intended to alleviate and fail to challenge the various sources of transphobia and homophobia in society. A lack of specialized training and education along with a lack of adequate research in this area have led the clergy in precarious positions, who often have to struggle with institutional policy and personal ethics when it comes to providing pastoral care or therapy[[23]](#footnote-23).

### Pastoral sermons and discussion

Nevertheless, Pastoral care providers still enjoy a unique position in providing a psychotherapeutic approach to transgender individuals that can help them challenge institutional oppression. Pastors can facilitate the process by integrating the transgender experience into discussion groups, adult courses, and reading groups, by encouraging encounter with real individuals who are struggling in their lives. In certain church groups that have opened a discussion with regards to those with gender identity issues have led transgender individuals to find the courage to express themselves and their identity. Such groups become safe spaces for trans-members to freely express their discomfort with gender stereotypes that interfere in their wellbeing and ability to form relationships. Additionally, organizing sermons can provide a safe platform to examine gender identity and cultural issues, especially targeted at discussing gendered accounts of creation in Genesis to explore gender sensitive treatments and interpretations of the story of Adam and Eve. Pastors can encourage discussion on Matthew 19:12 to serve as the starting point for conversations on the topic of intersexuality and gender non-conformity, which demonstrates that anatomical sex and gender may not always conform to societal expectations. This can be integrated into the teachings of Jesus about the concept of wholeness within Pastoral preaching[[24]](#footnote-24).

### Community Approaches

Further approaches to respond to contemporary challenges faced by the religious transgender communities have also been discussed by biblical scholars such as Andrew Walker, who suggests a patient, conventional, compassionate, and an attentive gospel ministry to address the needs of trans-individuals. Walker is of the view that the biblical concept of neighborly love entails empathy, sharing of truth, the promotion of dignity, and developing compassion and patience towards those who live their lives in contrast with Jesus' teachings. This approach does not require one to affirm destructive behavior in the name of love since that would be the opposite of genuine love, and instead requires a biblical understanding of the notion of love as defined by the Scripture and applying its compassionate approach when dealing with transgender issues[[25]](#footnote-25). Faith communities that adopt the welcoming position of love towards queer and transgender people can eventually create safe places for individuals to open up about their gender identity issues. Integrating and hosting groups of trans-people into their community can help produce a strong and welcoming statement of support[[26]](#footnote-26). Some examples of trans-affirming Churches include the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church that allow full ordination an inclusion of transgender people as members and leaders[[27]](#footnote-27). The view is supported by Craig A. Ford in his essay who argues that exploring one’s gender and sexual identity is important not just within the domain of one’s conscience but also within one’s family, faith community, and social circle, because a significant part of living according to one’s gender and sexual identity entails having a fulfilling relationship with one’s self, the external world, and with God[[28]](#footnote-28).

### Individual Approach

The individual trans-inclusive approach that Individual Church members can approach has been discussed extensively by Yarhouse, who suggests that a reasoned response should include carefully listening to an Individual who experiences gender conflict. The approach stands in contrast to the conventional evangelical approach which advocates behaving in certain defined ways to demonstrate that one is on the church’s path. A missional approach suggested by Yarhouse involves concentrating first on the trans-Individual’s sense of belonging to the church. This approach will encourage the queer and trans-Individual to develop a relationship with the church and move towards belief, while also help cis-gendered Individual members develop ways to faithfully and compassionately care for their fellow members experiencing gender identity issues[[29]](#footnote-29). This approach would also entail resisting conventional norms based on anatomical sex distinction in favor of values that promote diversity and inclusivity. At the same time, Yarhouse warns against embracing diversity and inclusivity to the extent that it dilutes the sacredness of sex differences and devaluing Scriptural authority[[30]](#footnote-30).

### Social, Cultural, and Ethical Approach

The ethical and social aspect of developing a trans-inclusive pastoral approach involves a number of considerations. According to Yarhouse, the disability lens can help pastors and individual members understand that gender dysphoria and identity issues are not a result of a wrong moral choice but a product of the fallen world in which human beings live. The approach helps one approach gender identity problems with compassion and empathy and leads one away from the lens that views gender non-conformity as a result of sinful choices and disobedience. Alongside, the diversity lens can help people acknowledge varying gender roles across culture and help them affirm the existence of a trans or non-binary gender identity. The importance of belonging is once again emphasized within this approach, since it helps people struggling with gender identity issues find their place amongst a community of other ‘broken’ individuals, all of whom wish to be saved by grace[[31]](#footnote-31). Yarhouse presents a hypothetical case of Sara, who is a trans-woman and enters into the Church. The first question that would enter Sara's mind would be whether she is welcome in the place. The right inclusive approach would assure Sara that she is in the right place and that she is wanted here. Moreover, the right social approach would be to see her as a dignified person looking for a sustained and real relationship, instead of viewing her case as a project. This would entail demonstrating encouragement as well as empathy while focusing more on fostering relationships instead of trying to fix her identity issues. The social relationship, thus formed, will help her know, obey, and love Jesus and find her redemption[[32]](#footnote-32).

 Another aspect of pastoral care and church support for gender non-conforming, trans, and queer individuals is the cultural component. The conventional approach that emphasizes the sacredness of biological sex and believes in maintaining strong boundaries around the notion makes the process of redemption and reconciliation difficult. The culture created by such an approach can exacerbate gender identity problems and create an environment that fosters moral evaluation instead of compassion. According to Yarhouse, the correct pastoral care approach would involve stepping outside of the realm of these cultural wars in order to provide a meaningful church experience for trans-Individuals. In this regard, the perspective of redemption can also explain and reinforce the idea that a lack of correspondence between an Individual’s gender identity and birth sex does not separate one from God’s love and care, and is only a result of ‘the fall’[[33]](#footnote-33).

In addition, an ethical approach towards trans-Individuals would also entail recognizing that the existence of societal stigma and the resulting minority stress. In this regard, pastoral care holds an ethical responsibility to help individuals access to support and develop the right skills to battle the impact of harmful social stigmas. This would require providing more specialized training and education to pastoral care providers to support the trans and queer population and to work with the trans-members and their families to provide the right psychosocial therapy[[34]](#footnote-34). The education would foster and reinforce the view among trans and cis members that public acceptance of a particular gender role may not always depend on the biological sex of that individual[[35]](#footnote-35).

## Theological Backing for the Inclusive Approach

The importance of developing a trans-inclusive pastoral care approach is evident in light of various social and behavioral studies conducted by researchers. However, any such approach would not find legitimacy among faith communities and church leaders unless it has adequate theological backing. A trans-inclusive theological support may require a re-reading, re-interpretation, or a deeper contextual understanding of the Scripture. A re-reading of the Scripture would involve aligning with a human-centric view of the text besides introducing some new interpretations[[36]](#footnote-36). Many other scholars talk about the importance of transgender faith leaders developing their own theology from their own perspectives and contexts, even if it is more personal, ecumenical, non-academic, but emotionally engaging in nature[[37]](#footnote-37).

 For instance, the texts that emphasize the sexual difference between the male and female can be understood to be about preserving the community through sustaining procreation in their objective. Moreover, there are many biblical texts that indicate the presence or acceptance of a community that has different genitalia, such as eunuchs, as complete members. Such a narrative can be found in Acts 8 which discusses the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch who was baptized without questioning his gender identity. Additionally, Jesus' view of eunuchs in Matthew 19 who are either by birth (intersex), or those who chose to be eunuchs, or those made eunuchs also signifies the notion of acceptance.

“For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother’s womb: and there are eunuchs who were made so by men: and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.” (Matt. 19:12, NASB)

Jesus’ assertion of eunuchs being born from the womb can be understood to imply intersex individuals which are another category of transgender people. The final phrase of Matthew 19:12 where Jesus’ says “However get [here]” also indicates that how a follower of the Christ is supposed to treat these individuals[[38]](#footnote-38). Being a eunuch is neither sinful nor suggests having a transgressive behavior, instead, they are portrayed as people who pleased the Lord in Isaiah 56:4 and Jeremiah 38:7. Moreover, their exclusion from the assembly and priesthood in Lev. 21:20 and Deut. 23:1 should be read in the context of God's promise to grant a name and monument to eunuchs better than their children (Isaiah 56:3–5)[[39]](#footnote-39). The passage in Isaiah 56:1–8, which suggests that “eunuchs will be given “a name better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name which will not be cut off” also indicates the potential of differently gendered individuals of rising in faith. Similarly, the passages that express displeasure over cross-dressing such as “Women must not wear men’s clothes, and men must not wear women’s clothes. Everyone who does such things is detestable to the Lord your God” (Deut. 22:5, CEB), can be understood to be restricted to a certain time since in contemporary times the cultural distinction between women’s and men’s clothing has considerably blurred. It can also be understood in the sense that for a transgender man, it would go against the text to wear a woman’s clothing, thus he would in a way still be abiding by the text.

Other examples from the Scripture talk about non-conforming gender roles by Biblical characters such as Deborah the Judge, or the relationship of David with Jonathan and Saul (1 Sam. 16;12, 1 Sam. 18:1-3). Similar is the case of the Apostle Paul who could be said to have gone against his expected gender role of fathering a child by choosing to become celibate. The case of the female emissaries, such as Tryphosa and Tryphena in Romans 16:12 and Syntyche and Euhodia in Phil. 4:1 also serves as an example that the Scripture does not obligate following particular gender roles, and thus differing from normative gender roles is very much acceptable. The concept of redemption can also be used to concentrate focus on the extent of Jesus’ presence in people’s lives and their transformation into the Holy Spirit’s image, something which carries more importance than aligning oneself to their biological sex, thus adopting a life-supporting approach, as mentioned in Deut. 30:19.

Another theological approach is suggested by Lowe (28) who argues that transgender Christians should adopt the idea that human beings are created co-creators alongside God, who also continues to make new things. Moreover, a shift from the notion of self-sacrifice towards sustained love for others can help people see themselves as followers of a loving God. The idea can empower the faithful to celebrate and recognize an ongoing process of creation, affirm the importance of their body-minds, develop self-love, and open up to the possibility of receiving new gifts within their lives[[40]](#footnote-40). The idea of love can be further integrated into the approach by affirming that a loving God would not allow pain to occur to those suffering from gender dysphoria since real “love does no harm to its neighbor.” (Romans 13:10). Yet another approach and theological reasoning is offered by Pyysiainen who suggests that the early theological understanding of sex was based on folk biology and hence contemporary theological concepts should be based more on scientific biology. Since recent biological evidence affirms the existence of heterogeneity of gender, the theological position also has to acknowledge the same. The approach would prevent seeing transgender individuals as an embarrassing challenge or a product of sinful disobedience[[41]](#footnote-41). Taking a similar approach, Teresa J. Hornsby and Deryn Guest suggest that a conventional reading of the Genesis' text has to be avoided in favor of exploring new interpretations that look beyond boundaries and order and embrace fluidity[[42]](#footnote-42). Clark-King suggests a re-interpretation of being created in the image of God by looking beyond binary use of language, and view the human body as wonderfully and strangely made, regardless of whether it transgresses or conforms to norms[[43]](#footnote-43).

The interpretation that passages in Romans 1, Leviticus 18 and 20, and 1 Corinthians 6, speak negatively about same-sex or queer behavior is discussed by Ken Wilson who argues that the text may not be referring to faithful and loving same-sex monogamous relationships that exist today. Rather, it is very much possible that the texts are prohibiting sexual activity outside of marriage for both same-sex and opposite-sex partners. If such a category is not being clearly referred to in the Bible, then such prohibitions cannot be reasonably applied to prohibit same-sex relationships. Likewise, the importance of treating both weak and strong Christians as parts of the family, regardless of whether they disagree over their choice of food (Romans 14-15) also indicates that acceptance embrace and inclusion is a higher moral concern than secondary disputable issues[[44]](#footnote-44). Thus, disagreements over trans and LGBT issues should not divide the church, its leadership, and its members.

## Developing a Plan of Action

 Competent pastoral care along with the counseling is engrossed in empathy, compassion, and care of a trans individual, adult or an adolescent. Those working with and taking care of transgender teenagers must take these two areas of pastoral care, being welcoming towards trans youth and having a checklist of pastoral care.

### Welcoming Trans-Individuals into Communities

The first step in this regard would be for any organization, ministry, and church to recognize that transgender youths exist and there is a reasonable way of living for them. Secondly, welcoming ministries, churches, and other related institutes would be pastorally sensible to embrace a culture of openness, acceptance and upholding the respect and dignity of every individual promoting an idea of sympathy for all. Third, is to instruct the whole congregation, particularly the ministry of youth about the concerns of the transgender community and their efforts in the society. Fourth, that is a little risky is to orate on transgender issues at Sunday worship, accepting the individual made in imago Dei. Fifth, initiating various discipleship programs in the church for sexual minorities to help them develop their belief and enhance their spirituality. Sixth, if the elder members of the Christian congregations are taught about the gender constructs in society and the way it devalues and weakens physical, emotional and spiritual and social comfort of transgender youth, can be helpful. Finally, the seventh part involves dealing with the theological convictions and negative attitude towards trans youth that impacts them adversely[[45]](#footnote-45).

### Sensitization and Overcoming Bias

The first step is to analyze one's own assumptions. One must assume that (a) being a trans is not a major concern that leads the adult to seek pastoral care; (b) a young individual may not be willing to discover their sexual identity (c) owing to the social pressure, trans may not recognize themselves as transgender; and (d) transgender behavior is very common. Secondly, one needs to be aware of (a) , books, web pages, advocacy programs and helping material (b) people who work with trans such as psychologists, spiritual directors, and pastoral counselors (c) the policies of numerous Christian denominations related to transgender matters; and (d) the appropriate terms to be used while mentioning transgenderism and transsexuality. Thirdly, One must be aware of (a) one’s own attitudes, irrespective of their sexual orientation; (b) one’s limitations about their range of pastoral care; (c) boundary concerns and (d) one’s feeling towards the individual getting care. Fourthly, valuing the care receiver by having an orientation of their identity and cultural assumptions, by taking care of their privacy and personal pain, and their individual competencies to discover their own pastoral solutions[[46]](#footnote-46).

### Public Advocacy and Institutional Support

To help transgender individuals feel affirmed as church members and be treated equitably in public spaces, it is also significantly important for Pastors, and Christian communities to support the civil rights of transgender church members. This would involve supporting their struggles for justice and support their political and theological agendas, thus strengthening the fellow member's hand in obtaining their due rights[[47]](#footnote-47).

In Christian institutions, such as Churches and Colleges, demonstrating a visible institutional commitment to diversity and developing trans-inclusive policies is very important in this regard. This would also entail the inclusion of trans and queer-friendly curriculum topics, dealing swiftly with harassment and violence, and creating safe spaces for dialogue. In addition, creating appropriate mental and medical health services, improving retention and recruitment, and adopting a gender-inclusive language in the curriculum are also important. Further inclusion policies would involve offering gender-inclusive accommodation and bathrooms. This would foster an overall climate of community acceptance and fellowship and encourage trans-individuals to freely discuss gender identity issues[[48]](#footnote-48). Such support can enable trans-members of these institutions to build and leverage kinship networks, and build advocacy groups, that would further help them attain acceptance and equal opportunities[[49]](#footnote-49).

### Avoidance of ideological wars

The correct pastoral care plan would not only focus on appropriate interventions, policies, and approaches but also avoid being carried away by ideological and political wars that create confusion. In particular, young children growing up in this era of ideological conflict may get confused about their own gender identity. In this respect, unconditionally favoring a certain political agenda may be detrimental to children still confused over their identity[[50]](#footnote-50). It is important for church leaders and pastors to guide parents to avoid involving struggling and confused children into the ideological conflict even by siding with a certain political agenda. Certain stances by rights group can often blur lines between trans-inclusive policies and a sexually suggestive lifestyle, of which the latter can potentially lead to sexual abuse of adolescents and children. Therefore, it is equally important that any political agenda supported by Pastoral care providers should not be hostile to the Church's overall teachings that emphasize the dignity of man, the beauty of monogamous marital intimacy, and life-affirming worldview since that can prove detrimental to transgender church members wellbeing.

## Effect of Proper Pastoral Care to Transgender Individuals

The effect of proper pastoral care is discussed by Clark-King who studied the qualitative responses of six different transwomen. One of the profound effects of proper care was that transwomen could become more honest with themselves and their communities thus avoiding the spiritual pain that came with secrecy[[51]](#footnote-51). Trans-members found more spiritual delight and meaning in prayers through honesty, as it helped them become more honest with themselves and with God. Consequently, it helped blossom their faith which led them to feel accepted and loved by God as a follower of Christ. Themes of a sense of peace and spaciousness were also found among the study's participants as trans-members of the Church discovered their inner selves by being able to avoid conflicting personas. Some trans-members of the Church reported peace resulting from alleviated feelings of pain and aggression, which helped them direct all that energy towards God. For some members, their conceptions of God changed from being a distant judge who would answer only perfect prayers to one who is characterized by love instead of judgment and rejection. Thus, any inner discomfort that led them to hold God responsible for their gender identity issues disappeared and was replaced by love and longing for God's path[[52]](#footnote-52). It is thus clear that the acceptance of their gender identities and transition helped these Trans-Individuals discover faith, develop a better understanding of faith, and overcome their personal issues and problems to attain spiritual and mental well-being.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, the psychological, social, and theological arguments demonstrate the need to counter interpersonal rejection, invisibility, and psychological conflict and ambivalence felt by transgender Individuals as a result of the perceived conflict between their gender identities and religious beliefs. Although the theological and pastoral issues involved in the subject are sensitive as well as complex, counselors and pastors remain in the best position to lead trans-communities out of their psychosocial distresses by exploring these various topics and developing evidence-based and theologically-backed approaches to delivering care. Their unique position grants them a good opportunity to utilize the correct spiritual and psychotherapeutic interventions to serve the transgender community’s needs. The essay also demonstrates the impact of pastoral care providers remaining ignorant of transgender issues and highlights the need to counter conventional interpretations and readings of the text through equally possible trans-inclusive interpretations that remain aligned with the spirit of God’s message. The importance of unconditional acceptance for transgender church members has also been highlighted when developing approaches and plans to deal with their issues, with the positive outcomes of the correct pastoral approach and the negative outcomes of the conventional conservative approach demonstrating that significance.

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