

**OPEN HEARTS, OPEN DOORS:
OPENING THE DOORS TO THE TRANSGENDER
COMMUNITY**

By

Rev. Dr. Nancy Jo Horvath-Zurn

Acknowledgments

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I am deeply indebted to people who are transgender. I would especially like to thank Robin and Della Linse, Mike and Stacy Hughes, Carol and Kathy T., Jakob Hero, Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis, Rev. Malcolm Himschoot, Rev. David Wynn, Ann, Stephanie P. and my dear friend Charlene, “who eats the pralines from New Orleans.”

Most importantly, I thank God for inspiring this journey. The doors to my heart have been opened, and I have been blessed.

Introduction

This workshop is the result of a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) project for Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The entire project was on the subject of promoting functional change in a congregation in regard to welcoming people who are transgender.

According to Virginia Mollenkott, those of us in western society are currently in a gender crisis because through the centuries we have held the concept of two opposite sexes as a boundary with which to hold established patterns of power in place. Mollenkott believes there is plenty wrong with this concept. Rather than two opposite sexes, she identifies concepts that seem to be without distinct gender boundaries. Mollenkott concludes that these are not to be confused with biological categories. In her estimation, with so much diversity that actually exists, it's no wonder the age-old gender paradigm is collapsing.¹

The problem I see is that we aren't certain where or how to categorize those who are transgender. Many church bodies have struggled with issues of sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation. Some have come to admit that some people are sexually oriented as heterosexual and some are sexually oriented as homosexual. We know that biologically some babies are born with both male and female genitalia; we call them intersex. But what do we do with people who claim to have been born in the wrong body as far as their gender is concerned?

In 1989, when I was the student clergy at All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I had an experience that startled me out of my comfort zone. As people were coming into church for a Sunday evening worship service, I was there greeting them. Two women I had never seen before entered and walked directly over to me. The shorter of the two asked, "Do you do hugs, because I

¹ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender; a trans-religious approach* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 1

really need one?" I hugged her as she continued to speak in my ear, "This is our first time in church. Where do we go?" As I pointed out the sanctuary behind me I also showed her a place to hang their coats and answered, "You may sit anywhere you'd like. Make yourselves at home." The taller woman had been quietly waiting to speak to me. It was obvious that they were together, but the taller woman seemed much quieter, more reserved. She was striking in her appearance and my first thought was that perhaps she was a model. As she came over to me I reached out to hug her as she was already opening her arms to me. Imagine my shock when a very male voice spoke into my ear. "Is it okay for me to be here? I'm scared to death." I whispered back, "We're very happy to have you here. Welcome!" Quoting something the pastor had us say to one another on Sunday mornings as we greeted each other, I said with more conviction than I felt, "You're in the right place."

With tears in her eyes she looked at me and replied, "Thank you so very much." With that they walked into the sanctuary and took a seat. I was shocked. This was my first experience with a person who was transgender though I didn't know the terminology at the time. My initial reaction was to find the long-standing deacon and inquire as to what I should say if they came to me for communion. Should I say "My brother and sister?" Or perhaps, "My sisters"? The deacon didn't know either, so we decided that whichever one of us got them for communion would simply say, "Children of God..." You can imagine my relief when the usher sent them to the deacon to receive communion.

Robin and Della attended church regularly from that day on, and a year later, Robin became the church's office assistant. Over time I learned that one of the many issues this couple faced was that if Robin became a biological woman, they could no longer be legally married. They would be considered a lesbian couple and they would lose all of the rights afforded to heterosexuals. I do not know if Robin had any surgical procedures done over the years, but I do know that I am grateful for the time I spent with the two of them, and their willingness to educate me about their issues.

Fourteen years later I found myself attending the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) World Jubilee & General Conference in Dallas, Texas. The first morning of the conference I attended a workshop presented by Virginia Mollenkott titled "Omnigender". She asked, "How many of you have been tested to determine what sex you were biologically born as?" Not one person raised a hand. She smiled and said, "You may be surprised." Following the workshop I purchased her book by the same title.

The second workshop I attended along the subject of gender was one presented by a gynecologist who helped us to identify terminology such as: transgender, transsexual, cross dresser, drag queen, bi-sexual, heterosexual, homosexual.

This physician introduced a term I had also heard in Mollenkott's workshop. It is one with which I was hardly familiar. The term: "intersex". I wasn't sure what it meant. The presenter of this workshop laid it out bluntly. I soon realized that intersex is the same as the term I grew up with that meant a person who is a hermaphrodite: a person born with both male and female genitalia.

In her workshop, Mollenkott pushed the issue further. She seemed to believe that one might be intersex without having the genitalia of both sexes. Her example was Olympic athletes; she observed that often, Olympian women were tested for gender. A woman might be shocked to learn that she is actually more biologically male than female, even though she has female genitalia.

The gynecologist gave people the opportunity to share during her workshop presentation. Two people's statements, in particular, struck me profoundly. The first was made by what appeared to be a young man. He shared that he was transgender and that he was tired of people asking, "Have you had the surgery to become a male?" He told us that the question was not only rude, but also no one's business because whether he had a surgical procedure done or not made him no less a man.

The second statement that impacted me was made by a seventy-two year old person who was known as cross-dresser. She stood and announced loudly, "I'm transgender,

and I'm tired of being referred to as a "chick with a dick'." I've known Charlene for many years but this was the first time I had ever heard her speak up and the first time I'd ever seen such a look of anguish on her face.

It occurred to me that one didn't have to have a surgical procedure in order to believe oneself to be transgender. It was an inside reality more than an outside appearance.

I do not know why these gender workshops fascinated me so much, but I felt as though a new door had presented itself to me. Perhaps it was the realization that there are so many different people represented at the conference. Perhaps it was because I realized that for people to feel spiritually connected with God, they needed to "come out" in their unique gender identities. Perhaps I realized that Metropolitan Community Churches is one of the few Christian denominations that would openly discuss these issues, and that I needed to engage in that discussion if I were to be truly open and affirming of all people in my congregation.

I found myself wondering how, as a pastor, I could respond to the needs of such a diverse group of people within my congregation. And beyond my response, how would I teach a congregation to open the doors to those who were different from gays, lesbians and bi-sexuals? I was still caught up in twentieth century terminology and I knew that a shift needed to happen within me before I could model acceptance for others.

It seems to me that some Christian churches like life to be simple and organized. Some would have us go back to the six hundred and thirty-six laws in Leviticus, where it can be seen that the desire for life was well-defined; however, being transgender is not well-defined in the least.

How do we create a loving church environment for all people when we have so many questions? I believe that the answer to some of these questions, and others, lie within this workshop.

WORKBOOK

Opening the Doors to the Transgender Community

A workshop to assist us in recognizing and breaking down barriers so that we might reflect the truly inclusive body of Christ.

Match the terms below with the definitions listed below them. Place the letter of the BEST definition in the space provided in front of each term².

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|----------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ Intersex | a. A multi-step process of starting to live in a way that most accurately reflects a person's true gender identity. |
| 2. _____ Transitioning | b. Has to do with our anatomy, but is also about a person's identity as masculine or feminine. |
| 3. _____ Gender-Assignment | c. An internal sense of what gender we consider ourselves to be regardless of our genitals/anatomy. |
| 4. _____ Gender-Identity | d. An older term often used interchangeably with "transgender. There is some controversy, however, because while all transsexuals are transgender, not all transgender are necessarily transsexual. |
| 5. _____ Gender | e. Men and women who dress in opposite sex clothing, exaggerating gender stereotypes for entertainment purposes – not necessarily a reflection of gender identity or sexual orientation. |
| 6. _____ Cross-Dresser | f. Someone born with a mixture of both male and female genitalia or ambiguous genitalia. |
| 7. _____ Transsexual | g. The professional name that mental health professionals often use when diagnosing a person who is transgender. |

² Kelly Huegal, *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer & Questioning Teens*. (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2003).

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|-----|--------------------------------------|----|--|
| 8. | _____ Gender-Identity Disorder (GID) | h. | The term used for the confusion, pain and anxiety involved when there's a disparity between a person's gender identity and their genitalia/anatomy. |
| 9. | _____ Gender-Reassignment | i. | A person born intersex may be given this by his/her parents and/or physician. |
| 10. | _____ Drag Queen/Drag King | j. | Those who like to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex either privately or to try to pass in public. They can be male or female, gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight. |
| 11. | _____ Gender-Expression | k. | The gender we outwardly reveal with our clothes, hair style, mannerisms, body language, speech patterns, etc. |
| 12. | _____ Transgender | l. | A broad term for one who has a gender-identity or gender-expression that is different from their genitalia/anatomy. It can include: transsexuals in all stages of transitioning or cross dressers, drag queens/kings, intersex, lesbians, gays, bisexuals; those who have had sexual re-assignment and those who have not. |
| 13. | _____ Gender-Dysphoria | m. | Having surgery, therapy, hormones, etc. to change one's anatomy/genitals to match their gender-identity. |

"Being transgender is more of an inside job than an outside job"

-Unknown

Two Questions people who are transgender shudder to hear (and these are two of the most frequently asked questions)

1) Have you had the _____?

2) Which _____ do you use?

Is being transgender something new in society over the last twenty years or so?

Is this a new concept? While the modern terminology is new, the idea of living out a gender role that differs from ones biological and genital make up has been around for centuries. Consider the following examples:

Activist Leslie Feinberg references a French Missionary, Joseph Francois Lafitau, who in 1724 wrote of his condemnation of the Two-Spirit people he found among the nations of Louisiana, Florida and the western Great Lakes. Though he condemned them, he did note that they participated in all of the _____ and were regarded as a people of a higher order³.

In 1850 a white man wrote "Strange country this, where males assume the _____ of females while women turn men and mate with their own sex."⁴

Other early accounts include the 1880's when Lucy Ann Lobdell claimed to have genitals that made her more _____ than _____. The doctors found nothing more than an enlarged clitoris, but suspected that it was her excuse for engaging in lesbian sexual relations.⁵

As early as 1868 there is record of transgender people in American history. Don Rickey Jr, in the study of the American west, wrote a well-documented account of a certain Mrs. Nash. She remained with the Seventh Cavalry as the company laundress and married a host of soldiers from 1868-1878. When she died, they learned, much to their astonishment, that Mrs. Nash was biologically a _____.⁶

In 1914 Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a German sexologist and homosexual emancipation leader, wrote that American newspapers were reporting with frequency the arrests of men dressed women's clothing and women dressed in men's clothing. He further

³ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 23

⁴ IBID, 22

⁵ Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History; Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 211

⁶ IBID 509

stated that a large number of American transvestites were _____, though not all of them.⁷

In fact, it wasn't until 1911 that Edward Carpenter, an English homosexual emancipation theorist first coined the term "cross-dressing".⁸ Those who cross-dressed were not only seen as marginalized on the fringes of society, but also included among the _____.

Take for example, the case of twenty-three year old African American male who was admitted to the Norwich state hospital in 1941 because he dressed as a female, complete with clothing and make up.⁹ He was eventually discharged in 1943 after receiving thirteen electroshock (convulsive dose) treatments. After these he declared himself to be _____, which evidently was much more acceptable than being a cross-dresser.

We can see from these examples that transgender people have been around for centuries, likely even longer. How much support do they receive from the gay and lesbian community—remember, we are glbT?

Transgender rights activist Leslie Feinberg refers to a 1998 poll taken from the national gay magazine, *The Advocate*. This poll showed that _____percent of those who responded said that gay and lesbian rights groups should try to support transgender rights; _____ percent weren't sure.¹⁰ This means that _____percent, almost a quarter of those who responded, do not believe that gay and lesbian rights groups should try to support transgender rights.

A lesbian theologian, Virginia Mollenkott cites a more recent poll from May 25, 1999 that reports that _____ of those who responded said that transgender people should be a part of the gay rights movement, _____percent weren't sure, and _____ said

⁷ IBID 50

⁸ IBID 210

⁹ IBID 170-173

¹⁰ Leslie Feinberg, *Transliberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 98

that transgender people should not be a part of the gay rights movement.¹¹ This would suggest that almost fifty percent of those polled did not believe that those who are transgender have a place within the gay community or gay rights movement.

“If the gay and lesbian community is not inclusive of them, where will they find community?”

Mollenkott also points out that one out of every one thousand young people begin to deal with their transgender feelings and issues between jr. high and high school.¹²

Where will these questioning young people turn in order to find _____, _____ and _____?

“It would seem to me that the gay and lesbian community has not only a role to fulfill here, but also a responsibility. Our journeys’ may differ, but the fact is that people who are transgender face the same types of physical violence and demoralizing humility that gays and lesbians have faced. We know what it is to face rejection, discrimination and hate-filled rhetoric. Why would we choose to exile our transgender brothers and sisters?”

-Unknown

BREAK

What is the response of the Christian Church?

¹¹ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender; a trans-religious approach*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001) 39

¹² IBID 68

Mollenkott writes that when she's met with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of faith, regarding people who are transgender and their special set of issues, the response has _____, but not _____ enthusiastic.¹³ While some may argue that the glb community is willing to be tolerant and perhaps even accepting of those who are transgender, is that enough? Can we move beyond acceptance to a place of embracing and celebrating our diversity? More specifically, how can this faith community open it's hearts and doors in order to become the truly inclusive body of Christ?

Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis, who has served as the Director of Leadership Development for Metropolitan Community Churches brings personal experiences to his writing. He was ordained in MCC where he frequently encountered those who were transgender. He began a journey into self-reflection that led to his transformation from Maggie into Justin, thus leading him into what he describes as a _____ - _____ in God.

According to Justin Tanis, people who are transgender encounter a wide range of responses from parishioners whenever they enter into a faith community. Often they choose not to attend church at all because they don't want to deal with the _____. On the other hand, most churches haven't considered the possibility of having people who are transgender in their midst and have no idea as to how to receive them.¹⁴

Jakob Hero, a female to male transgender, explained during a workshop at an MCC General Conference 2005 (Calgary) that going through the process of transitioning is very painful _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____. Taking hormones affected him in a big way and the overall process was very painful. Jakob found great support in the MCC church he attended, though he had to be willing to educate the church that he was not a young

¹³ IBID 38

¹⁴ Justin Tanis, *Trans-Gendered Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 24, 15

butch lesbian nor a very young gay male they thought him to be when he first started to attend.

Laura (not her real name) is a male to female transgender who says that during transition many people end up lost in _____ and _____ as a way to cope. They never even find their way to the church. She says the following is the key to bringing people who are transgender into our church:

- _____ —hold workshop and classes to educate your faith community.
- Treat each person as an _____. Don't lump all the trans people into one category simply because they are transgender.
- Remember that it's harder for them to come to church because they go through so much _____.
- Get the word out that the church is truly open to _____ including people who are transgender.
- Let _____ in the greater community/city know that the church exists and is open to people who are transgender. The church could be exactly the resource/reference needed.

Tanis believes that those of us who are a part of the church have a _____ to help the church remove its head from the sand and its heart from denial so that we can speak with relevance and compassion to the question of gender.¹⁵

¹⁵ IBID 9

Looking back over the course of history, he reveals that human societies have viewed sex and gender in a variety of ways and with more options that exist in today's culture.

- We are reminded of the church's response to Joan of Arc
- We look at the Dakota people of North America who identify Two-Spirited People as their winkte: their _____ and _____.
- Some cultures have had spiritual roles that are specific to _____, such as the embodiment of the Goddess in female ceremonial leaders.
- There's a particular role that might apply for those identified as a third gender, such as the Indian hijras who are born male, castrated, and who live as an alternative gender performing specific religious functions.

Because of medical advances in today's culture, how we change from one gender to another is different than it was in past history.¹⁶ Today we have a time of _____, _____, _____ and refined _____ procedures (for those who choose). Although we have made medical advances in these matters, the spirituality aspect seems to be lost in the shuffle.

Somewhere along the line the Christian church grasped the concept that God created men and women with a separate set of historical, cultural and experiential stereotypes. Thus, if any man or woman strayed from these stereotypes it was considered _____. In her book, **Super, Natural Christians; How we should love nature**, Sallie McFague argues, throughout, that instead of judging things as

¹⁶ IBID 14, 15

natural or unnatural we should simply take nature as it is. This is a radical thought because society never seems to want to embrace anything that makes us _____; anything out of the norm or “unnatural”. This is certainly true with the Christian church. How many times have we heard the statement, “So where do we draw the line? If we let *them* in, who will be next?”

“Why do we have to draw lines in the first place?”

What about Metropolitan Community Churches? Tanis states that there has been a fairly rapid increase in the participation of people who are transgender at MCC conferences in more recent years. Some even have visible places in denominational _____. He believes that many of our churches want to be welcoming to those who are transgender, but they aren’t sure of how to do so.¹⁷

He also shares a story about being a guest at an MCC church that was self-proclaimed as a progressive congregation. When a staff member took him on a tour of the church building, they approached the restrooms where the staff member instructed Tanis on which one he was to use. He writes that other people who are transgender have had similar experiences in MCC churches, sometimes being overtly told that they don’t fit in. There are, however, welcoming MCC’s who have specific transgender support ministries.¹⁸

Virginia Mollenkott openly praises MCC churches as one of the open denominations where those who are transgender can find a safe faith-oriented space.¹⁹

¹⁷ IBID 111

¹⁸ IBID 111

¹⁹ Virginia Mollenkott, *Omnigender; a trans-religious approach*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 67

It sounds like we, as a denomination, have made good progress, but we still have a ways to go in recognizing and breaking down any barriers in local MCC's so that we might reflect the truly inclusive body of Christ.

Having spent the morning receiving so much information, how might you answer the following questions:

Does our congregation have barriers we might not have realized?

What kind of church doors do you think we have at the present time? Has this changed from what you wrote this morning?

- Storm doors

- Traditional church doors

- Screen doors

- Open and Welcoming doors

- Revolving doors

- Back doors

- French doors

- Saloon-Type swinging doors

LUNCH BREAK

THE BILL OF GENDER RIGHTS

JoAnn Roberts Ph.D., December 1990

It is time for the transgendered community to take a stand, a strong stand, against all gender-based discrimination simply because some people are different and simply because some people do not fit into current social norms of gender roles. It is time the gender-based community articulate this stand in words that clearly define exactly what our gender rights are. It is time to stand alongside other minority rights movements to declare these gender rights as follows:

The Right to Assume a Gender Role

Every human being has within themselves an idea of who they are and what they are capable of achieving. That identity and capability shall not be limited by a person's physical or genetic sex, nor by what any society may deem as "masculine" or "feminine" behavior. It is fundamental, then, that each individual has the right to assume gender roles congruent with one's self-perceived identity and capabilities, regardless of physical sex, genetic sex, or sex role.

Therefore, no person shall be denied their Human and/or Civil Rights on the basis that their gender role or perceived gender role is not congruent with their genetic sex, physical sex, or sex role.

The Right to Freely Express Gender Roles

Given that each individual has the right to assume gender roles, it then follows that each individual has the right to freely express gender roles in any manner that does not infringe on the freedom of another individual.

Therefore, no person shall be denied their Human and/or Civil Rights on the basis that a private or public expression of a gender role or perceived gender role is not congruent with their physical sex, genetic sex, or sex role.

The Right to Make One's Body Congruent with Gender Role

Given that each individual has the right to assume gender roles, it then follows that each individual has the right to change their body or alter its physiology so that it better fits a gender role. These changes may be cosmetically, chemically or surgically induced, provided these changes are supervised by an appropriate licensed professional and the individual accepts sole responsibility for their actions in this regard.

Therefore, no person shall be denied their Human and/or Civil Rights on the basis that they changed or wish to change their body, cosmetically, chemically, surgically or any combination of these, to better fit a gender role.

The Right to Sexual Expression Congruent with Gender Role

Given that each individual has the right to assume gender roles, it then follows that each individual has the right to express their sexuality within a gender role.

Therefore, no person shall be denied their Human and/or Civil Rights on the basis of sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation. Further, no individual shall be denied their Human and/or Civil Rights for expressing a gender role through private sexual acts between consenting adults in any manner that does not infringe on the freedom of another individual.

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Video

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Call Me Malcolm, filmworks inc. and the United Church of Christ: 13 minutes, DVD.



Rev. Dr. Nancy J. Horvath-Zurn was credentialed as clergy in Metropolitan Community churches in 1991. She has pastored churches in Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and Minnesota.

She holds a Master of Divinity from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and Doctorate in Ministry from Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Her other curriculum includes: “The Eight Essentials for a Healthy and Thriving Congregation” and “The Eight Essentials for a Healthy and Thriving Congregation; Developing a Strategy for Success.” These can be found on the MCC website: www.mccchurch.org

In addition to her part time ministry as the pastor of Healing Spirit MCC in Rochester, Minnesota, she is also the owner of Horvath-Zurn Consulting, a spiritual consulting business designed to “*Illuminate spiritual paths through inter-spiritual exploration and reflection*”. www.horvathzurnconsulting.com
Her consulting includes personal and small group spiritual mentoring, curriculum development and workshop facilitation, and inspirational speaking.

Nancy shares in a twenty-plus year relationship with her life-partner, Barbara. They have a son, Zachary, who is a high school student. Their household also includes two dogs, a cat and any number of fish on any number of days.

You can contact Nancy at: revhorvath-zurn@charter.net.

A Leader's Guide

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS:

- In advance of the workshop, set up a panel of people, who identify as transgender, in advance. These should be individuals who are comfortable with their transition process and open to all levels of questions. It is advised that you invite them to arrive at noon to have lunch with the workshop participants. This provides some interaction prior to the panel portion of the workshop.
- Obtain a copy of “Call Me Malcolm” and prepare to show the first thirteen minutes of it during the workshop. You may wish to show the rest of it at a later date. If you are unable to locate or order this video through your local video rental store, try: <http://www.callmemalcolm.com/>
- Recruit volunteers to assist with set-up, refreshments, lunch, registration, clean-up and any other needs you may take note of.
- Maintain an atmosphere of discussion, not instruction. In order to do so, focus on asking open ended questions rather than closed ended ones. For example, choose questions that allow for more than one answer, such as: “How do you think our church does this?” A close ended question typically allows only for one answer: “Do we do this in our church?”
- Group guidelines can help provide healthy boundaries and structure. Suggested group rules may include, and are not limited to:
 - Respect confidentiality: what is shared in the group stays in the group
 - Honor everyone’s view: recognize everyone’s view as sacred and worthy of respect
 - Recognize the group process: the workshop will begin and end on time. If you must come late or leave early, please do with a minimum of distraction.

- Remember that all sharing is sacred: take turns sharing so that everyone has the opportunity to listen, and everyone has the opportunity to share.
- Recognize that silence is an acceptable way to participate: no one will be required to share

Choose your group guidelines carefully. They should offer safety and security to your group without excluding or becoming invasive. It is suggested that each participant receive a copy of these rules and the group leader reads through them aloud, asking if there are questions or a need for clarification.

- Set a time and date for this workshop. It is suggested that you begin at 9:00am, take the morning break found in the material, a lunch break at noon, and then continue with the panel from 1:00pm – 2:00pm. Then discussion can follow the panel as a sort of wrap-up. Close with reading together the Bill of Gender Rights. You may wish to adjust this time to best meet the needs of your group. It might look like this:

8:30am: Doors open. Coffee and rolls may be available.

9:00am: Open the workshop with a welcome and prayer..

Break: This morning break fits into the curriculum.

Noon: Work to be through the workbooks by now so you can break for lunch.

1:00pm: The panel shares their stories and journey's, and respond to questions.

2:00pm Open for general discussion on the workshop and subject matter.

3:00pm Close with a reading of the Gender Bill of Rights, followed by prayer.

You may adjust this timeline to meet the needs of your group.

- Establish an environment that is conducive to discussion. Since you will ask people to participate in discussion while working through their individual workbooks, an informal square or “U” shape might work well. Avoid a classroom setting where people have to turn around to look at whoever is talking.
- Refreshments: Decide if your workshop will include refreshments.

- Begin and end with prayer.

Remember, these are only suggestions. You may wish to add to the list as you see a need.

Suggested Group Guidelines

(Hand out)

- Let's keep personal sharing confidential; what is said in this group stays in this group.
- Let's recognize that everyone's view is sacred and worthy of respect.
- Let's begin and end on time.
- Let's take turn sharing so that everyone is listening respectfully.
- Let's recognize that silence is an acceptable way to participate; no one will be required to share, read, or speak.

- Let's clean up after ourselves. Bringing sodas and snacks is perfectly acceptable, but let's be sure to leave the room *cleaner than we found it*.
- Let's begin and end in prayer.

Materials Needed:

- A Fairy wand (your choice of homemade or store bought).
- Two name tags for each participant and the workshop leader.
- A marker for name tags
- Pens or pencils

Resources Needed:

- Copies of your group guidelines for everyone.
- Workbooks for each participant including the Cover Page through the Biography of the curriculum writer, Rev. Dr. Nancy J. Horvath-Zurn
- The Leader's Guide for the workshop leader.
- The video "Call Me Malcolm" .
- A panel of at least two people who identify as transgender—if they have spouses, children and/or other family members willing to serve on the panel, it is all the better.

An Overview:

Preparation

- I. Set up the panel in advance, inviting them to come for lunch prior to the panel session.

- II. Order a copy of the video "Call Me Malcolm".
- III. Announce the workshop in advance. You may wish to use a registration sign-up sheet so you have enough workbooks to go around.
- IV. Copy workbooks for participants and the workshop leader.
- V. Set up the workshop area. Arrange tables in a U shape with the opening where the leader stands (or sits). Later, a table will be added for the panel, thus closing the square inclusively.

The Day of the Workshop

1. As people arrive, hand them a name tag, asking them to put only their first name on it.
2. Welcome everyone. Explain schedule, group rules, refreshments, restrooms, etc.
3. Open with prayer.
4. Wave your fairy wand over the group, explaining that until lunch they will identify as transgender. Give each person a new name tag, asking them to carefully remove the original one (saving it for after lunch). Ask them to take a new name for the morning that reflects a gender change. The leader will do the same. The object is to work to use the NEW names all morning long. You might also point out that it is expected of them to act in such a way as to reflect the gender change. This might include the restroom they use, and insistence on people calling them by the correct name. You can later point out what it might be like for a person who is transgender to change names and make other changes as well. This is a very simple basic opportunity to experience some of this transition.
5. Read the writer's journal entry dated July 5, 2003 General Conference in Dallas, Texas.

6. Watch the first 13 minutes of “Call Me Malcolm”. Offer to show the rest of the film at another time.

7. Ask discussion questions:

What is your first impression of Malcolm and his story?

What did you hear in Malcolm’s story that is similar to the typical coming out stories of gays and lesbians?

What did you hear in Malcolm’s story that is different from the typical coming out stories of gays and lesbians?

Allow time for discussion.

8. Hand out the workbooks (including cover page to works cited) to each participant. State that this workshop was a part of a Doctorate in Ministry project for Rev. Dr. Nancy Horvath-Zurn, an MCC clergy.

9. Explain that there is not enough time to read through the Introduction, inviting them to do so on their own.

10. Invite the participants to turn to the matching exercise. Give them 10 minutes to do the best they can in matching the terms on the left with the definitions on the right (they carry over to the next page). After time is up, take them through each one, making sure everyone has the correct answer. Your Leader’s Workbook has more information about each definition for you to share with them. Explain that this is not a quiz or test—no grade will be given. You may wish, however, to ask if anyone had all of them correct when you are done. This is optional.

11. Read the quote—then explain that the rest of the workbook is written in a fill-in-the-blank style. You will slowly read from the Leader’s Workbook, allowing them the time to fill in the blanks in their workbooks. It might be helpful for you to

highlight the words in the Leader's Workbook that they will be filling in. That way you go a little slower at those places, allowing time to complete the sentences. The idea here is to give them ownership of their own materials and the opportunity to participate through the workbook process.

12. Following the unknown quote about the gay and lesbian community's responsibility, take a 10 minute break. Remind them of their nametags.
13. After the break, begin the next section with the journal entry from July 7th 2003 UFMCC General Conference, Dallas, TX.
14. The next section on the response of the Christian Church continues with fill-in-the-blank.
15. Invite participants to list every type/style of door they can think of. You may wish to include types of doors including: storm doors, traditional church doors, screen doors, open doors, revolving doors, back doors, French doors, saloon-type swinging doors, etc. Then, ask what kind of doors your church might have toward people who are transgender (at this particular time). Allow time for discussion. It's important to encourage participants to be honest and not just yell out, "Open and affirming doors" because they think it's the right thing.
16. LUNCH BREAK 1 hour is suggested—be sure to have enough food for the panel. Use this time to set up an additional table for the panelists, thus closing the U shape into a square.
17. After lunch, invite the panelists to share their personal journey.
18. Open up for questions and comments.
19. Particularly ask the panel what they think your church can do to become more opening, welcome and inclusive of people who are transgender.

20. After an hour or so with the panel, allow discussion to begin to flow wherever it needs to. At a designated time, wrap it up. Thank the panelists.

21. Invite everyone to join together in reading The Gender Bill of Rights.

22. Thank everyone for coming. Express your hope that their own personal doors have been opened, and your desire for the doors of your church to continue to open.

23. Close in Prayer

Follow-Up

Please consider dropping Dr. Horvath-Zurn an email to let her know how this workshop played out in your faith community, and/or if you would like to obtain a copy of her entire doctoral thesis. You can reach her at: revhorvath-zurn@charter.net

The Leader's Guide Workbook

Open Hearts, Open Doors Opening the Doors to the Transgender Community

A workshop to assist us in recognizing and breaking down barrier, so that we might reflect the truly inclusive body of Christ.

*Saturday November 12, 2005
9:30am – 2:30 pm*

WELCOME!

**Fairy Wand---Name Tags (use an opposite sex name)
Make a bathroom reference/joke**

Complete Questionnaire---use their name tag name

Journal Entry July 5, 2003, General Conference in Dallas, TX:

As I sit here writing on this fifth day of July, 2003, I think about two very profound workshops I've attended here at General Conference thus far. A couple of days ago I listened as Virginia Mollenkott asked us: "How many of you have been tested for your actual gender?" Not one person in a room of one hundred people raised a hand. She smiled and said, "You might be surprised." Virginia believes that we shouldn't get caught up in the polarization of male and female because there's so much more involved. This makes me think of the Kinsey scale and how few people are 100% heterosexual or 100% homosexual. Mollenkott seems to believe the same thing true about gender: few are 100% MALE or 100% FEMALE. There's always shades of gray.

This morning I went to a workshop presented by a medical physician that talked about the terminology: transgender, transsexual, cross dressers, drag queens and kings, and intersex. I find myself fascinated. Both Mollenkott and the doctor who presented today

seem to believe that we should not surgically alter those who are born intersex—the old derogatory term for this is hermaphrodite—no longer acceptable language.

These workshops make me wonder about God having created us in the image of God—both male and female. So is an intersex person a freak of nature, or created in God's image? Is a person who is transgender a biological mistake, or simply created in God's image? I don't know, but I just have to find out where God is in the midst of all of this new information—and why it fascinates me so.

Call Me Malcolm (first 13 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

What are your first impressions of Malcolm and his story?

What did you hear in Malcolm's story that is similar to the typical coming out stories of gays and lesbians?

What did you hear in Malcolm's story that is different from the typical coming out stories of gays and lesbians?

Hand Out Workbooks

Definitions of Terms: Matching Game

Match the terms below with the definitions listed below them. Place the letter of the BEST definition in the space provided in front of each term.²⁰

- | | | | | |
|-----|-------|--------------------------------|----|--|
| 1. | __f__ | Intersex | a. | A multi-step process of starting to live in a way that most accurately reflects a person's true gender identity. |
| 2. | __a__ | Transtitioning | b. | Has to do with our anatomy, but is also about a person's identity as masculine or feminine. |
| 3. | __i__ | Gender-Assignment | c. | An internal sense of what gender we consider ourselves to be regardless of our genitals/anatomy. |
| 4. | __c__ | Gender-Identity | d. | An older term often used interchangeably with "transgender. There is some controversy, however, because while all transsexuals are transgender, not all transgender are necessarily transsexual. |
| 5. | __b__ | Gender | e. | Men and women who dress in opposite sex clothing, exaggerating gender stereotypes for entertainment purposes – not necessarily a reflection of gender identity or sexual orientation. |
| 6. | __j__ | Cross-Dresser | f. | Someone born with a mixture of both male and female genitalia or ambiguous genitalia. |
| 7. | __d__ | Transsexual | g. | The professional name that mental health professionals often use when diagnosing a person who is transgender. |
| 8. | __g__ | Gender-Identity Disorder (GID) | h. | The term used for the confusion, pain and anxiety involved when there's a disparity between a person's gender identity and their genitalia/anatomy. |
| 9. | __m__ | Gender-Reassignment | i. | A person born intersex may be given this by his/her parents and/or physician. |
| 10. | __e__ | Drag Queen/Drag King | j. | Those who like to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex either privately or to try to pass in public. They can be male or female, gay, lesbian, |

²⁰ Kelly Huegel, GLBTQ; The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens. (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2003)

bisexual or straight.

11. k Gender-Expression k. The gender we outwardly reveal with our clothes, hair style, mannerisms, body language, speech patterns, etc.
12. l Transgender l. A broad term for one who has a gender-identity or gender-expression that is different from their genitalia/anatomy. It can include: transsexuals in all stages of transitioning or cross dressers, drag queens/kings, intersex, lesbians, gays, bisexuals; those who have had sexual re-assignment and those who have not.
13. h Gender-Dysphoria m. Having surgery, therapy, hormones, etc. to change one's anatomy/genitals to match their gender-identity.

- **Gender:** Has to do with our anatomy, but is also about a person's identity as masculine or feminine.
- **Gender-assignment:** A person born intersex (with both sets of genitalia) may be given a gender assignment by parents and/or physicians.
- **Gender-reassignment:** Having surgery, therapy, hormones, etc. to change one's genitals to match person's identity.
- **Gender-identity:** An internal sense of what gender we consider ourselves. This has nothing to do with our genitalia.
- **Gender-expression:** The gender we outwardly reveal with our clothes, hairstyle, body language, speech patterns, how we walk, gesture, and other mannerisms.
- **Gender-dysphoria:** This term is used for the confusion, anxiety and pain involved when there is a disparity between a person's gender identity and biological sex.
- **Gender-identity disorder (GID):** This is the professional name that mental health professionals often use when diagnosing a person who is transgender. This diagnosis can get people the

mental and physical treatment needed to help them transition. It can also carry the stigma of mental illness.

- **Transitioning:** A multi-step process of starting to live in a way that most accurately reflects a person's true gender identity. Transitioning primarily involves social issues such as changing your name, dressing differently, altering your appearance, voice, mannerisms and how you move. Transitioning, by definition, doesn't always include surgery. It may, however, include taking hormones under the supervision of a medical professional. For some, transitioning may eventually include surgical procedure(s).
- **Transsexual:** Often used interchangeably with "transgender", however, there is some controversy over this. Generally it refers to people who don't identify with the sex they were born with and who may change their bodies through hormones and possibly surgery to reconcile their gender identity and physical anatomy. While all transsexuals are transgender, not all people who are transgender are transsexuals.
- **Transgender:** A person who is transgender has a gender-identity or gender-expression that is different from their physical anatomy. Transgender is a broader term that covers more than one group of people. It can include transsexuals (in all stages of transitioning), crossdressers, drag queens and kings, and people who are intersex. People who are transgender may identify themselves in a variety of ways. Being transgender isn't a reflection of sexual orientation. People who are transgender are often heterosexual, but they can also be gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- **Cross-dresser:** Those who dress in clothing of the opposite sex. They may do this in private or try to pass for the opposite sex out in public. The term for this used to be transvestites. They can be male or female; gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.
- **Intersex:** People who are born with a mixture of both male and female genitalia, or with ambiguous genitalia. In many cases the parents or physician chooses their child's anatomy and the child has a series of surgeries to definitely assign one anatomical sex. The surgery doesn't always result in a physical sex assignment

that matches the person's internal gender. As a result, some intersex people grow up having gender identity issues that mirror those experienced by transgender people.

- **Drag Queen/Drag King:** Drag Queens are men who dress as women. Drag Kings are women who dress as men. They usually present larger than life representations of men and women. They exaggerate stereotypes usually for entertainment. Dressing in drag is not necessarily a reflection of sexual orientation or gender identity. They can be GLBT or heterosexual. They may be cross dressers or they may just dress as the opposite sex when they are entertaining.

“Being transgender is more of an inside job than an outside job”

-Unknown

Two Questions people who are transgender shudder to hear (and unfortunately these are two of the most frequently asked questions)

3) Have you had the surgery?

4) Which bathroom do you use?

Is being transgender something new in society over the last twenty years or so?

Is this a new concept? While the modern terminology is new, the idea of living out a gender role that differs from ones biological and genital make up has been around for centuries. Consider the following examples:

Activist Leslie Feinberg references a French Missionary, Joseph Francois Lafitau, who in 1724 wrote of his condemnation of the Two-Spirit people he found among the nations of Louisiana, Florida and the western Great Lakes. Though he condemned them, he did note that they participated in all of the religious ceremonies and were regarded as a people of a higher order.²¹

In 1850 a white man wrote “Strange country this, where males assume the dress and perform the duties of females while women turn men and mate with their own sex.”²²

Other early accounts include the 1880’s when Lucy Ann Lobdell claimed to have genitals that made her more male than female. The doctors found nothing more than an enlarged clitoris, but suspected that it was her excuse for engaging in lesbian sexual relations.²³

As early as 1868 there is record of transgender people in American history. Don Rickey Jr, in the study of the American west, wrote a well-documented account of a certain Mrs. Nash. She remained with the Seventh Cavalry as the company laundress and married a host of soldiers from 1868-1878. When she died, they learned, much to their astonishment, that Mrs. Nash was biologically a male.²⁴

In 1914 Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a German sexologist and homosexual emancipation leader, wrote that American newspapers were reporting with frequency the arrests of men dressed women’s clothing and women dressed in men’s clothing. He further stated that a large number of American transvestites were homosexual, though not all of them.²⁵

²¹ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 23

²² IBID, 22

²³ Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History; Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 211

²⁴ IBID 509

²⁵ IBID 50

In fact, it wasn't until 1911 that Edward Carpenter, an English homosexual emancipation theorist first coined the term "cross-dressing".²⁶ Those who cross-dressed were not only seen as marginalized on the fringes of society, but also included among the mentally ill.

Take for example the case of twenty-three year old African American male who was admitted to the Norwich state hospital in 1941 because he dressed as a female, complete with clothing and make up.²⁷ He was eventually discharged in 1943 after receiving thirteen electroshock (convulsive dose) treatments. After these he declared himself to be homosexual, which evidently was much more acceptable than being a cross-dresser.

We can see from these examples that transgender people have been around for centuries, likely even longer. How much support do they receive from the gay and lesbian community—remember, we are gIbT?

Transgender rights activist Leslie Feinberg refers to a 1998 poll taken from the national gay magazine, *The Advocate*. This poll showed that sixty-four percent of those who responded said that gay and lesbian rights groups should try to support transgender rights; thirteen percent weren't sure.²⁸ This means that twenty-three percent, almost a quarter of those who responded, do not believe that gay and lesbian rights groups should try to support transgender rights.

²⁶ IBID 210

²⁷ IBID 170-173

²⁸ Leslie Feinberg, *Transliberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 98

A lesbian theologian, Virginia Mollenkott cites a more recent poll from May 25, 1999 that reports that forty-six percent of those who responded said that transgender people should be a part of the gay rights movement, six percent weren't sure, and forty-eight percent said that transgender people should not be a part of the gay rights movement.²⁹ This would suggest that almost fifty percent of those polled did not believe that those who are transgender have a place within the gay community or gay rights movement.

“If the gay and lesbian community are not inclusive of them, where will they find community?”

Mollenkott also points out that one out of every one thousand young people begin to deal with their transgender feelings and issues between jr. high and high school.³⁰ Where will these questioning young people turn in order to find guidance, support and acceptance?

“It would seem to me that the gay and lesbian community has not only a role to fulfill here, but also a responsibility. Our journeys may differ, but the fact is that people who are transgender face the same types of physical violence and demoralizing humility that gays and lesbians have faced. We know what it is to face rejection, discrimination and hate-filled rhetoric. Why would we choose to exile our transgender brothers and sisters?”

-Unknown

²⁹ Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender; a trans-religious approach*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 39

³⁰ IBID 68

BREAK—(REMEMBER YOUR NAME TAGS)

Journal Entry July 7th 2003 UFMCC General Conference, Dallas, TX

I can't believe our son, Zach, got hurt during the children's part of conference! Sitting there at Parkland hospital waiting for the x-ray results I recalled the first time I met the young bearded man standing there looking so worried about our son. It was in 1990 when I attended the MCC Orientation to Pastoring required for everyone who wanted to become clergy. I remembered Maggie; she'd seemed unhappy and unapproachable during those two weeks. She hardly ever smiled and seemed nearly impossible to get to know. I was so much in my own process, however, that I didn't give Maggie a lot of thought. I gave her more thought some years later when I learned that she was in the process of having a surgical procedure done that would make her a man!

Over time Maggie seemed to disappear and Justin was born. Justin has warm eyes and a ready smile. He very approachable and delightful to be with!

And although Zach has no broken bones, Justin checks in with us almost daily to let us know that he is holding Zach in prayer for a quick recovery for the injured shoulder.

No doubt about it! This one of God's creatures makes a much better male than a female!! But did Maggie actually disappear, or is she somewhere in this body named Justin? Whew, I have a lot to learn don't I?

What is the response of the Christian church?

Mollenkott writes that when she's met with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people of faith, regarding people who are transgender and their special set of issues, the response has been respectful, but not enthusiastic.³¹ While some may argue that the glb community is willing to be tolerant and perhaps even accepting of those who are transgender, is that enough? Can we move beyond acceptance to a place of embracing and celebrating our diversity? More specifically, how can THIS faith community open its hearts and doors in order to become the truly inclusive body of Christ?

Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis, who has served as the Director of Leadership Development for Metropolitan Community Churches, brings personal experiences to his writing. He was ordained in MCC where he frequently encountered those who were transgender. He began a journey into self-reflection that led to his transformation from Maggie into Justin, thus leading him into what he describes as a new-found freedom in God.

According to Justin Tanis, people who are transgender encounter a wide range of responses from parishioners whenever they enter into a faith community. Often they choose not to attend church at all because they don't want to deal with the judgmental attitudes. On the other hand, most

³¹ IBID 38

churches haven't considered the possibility of having people who are transgender in their midst and have no idea as to how to receive them.³²

Jakob Hero, a female to male transgender, explained, during a workshop at General Conference 2005 (Calgary) that going through the process of transitioning is very painful physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually and spiritually. Taking hormones messed up his emotions and his body big time. It was a tremendous adjustment. He found great support in the MCC church he attended, though he had to educate the congregation that he was not the young butch lesbian, nor the young boy they thought him to be when he first arrived.

Laura (not her real name) is a male to female transgender who says that during transition many people end up lost in drugs and alcohol as a way to cope. They never even find their way to the church. She says the following is the key to bringing people who are transgender into our church:

- Education—hold workshop and classes to educate your faith community.
- Treat each person as an individual. Don't lump all the trans people into one category simply because they are transgender.
- Remember that it's harder for them to come to church because they go through so much emotionally.

³² Justin Tanis, *Transgendered; Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003) 14, 15

- Get the word out that the church is truly open to everyone including people who are transgender.
- Let professionals in the greater community/city know that the church exists and is open to people who are transgender. The church could be exactly the resource/reference needed.

Tanis believes that those of us who are a part of the church have a responsibility to help the church remove its head from the sand and its heart from denial so that we can speak with relevance and compassion to the question of gender.³³

Looking back over the course of history, he reveals that human societies have viewed sex and gender in a variety of ways and with more options than exist in today's Christian church, and in the pre-dominant culture.

- We are reminded of the church's response to Joan of Arc
- We look at the Dakota people of North America who identify Two-Spirited People as their winkte: their healers and visionaries
- Some cultures have had spiritual roles that are specific to gender, such as the embodiment of the Goddess in female ceremonial leaders.

³³ IBID 9

- There's a particular role that might apply for those identified as a third gender, such as the Indian hijras who are born male, castrated, and who lived as an alternative gender performing specific religious functions.

Because of medical advances in today's culture, how we change from one gender to another is different than it was in past history.³⁴ Today we have a time of transitioning, hormones, therapy and refined surgical procedures (for those who choose). Although we have medical advances in these matters, the spirituality aspect seems lost in the shuffle.

Somewhere along the line the Christian church grasped the concept that God created men and women with a separate set of historical, cultural and experiential stereotypes. Thus, if any man or woman strayed from these stereotypes it was considered unnatural. In her book, *Super, Natural Christians; How we should love nature*, Sallie McFague argues that instead of judging things as natural or unnatural we should simply take nature as it is. This is a radical thought because society never seems to want to embrace anything that makes us uncomfortable; anything out of the norm or "unnatural". This is certainly true with the Christian church. How many times have we heard the statement, "So where do we draw the line? If we start letting *them* in here, who will be next?"

"Why do we have to draw lines in the first place?"

³⁴ IBID 14, 15

What about Metropolitan Community Churches? Tanis states that there has been a fairly rapid increase in the participation of people who are transgender at MCC conferences in more recent years. Some even have visible places in denominational leadership. He believes that many of our churches want to be welcoming to those who are transgender, but they aren't sure of how to do so.³⁵

He also shares a story about being a guest at an MCC church that was self-proclaimed as a progressive congregation. When a staff member took him on a tour of the church building, they approached the restrooms where the staff member instructed Tanis on which one he was to use. He writes that other people who are transgender have had similar experiences in MCC churches, sometimes being overtly told that they don't fit in. There are, however, welcoming MCCs who have specific transgender support ministries.³⁶

Virginia Mollenkott openly praises MCC churches as one of the open denominations where those who are transgender can find a safe faith-oriented space.³⁷

It sounds like we, as a denomination, have made great progress, but still have a ways to go in recognizing and breaking down any barriers in local churches so that we might reflect the truly inclusive body of Christ.

³⁵ IBID 111

³⁶ IBID 111

³⁷ Virginia Mollenkott, *Omnigender; a trans-religious approach*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 14, 15

Does our church have barriers we may or may not have realized? What kind of church doors do you think we have at the present time?

LUNCH

PANEL: Their stories.... What can our church do to be more open, welcoming and inclusive? Other Questions and Answers.

***Read the Gender Bill of Rights Together**

Close in prayer.