

# DIVERSE GENDER IDENTITIES AND PASTORAL CARE



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All are welcome. This is what we believe in the Church of Scotland. Indeed, it is often on the signs at the front of our buildings. How do we welcome all, how do we make our spaces, services and events reflect that inclusion? How do we meet the pastoral needs of all and any who come to us looking for support?

At the 2016 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland the following deliverance section was proposed from the floor and approved:

*5. Instruct the Council (Mission and Discipleship Council) working with the Church and Society Council and others, where appropriate, to promote congregational learning and awareness of the issues transgender and gender non-conforming people experience, in order to better facilitate pastoral care to and inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming people at a local level.*

The deliverance is rooted in and framed by pastoral care. As members of the Church we often find ourselves caring and supporting others. It is a wonderful honour and often a humbling experience to walk with our siblings in Christ on their personal journeys, often at times of joy and celebration and, now and again, in times of difficulty, in moments of pain and raw vulnerability.

In the following pages are the stories of everyday folk in Scotland. Some of them identify as transgender people. Others are a spouse, a parent or a minister of a trans person. We wanted to offer a space for people to share this aspect of their life's journey in their own words. This means that they can define themselves using the vocabulary they are comfortable with; they can share the ups and downs of this journey of identity as they have experienced them. They can tell us about their faith and they can honestly share the impact of the church community in their lives. Some of them even sketch their hopes for the future about what the Church can do, the great opportunities that exist.

At the end of each journey there are some questions to prompt further reflection. You might want to use these questions to start a discussion with others in your church community about pastoral care.

As you go on through this booklet, you will not read any academic essays or hear any debates on theological positions; you are just going to meet some people. So get yourself a wee cuppa and settle in and hear about someone else's life.

*\*Some names have been changed to protect anonymity.*



I didn't know being trans was OK

I think I first started to question my gender when I was at university. I remember very clearly sitting on my bed and looking in the mirror and thinking 'this is not me'. There was a real disconnect between what I saw in the mirror and what I felt. Those were my first identified feelings of gender dysphoria. For me, my transition is shaped more by the opposite feelings - of gender euphoria; times where I have felt relief or happiness - for example the first time I cut my hair really short; I felt a sense of safety, of comfort. I began to feel contentment.

Looking back, I would say that in my late teens I was gender-questioning; now, a few years on, I would describe myself as non-binary and more specifically as an androgyne. This means I feel I am somewhere on the spectrum between male and female, with attributes of both.

My life has been very much shaped by faith and church. I am studying theology, my father is a minister, and I have worked in churches. Up until I left home I identified with the female gender assigned to me at birth. Trans people were never really mentioned at home or in church growing up so it was not that I was ever told that being trans was wrong just that I didn't know being trans was OK.

When I went to uni I met lots of new people, people who had more progressive or affirming understandings of the Bible. I started reading Queer Theology and Trans Theology which opened up new ways to think about God. I grew up thinking about God as He - Father and Son - but I learnt that God encompasses the genders of all people. God is beyond our understanding of gender. I am trying to think about God in the broadest way I can. God is in everyone and in everything and God is love so I can't just think about God as narrowly as I was first taught. This journey has definitely enriched my faith; it hasn't transformed my faith but it has enriched it.

I have asked myself questions like 'Is this what God wants? Am I called to this, to be this, or am I embracing something God doesn't want?' I am at a place now where I know I am called to be who I am and that is non-binary.



## this journey has definitely enriched my faith

Christian culture all around us tells us that being trans is wrong. I have often been in conversations where someone has mentioned a trans celebrity and said things like 'that can't be right, that must be sinful'. People say things like 'I will pray for them to stop being trans'. Even just the very existence of conversion therapy is a clear sign that people believe being trans to be wrong. There are lots of voices in Christian culture who make it hard to accept yourself. It made such a difference to me when I found people who didn't think like that.

Now, at the most simplistic level, I think that it is OK to be non-binary, deeper than that, I'm not sure if I believe this fully yet, I think that it is holy and God given. Rather than just being OK it is more than OK - it is fully part of everything God's kingdom is. I'm not sure if I believe all that yet; maybe one day I'll get there but at the moment I'm OK with it being OK. After all, I am only 21 and I have only known my gender for 3 years. I am still at the beginning of my journey.

I have always struggled with poor mental health and mental illness but these predate any of my gender questions; they are separate to my gender identity. Though there is some crossover, for example, the hatred I harboured for my body because of gender dysphoria was a factor in my self-harm. My self-esteem is getting better now. It is increased by happiness and my growing comfort with everyday life has made me happier.

The real difference has been the internal acceptance of 'this is OK' and that is heavily set in a Christian context for me.

I still struggle with being fully out. I first started to tell people through a blog. It gave me a place to experiment with using different pronouns and telling people what I was feeling. I came out to my family by email. I am very close to my parents and they have been my support network all the way along. I was very stressed at university and they would help me get up and get to class but every time I got off the phone I would burst into tears because I hadn't told them one of the main reasons I was stressed - dealing with gender questions. I felt like I was lying by omission. In the end, I just had to tell them and so I wrote it all down. It was such a relief to tell them- it felt like a weight had been lifted.

Now most people know but the church I attend most regularly doesn't know. It is really difficult to find times to bring it up. I do want to come out though. It is important to me to be honest. It feels really uncomfortable that some people don't know the real me. It can feel a bit like lying, that I am somehow misrepresenting myself and for me that doesn't feel very Christian. I don't think anyone should feel obliged to come out but for me I owed it to myself and to others to be who I really was.

- Q1** How has what Christian culture says about transgender people affected Iona's journey?
- Q2** What are the possible advantages and risks of someone telling their family?
- Q3** Does learning about diverse interpretations of the Bible have a place in pastoral care?

# JO

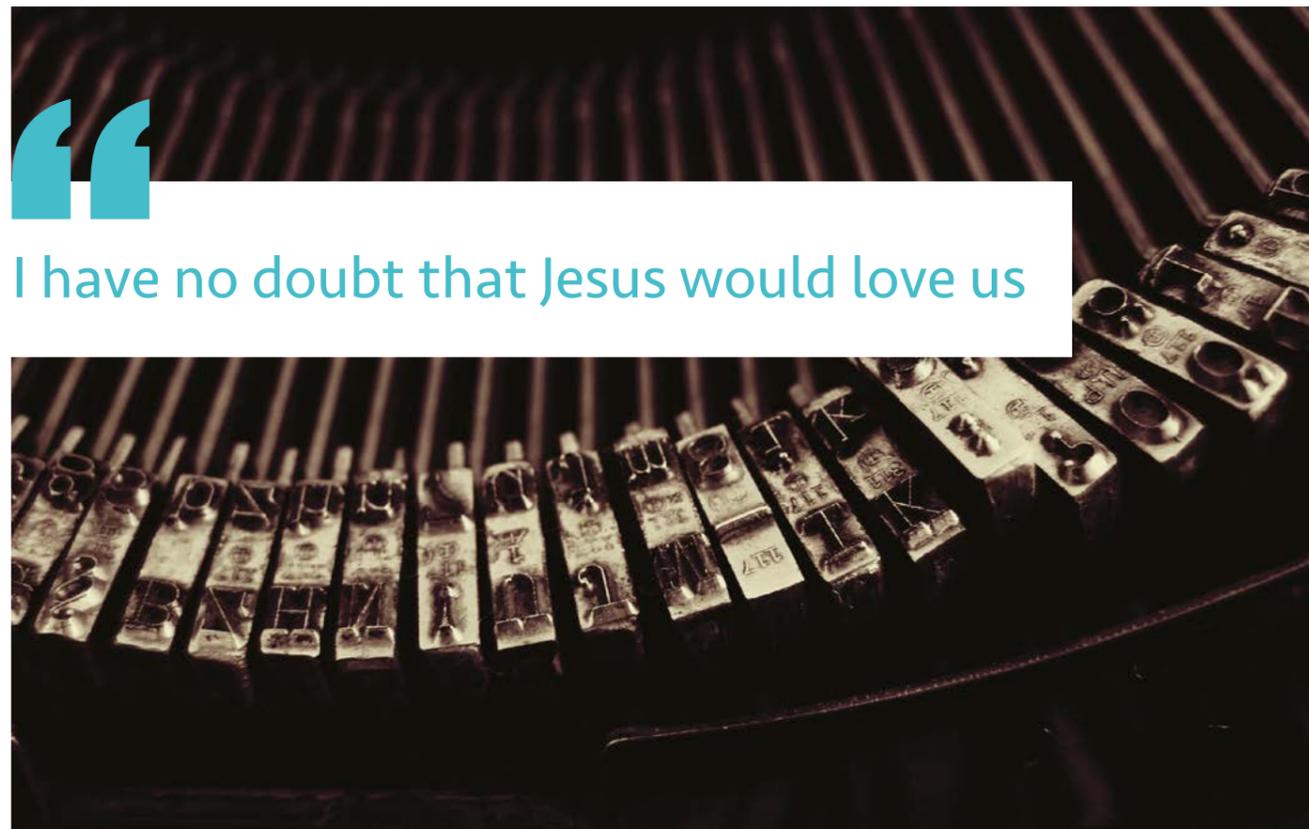


we all go on a journey of self-discovery to find out who we are

Everybody has a degree of distress about gender. Whoever I speak to, sooner or later, most people come up with something that indicates that they have suffered because of their gender. We all have issues around our gender identity and we all go on a journey of self-discovery to find out who we are. The only difference is that for a trans person that need - to confront who you are - is massively urgent because it is a place of huge distress. We all ask questions like 'Who am I? Why have I been put in the world?'

I was aware from a very young age that what I felt on the inside wasn't right - it didn't fit with the rest of the world. The disconnect I felt between the fact that I looked like a boy, had all the accoutrements of being a boy, yet when I looked in the mirror I thought - this isn't me. I had no one to talk to about those thoughts and feelings. The isolation was terrible.

As a child the hostility of the world towards trans people presses in on you. You grow up thinking you must be a bad person. I think all trans people grow up internalising those thoughts into our self-esteems - we think that we are basically rubbish. I have always suffered from chronically low self-esteem and I know that has come from being trans. My low self-esteem has meant that I have always undervalued my work and overcompensated by working twice as hard. Lots of trans people I know work so hard to try and convince themselves that they have a right to exist. It is a type of self-imposed discrimination because we don't truly value ourselves. I think that comes from a life of transphobic abuse. Growing up we realise that we are not free to truly express who we are and that freedom is a fundamental human right, for that right to be denied is abuse. Then we tend to internalise that abuse; we think that it is our fault, that we must have done something wrong, that we are terrible people. That low esteem makes us vulnerable to other types of abuse. If someone says that they love us but then beats us up we think we don't deserve any better - I don't deserve to be loved. We have this secret, our trans-ness, and we are scared of people finding out. That makes us susceptible to people abusing us further, which is why so many trans people have experienced sexual assault and domestic abuse. All the way along we have been shaped by isolation; we truly feel we can't talk to anyone about it.



A gendered sense of identity is a foundational stone of personality. Those lucky people in the majority who are born into a physical gender and feel comfortable with that gender will never experience how destabilising it is to grow up not having that. Congruence between your physical and spiritual form is so important. If you don't have a strong foundation you are susceptible to feeling really rotten about yourself.

I have always had a strong sense of 'me' but it was always alongside a deep puzzlement about how I felt and what I saw in the mirror. I remember looking in the mirror one day and I was dressed as woman, with a wig and full makeup and I thought - yes, this is me. This is who I am. I felt great joy. Some people only feel that contentment after full surgery but I feel that contentment now even though I still have my little penis. Some men have vaginas and some women have penises.

For a long time, every time I went out people would be mean to me. I would get laughed at in the streets; people would shout at me "what is IT - is IT a man or a woman". I would see the horror and disgust on their faces. My world was a world of anxiety. How would I be treated today? I would hesitate before I went into the corner shop, before I went into a restaurant. Would I be able to use the loo here without being confronted, without people being hostile?

I hope society has moved on now and I hope that it will continue to move on. I think in the near future this binary system of gender will be seen as inadequate. I am non-binary - I know what it is like to be a woman and I know what it is like to be a man too and I don't want to hide either of these parts of me- I am both. In every ancient culture across all of the earth more than two genders have been accepted. Gender is a spectrum and I think it is almost impossible to be able to definitively say the line is here. The Governing Bodies of Athletics can't fix that line in sport and we are finding throughout the rest of society that we can't find that line either.

I have had conservative traditional Christians call me an abomination, an affront to decency, a profound threat to the natural order but I don't see that in the Bible. When I read the two creation stories in Genesis I see that 'male and female created he them'. I know that these people read that as 'male and separate to that female' but the Hebrew is much more ambiguous than that. Perhaps it is 'male together with female'. It might mean that the first being was androgynous. Indeed the work of Jung would suggest that we all have female and male energy in us. Trans people are part of God's creation. It says in Isaiah that I named you in the womb. God's word is full of texts that talk about the mercy and compassion of the creator.

I have no doubt that Jesus would love us. I was taught that Jesus came down to earth and embraced all human experience so, of course, that must include my experience too. We see that Jesus reached out to people that conventional society of the time would have hated and excluded and that he treated them all equally. We even have the passages in Matthew (19:12) where Jesus directly talks about eunuchs. That is me. He is talking about me. I am a eunuch. Look at the beautiful story of Phillip and the eunuch in Acts (8:26-40). Even the passages in the Old Testament refer to specific cultural contexts that aren't around anymore. There isn't a theological problem with trans people, there is just prejudice.

- Q1** How can the church pastorally care for those who feel isolated in their community?
- Q2** How does having "chronically low self-esteem" affect everyday life for Jo?
- Q3** Jo says "Congruence between your physical and spiritual form is so important" and that "A gendered sense of identity is a foundational stone of personality". Do you agree? Can you imagine what it would be like to grow up without these?



As a Minister of a large urban church I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that someone in our church family is a trans person but, needless to say, I was gobsmacked. When the family first approached us it would be fair to say I definitely didn't have any of the answers, and we still don't but the first thing that sprang to mind was - "We're not going anywhere, you don't need to go anywhere - we are your church family and we'll be with you through this".

We are a relational church, we are a family, a community, and our first considerations are, and always will be, the primary characteristics of God - compassion, mercy, loving kindness. All together we are travelling this journey of transition with the person we knew and loved as Robert to the person we love and are getting to know as Jill.

We, the leadership team, have a pastoral duty to care for the individual but also to care for their family and the wider congregation too. This is a very complex situation. One person's story is about self-discovery and gaining a new identity but the spouse's story is one of loss and grief for the partner they feel they may be losing. It is a painful and difficult time for them too. How do we support both of them with integrity?

There are also issues of confidentiality, especially when a whole family is involved. How do we balance all their needs when one person is happily accelerating the process and the other person is trying to put on the brakes?

When the family first came to me I followed the age old rule of pastoral care of doing twice as much listening as talking. We tried to create a safe space for discussion, a place where the whole family could come for support. For the first two months I kept my ears and eyes open and my mouth closed. I was aware I knew very little about this issue, this community. I watched movies, went on a training course, saw lots of YouTube films, read books and reached out to people who could help or guide me - theologians and non. Although my first concern was to love and support the family, I was aware that sooner or later we would have to involve the wider church family and that I would be talking to the Kirk Session. I wanted to make sure that I had properly considered the theological questions. We are an evangelical church of the reformed tradition and have embraced the need not only pastorally but also biblically, developing a biblical framework for the approach we have adopted. I believe we have held true to our biblical grounding throughout. Love and truth go together, and we feel we are growing in our understanding of both as we journey together.

I do believe that gender dysphoria is a real thing, something that causes people immense psychological pain. It is not something people choose. With a pastoral care hat on, my main

**SAM**



love and truth go together





## Jesus would walk with this family, be with them, stay with them - even if in silence

priority is to help them, to try and alleviate their pain and for some people that pain can be eased by transition. If that is the road they are walking then we will be there with them on that road. It is like that bracelet from the 1990's WWJD - What Would Jesus Do? Jesus would walk with this family, be with them, stay with them - even if in silence.

But I also have a pastoral commitment to the whole congregation. How were we going to support them? As a relational church I decided that, with the trans person's permission, it would be best to go round the church and speak face to face with all of our groups and missional communities. They would be surprised, like I was, and I wanted to be there for them to ask any questions. It was also an opportunity for the Leadership Team to approach the situation in a particular way, to set the tone so to speak, and that tone was one of love. We are a pastoral church, we have a pastoral heart and that was our starting point. We were aware that people would be going home and processing this in their own time, in their own families; they will have their own views and opinions and that is their right but I wanted to remind them that our first and most important focus was compassion and after that keep your mouth shut!

Of course, there were waves in the church body and a few families felt that this was the time for them to leave us but, in general I have been very proud of the response of our church, one of loving concern for those who are going through this challenging and upsetting time.

If I look back on the last year I suppose the key things I would draw out are these: Be honest and transparent. It is OK that you don't have all the answers. More than anything in pastoral care we are called to just be there, to listen and to respond thoughtfully. The main thing has always got to be love. If we keep that at the centre, and we truly listen, then what's next will flow out of there.

I think as the world around us changes and develops we need to take time to think about how God is calling us to be salt and light. The statistics show that more and more people are being open about their difficulties with gender and the church needs to be ready for this. I urge you to take the time to think about this now so that you can be a little bit more prepared than I was.

One of the things that has given me hope through this process is the acronym POP: Positive Outcome Possible. With love at the centre a positive outcome is possible. It may be a long and difficult road but it is possible.

- Q1 Who is supporting the minister through this time?**
- Q2 How do you balance the pastoral needs of the individual, the family and the congregation?**
- Q3 How do you pastorally support people who feel very differently about the same thing?**
- Q4 What do you need to learn about transgender people to be able to provide better support?**

# KADEN



## finding a label meant that I found other people



I am an 18-year-old demi-boy which basically means I mostly identify as a boy but that there is a bit of me, that could be a third gender, but isn't: it is feminine, I suppose, but not in a girly way. I don't really know, it is just a thing. I'm definitely non-binary which is under the umbrella term of trans.

My self-discovery that I'm non-binary happened almost overnight. One day suddenly I realised everything felt a bit wrong. Up until then, I hadn't acknowledged puberty, I had ignored it and then on my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday I felt disconnected from what my body had become and, more importantly, I realised that I felt disconnected rather than just fumbling through life with a disconnection.

When I first came out I described myself as gender fluid but as time went on I tried out trans-guy and then found demi-boy and that really fitted what I felt so I carried on down that road. A lot of people talk about gender dysphoria but they don't mention gender euphoria as much. For me when someone introduced me as Kaden or used male pronouns that felt really good, that felt right.

I suppose I am androgynous but mostly boy. I lean towards the masculine with a masculine outlook and feelings but I do have feminine in me. I try to describe it via life goals and my life goal would be to have a beard and lipstick.

I don't think I ever felt like a girl. It doesn't make sense in my head to say 'I'm a girl' whereas it makes sense in my head to say I'm a demi-boy and my demi-boy label is really important to me. I know some people are like 'we should just be free to do whatever we want without having to label ourselves' but for me finding a label meant that I found other people. Labels are a good thing. It means I have found other people who understand me, people who know what I mean. Through the Transgender Scotland Facebook group I have a whole range of people who get how I feel, who can empathise with me in some way. It is these little things that give you a community. I suppose it is more about the connections rather than what the words mean.



## this is who I want to be and you need to see that version of me

In the house I can forget about what I look like but I can only cope with my body dysphoria because I own a binder and a packer. I wear a binder to make my chest flat and I wear androgynous clothes that hide my waist and hips. I couldn't go out without my binder on to places where other people could see. It's about people seeing you as your true self. They need to see the right things - this is who I want to be and you need to see that version of me not the old version which was just something I pretended to be for a large proportion of my life. It's about honesty.

Using my chosen name, having male pronouns, wearing my binder or my packer make me feel better. It's little things that build up day to day that become happiness, a bunch of little things. Everything just gets a little bit better all the time and my childhood makes sense now.

I got my driving licence with Mx instead of Miss and that felt really good, changing my name by statutory deed poll was OK too but trying to get the right passport was really difficult. They wanted a letter from my GP and he just didn't get it. He said "Why don't you just travel as a girl - wouldn't that be OK?" No, that is not OK. I would love for it to be OK because that would be a really easy option but it's not because I can't travel as a girl because of dysphoria. Then I had to explain gender dysphoria to the GP. It is so needless and so frustrating to have to prove yourself: prove that you're trans enough to get through their little tests.

I'm looking forward to taking testosterone. It will masculinise my facial features like getting rid of the fat in my cheeks. It will change my body shape by moving fat from my chest and hips to my waist, it will deepen my voice too. I'm a little worried about that because I am a singer. In fact, I am worried that it will change me too much - that I somehow will become a completely different person but I know that's not true. I also would like to have a mastectomy in the future but I am a little scared about surgery. I don't think I'll get a penis till they improve the results a bit. At the moment the results are a bit hit and miss.

I believe that God created us all so that means he created me to be this way. It's like what 1 Corinthians 10, verse 13 says - God won't test you more than you can handle. He is not going to make a trans person and then condemn them to be a sinner. That's not the act of a loving God. God loves all of us just as we are. It doesn't matter how you present so long as you're happy. That's what He wants; He wants us to be happy people.

It's like my dad. He just wants me to be happy too. It was difficult for him to understand at first but he's seen the improvement in my mental health since I came out. He has watched me increase in confidence so now I am able to go and enjoy life. We're just people trying to get on with life and be the happiest we can be.

- Q1** How would you pastorally care for Kaden as he explores his feelings around possible medical changes?
- Q2** Does Kaden's age affect how you would pastorally care for him?
- Q3** Where, when and why is Kaden frustrated?



I remember when my child came up to me and said 'Mum, I identify as non-binary'. I didn't know what it meant but I knew it must have been scary because of just how worried Rowan was to tell me. I went away and looked it up and saw that it meant someone who didn't feel like they were a boy or a girl. At the time I didn't even realise that it was transgender.

My overwhelming feelings were worry and panic. I was so scared for Rowan and what it would mean for them. It hit us like a ton of bricks and it was the steepest learning curve ever. You see, Rowan had been thinking about it for a while but you just get slapped with it and your child just wants you to catch up as quickly as possible so they can move on. It is a stressful time.

I have always been very open with Rowan saying "you have to give us time", explaining what feelings we are going through too. And there are a lot of feelings, especially in those early days. There is an element of 'did I do something, did I miss something?' Looking back there were lots of little things that all pointed here but you can only see them with hindsight and then there is a little bit of guilt - should I have picked up on this before?

Rowan was often a distressed child who struggled with things like self-harm. After Rowan told us about being non-binary they quickly found a support youth group run by LGBT Youth Scotland and asked us to go. We met with a worker beforehand and decided to let them go. The difference when they came out - after just two hours - a huge beaming smile across their face, so much happier. We made a real effort at home to use their chosen name - Rowan and change the pronouns we used from 'she' and 'her' to 'they' and 'them'. It was really hard to do but Rowan helped motivate us by creating a misgender jar; every time we slipped up and reverted back to old habits we would have to put 50p in the jar. That really gave us an incentive! It also lightened the mood and what a positive impact it had - within a few months we could really see the difference in Rowan. It was so important that at least here at home they were supported. We created a safe space where they could express themselves exactly as they wanted.

# SUSAN



'Mum, I identify as non-binary'



## it was the steepest learning curve ever

For parents it is very difficult. You are constantly trying to protect your child and that means sometimes hiding your own distress from them because you want to be as supportive as you can, but there were feelings of grief for me - a sense of grieving for the child I did have, the daughter. I spoke to Rowan about my feelings and they said "I am no different than I ever was, you just know more about me now". And I think that's true. I was not grieving for my child but a future I had imagined for them. That vision of the future gets shattered - will they be able to form a loving relationship in the future, will they have children, will they ever be happy but I suppose every parent goes through that. None of us are exactly what our parents expected us to be.

More than anything I felt such relief as I saw how much happier Rowan was but me and dad were still going through it at home; we had our own journey. It caused tension between my husband and me at the beginning because we wanted to respond differently. I wanted to push ahead, researching and finding out as much about it as possible whereas my husband wanted to take things a bit more slowly - 'Is it just a phase, is this something we should be encouraging or just ignoring and hoping that it all just goes away?' But I don't think it is encouraging; it's just supporting and accepting who they are, giving them space to dress the way they want and use the name and pronouns they want to use - that is not the same as encouraging - that is just giving time and space for them to think things through. Once dad and Rowan had a chance to really talk dad started to understand more. It's made us even closer as a nuclear family, really bonded us together. Telling the rest of family has been difficult and unfortunately it has resulted in the deterioration of some of the relationships within the wider family - which is a real shame.

As the parent of a non-binary young person you get dragged along this road and you are inevitably, quite often, fighting battles on behalf of your child. Our children are trailblazing. They are the first generation to be socially transitioning at such a young age and so visibly. I am constantly scared for Rowan that they might encounter violence. Rowan is constantly surrounded by tension and the fear of conflict. Everywhere we go we're having to educate people, things like why it matters to get the pronouns right or that it actually emotionally hurts Rowan if their old name is used - that is the name of a person Rowan never really felt was them. Even things like toilet usage. At the moment Rowan has to use the disabled toilet - that's not acceptable. Rowan is not disabled. Having to use that loo is just another thing that sets them apart as different, it's isolating. Why can't we just have gender neutral loos, get rid of the urinals and have all cubicles? Would that be so strange? It wouldn't be a huge change and it would make life so much easier for transgender people, or at the very least, change the name of the disabled loo to accessible loo - it would make such a positive impact on the people who use it.

The thing that has really helped me on this journey is finding people to talk to. They don't need to have all the answers: they just need to listen. It makes such a difference to be heard, to have your own feelings validated - just a space to express things, someone to offload onto. Even if that person said 'I don't have any answers but I'm willing to listen' - even that, the smallest amount of support is hugely valuable.

- Q1 How many different trigger points of stress are contained in Susan's story?**
- Q2 When are words and labels positive for Rowan and Susan and how are they places of pain?**
- Q3 How do we pastorally care for parents with differing opinions of how to support their child, the child in the situation and the family as a whole?**

# JUDITH



## growing up in an industrial town in the 40's and 50's was hard



I've always known I was different. Even at school the other boys called me Mary because I was much happier playing with girls than running around with them. Growing up in an industrial town in the 1940s and 1950s was hard. Men were men and women were women and women were somewhere down there - lower. I've always known I was born into the wrong body.

But you go along with life. I got married at 24 to a lovely woman, and eventually had a family - as that was what was expected, but part of me was always unhappy. I had to find time, to dress as Judith, privately. All the stress of pretending to be someone else - pretending to be a man - all that stress would fall away if I could just spend some time dressed in Judith's clothes. Then I could relax and be who I knew I really was. Luckily my job took me away a lot and I stayed in hotels, so hidden in the boot of my car was all I needed to be Judith. Alone, I would lock myself up in the hotel room and watch TV in a nice dress. It wasn't anything sexual, it was just about being honest, being me - Judith.

I would describe myself as a pre-operation transsexual woman. I haven't had surgery to transform my body from a man to that of a woman but I have seriously thought about going down that route at least three times. It is love and respect for my family that have stopped me. They know me as dad and husband and that is important. My wife and I live a life of loving compromise. She is fine with me dressing as Judith in private but she struggles with the wig, breast forms and makeup so I do my jobs round the house in slacks or a skirt and a blouse but out of respect for her I don't do 'full' Judith. We live in the Scottish Borders and to our friends and neighbours we are just Susan and Brian. Being a part of community life is important to my wife, that she can be accepted socially, and I understand that, so if I need to pick her up from bridge club I don't get 'dressed' that night - I go as Brian.

I go to church as Brian. I help serve communion and put up trestle tables for the summer fair and all the things that all the other men do. It upsets me that I feel like I can't be Judith when I go to church. The minister knows about Judith. We've talked about me 'coming out' - he thinks the majority would be fine with it but also joked that some would metaphorically throw things at me. I don't think it would go down well in the little rural community we live in. I would be fine with coming out and challenging anyone with a bad

attitude about it, but I know my wife worries about fitting in with village life. It is out of respect for her that I don't go to our church as Judith.

When I am visiting other towns Judith goes to church. So far I haven't had a bad experience in church. However, one time the bishop quite pointedly avoided me when it was time for the sharing of the peace, but I chased her down the aisle and got my handshake. Some churches are brilliant and there is a warm welcome that starts at the front door. That is the way it should be. It makes such a difference to see a leaflet or a poster in the foyer that mentions LGBTI – you know you are in a safe space and you can relax more. It is very frightening turning up at a new church and not knowing what reception you are going to get. Some of the greeters hesitate and back away and look so awkward – you can tell they've not had any diversity and inclusion training. It is so nice when someone looks you in the eye and smiles and makes you feel just like anyone else coming in the door.

I have struggled over the years with my faith– what does God think about Judith and what does the Bible say about gender dysphoric people like me but I have come to terms with it. I can't find anything in the Bible that says that transgender people aren't welcome. I think that our traditional translations of the Bible are from a time where views were limited. I am comfortable with God and feel personally that God is comfortable with Judith. If God didn't want me to be doing it then I wouldn't be doing it. I don't see God as saying 'Don't be like this'. I see God saying get out there and help others do what you have done: to accept themselves and be confident. That is why I am so involved with the Beaumont Society. I want to help people like me. Yes, my faith has been shaped by the fact that I am gender dysphoric but only because everything about me has been shaped by that. All my experiences, my whole life, I have been a woman on the inside looking out at a world through a man's eyes. Inside, I am a woman. I am Judith. I always was and always will be.

**Q1 What is the role of welcome in pastoral care?**

**Q2 What does pastoral care do or say to people struggling with understanding their identity?**

**Q3 Judith talks about a 'safe space'. What does she mean?**



Just and I had been together for 15 years. We had three lovely children but things in the family home were getting increasingly more difficult. Just was depressed and distant. He was slowly withdrawing from family life. We were all in the same house but we were almost living separate lives. We would fight all the time about nothing and things were very hard. It had got to the point where I was thinking 'Can we go on like this?' One day he said to me 'You married a freak.' – I was like 'what?? – what are you talking about?' He said to me, 'I have left some web pages open on the computer; I want you to go through and read them'. That's how I found out that my husband was trans.

My immediate thought was – what does this mean for our family? I asked him, 'Have the last 15 years been a lie? Has anything you've said to me ever been the truth? Have we just been actors in a play?' He answered, 'I've meant everything I have ever said to you, it's just that this body and my inner self don't match.'

I asked him what he wanted to do and he didn't know. He said, 'Do you want me to go – leave the family or do you want me to stay?' I thought about our wedding vows, sickness and health, better or worse, and I said, 'No - this is just something else that we need to overcome.'

For a long time it was only between Just and me as we tried to work on it. After a while, we told the kids and they were fine about it. It became our private world. Just dressed as a woman in the house but we never discussed it outside the house.

I struggled in those early years. I struggled with how I thought society was going to view me - what people would think about the fact that I stayed. I was worried people would say things like – 'how could you still love him, it's not right, how could you still be with him?' I wasn't struggling with the relationship, if anything that was getting better and better as Just became less stressed, happier, more engaged. The depression was lifting.

Just was still the same person. Gender is internal - it is only genitalia that are external: Genitalia are not gender. The person is the person and that doesn't change if the physicality changes – they just become a truer version of themselves.

# JULIE



I thought about our wedding vows





## gender is internal it is only genitalia that are external

Those early days were very difficult for me personally. The emotions are so conflicting and in that first stage there is the initial shock because everything is not as you thought it was. Marriage is about openness and honesty and then you discover this secret.

It is all very complicated – you are thinking about whether or not your friends are going to turn their backs on you, are they going to think I am a lesbian now? Are the windows going to get put through, is the car going to get set on fire, are people going to stone our kids in the street? But actually none of that happened. We live in a small rural village and the people have been great.

Unfortunately, I can't say the same about the church. We have been married 20 yrs and we recently asked our minister if we could renew our vows in church and he said, 'No – I don't believe in that'. So the sign outside says all are welcome but I'm only welcome on your terms, I'm not truly welcome. We wanted to renew our union with the correct alignment of body and soul that Just now has but no, we are not acceptable. I thought it was the soul that was important not the flesh. Isn't it my immortal soul, my being, that the church is interested in – who I am – not this human vessel?

Every time I pass that sign outside the church that says all are welcome it is like a slap in the face – the one time we ask something of you the answer is no and now as a family we feel the church is closed to us. There have been times when I would have really loved to come to church, times I needed them, but I couldn't because of their attitudes toward Just. We are a family first, not just a trans family. We could travel into the city to go to a more accepting church but why should we leave our community to worship. The rest of the community has moved with the times, why can't the church too?

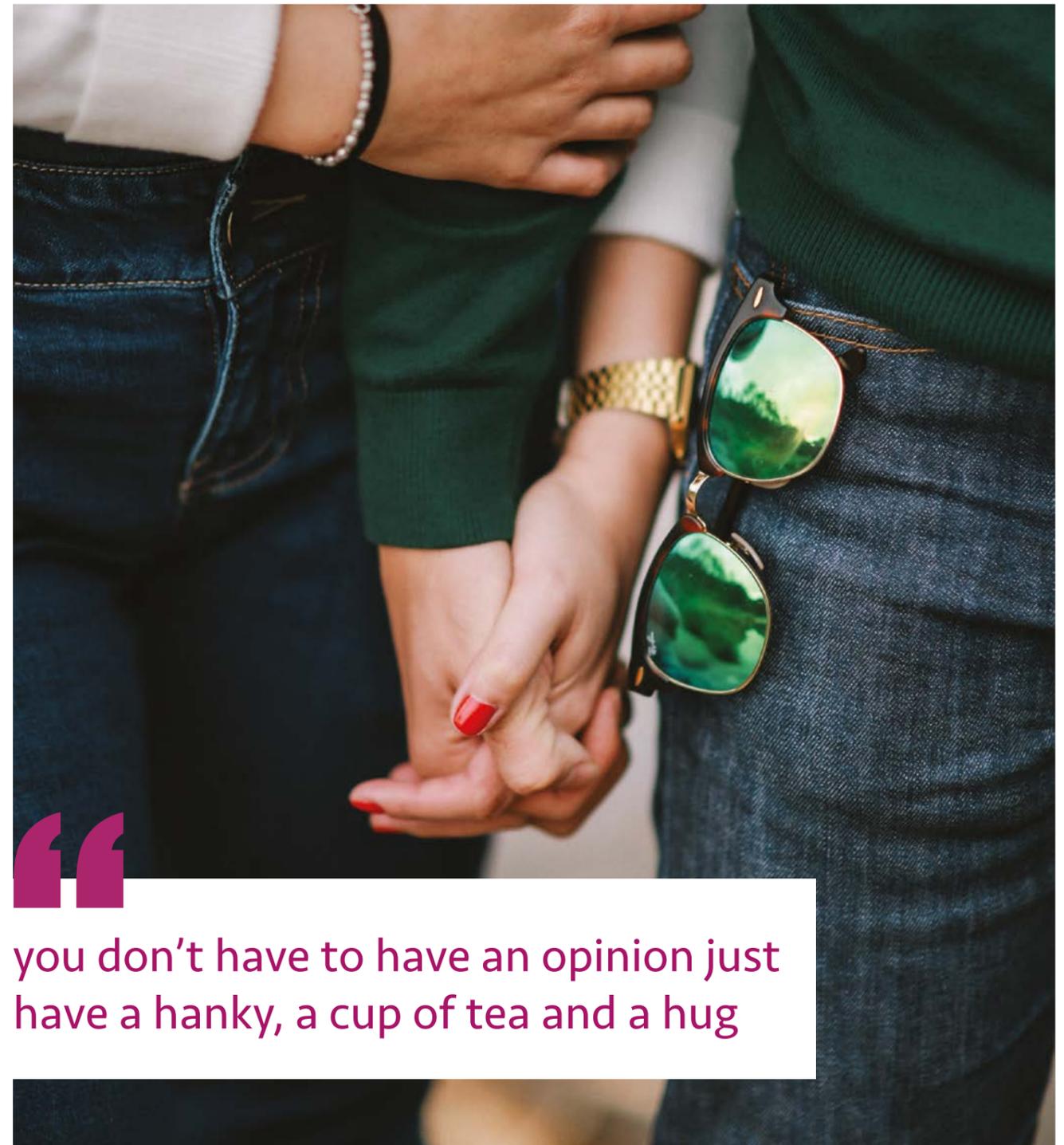
Being the partner of a trans person can be a very isolated place. I wish I had had someone to talk to, someone who knew nothing about it - someone to just listen. I think the church can be that place for people. You don't have to be an expert to listen, you don't have to have an opinion just have a hanky, a cup of tea and a hug. Please just listen, don't judge me. I just want to be loved and accepted for who I am.

People need to know three things:

1. That being transgender is not a sexual perversion – it is nothing to do with sex – gender and sexuality are poles apart.
2. If this happens to you it is not necessarily the end of your marriage or your family life.
3. It has not been all lies; they have just been withholding a specific part of themselves.

It can be OK. It's not for everyone but it can be OK. You can get past the initial shock of society's view and focus on what you really think and feel - your internal feelings are more important than how society feels. Since Justine's transition we are so much happier; the conflict is gone and now an argument is rare. Looking back I didn't even know what the arguments were actually about – I understand now.

Life is better than it was before, now we have 100% honesty. It's brought us closer as a family.



you don't have to have an opinion just have a hanky, a cup of tea and a hug

**Q1** In the early days Julie worried about what she imagined people would think and say. How can we create a known culture of inclusion that would lessen those fears?

**Q2** "We are a family first not just a trans family" What does Julie mean by this in relation to support they have or have not received from church?

**Q3** How can we pastorally care for people who have emotional wounds from previous interactions with the church?

# ANDREW



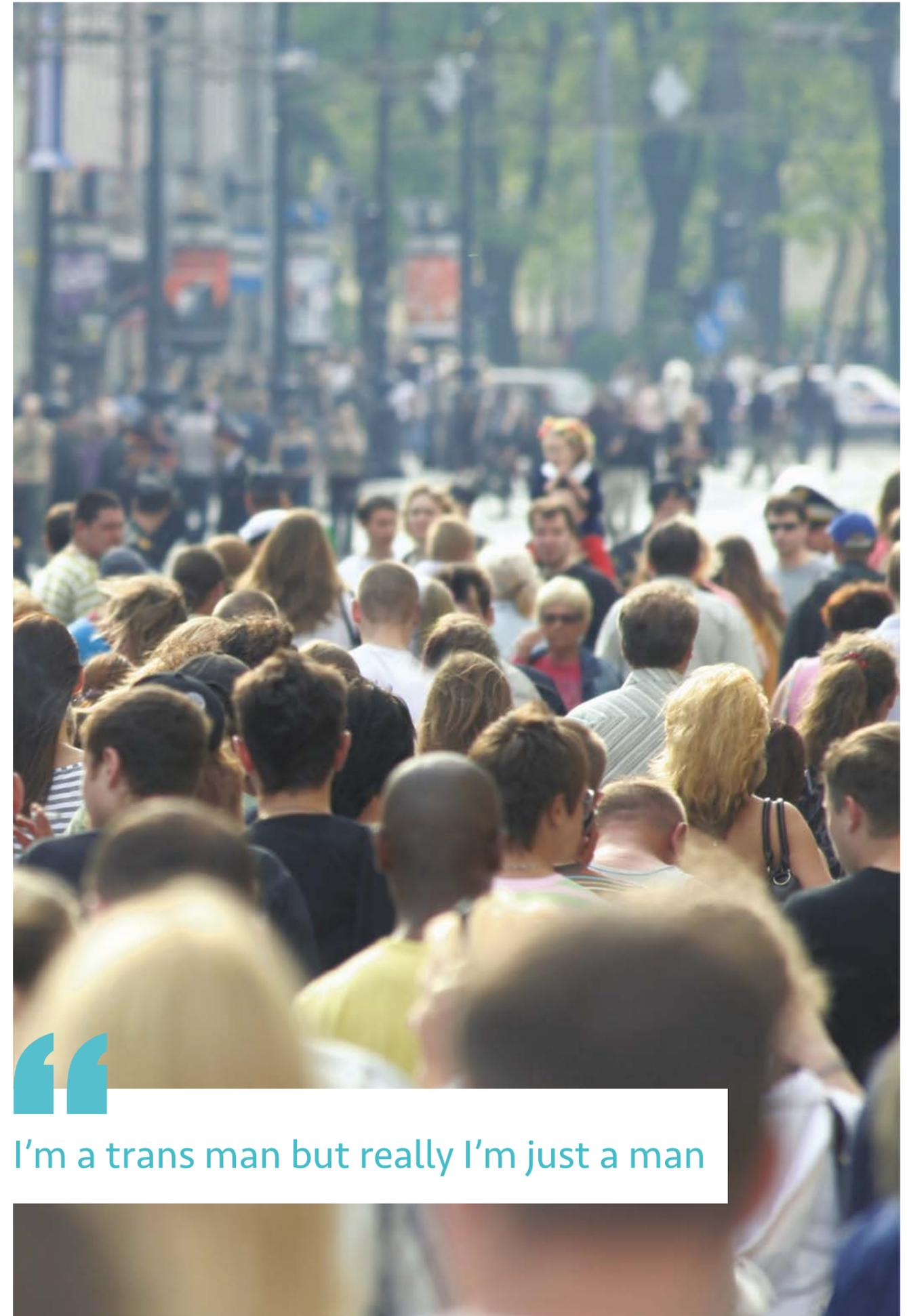
➤ I started exploring my gender when I was about 50. I'd known there was something different about me from the age of about 5 or 6 but you learn to suppress those feelings and not mention it because of the negative reactions you get but it is always there bubbling away in the background. It was after my parents died that I realised I'd run out of excuses for not dealing with my gender conundrum and within a few months I knew I had to do something about it as it was not going to go away. I approached my GP to talk about how I felt and after that the process has been one of discovery. At that first appointment, I hadn't even heard the term transgender let alone that it was possible to transition from a woman to a man. I went away and researched as much as I could and my journey to really living, to life, began.

There is just so much I have learnt. Firstly, there is a difference between gender and sexuality. It all gets lumped together under the LGBT banner (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) but there is a lot of discussion in the community about whether the T should be there at all. Lesbian, gay and bisexual are all about who you fancy, who you want to sleep with but transgender is about who you are, your own identity. They are completely separate. I'm a trans man but really I'm just a man.

When we are early on in transition, whether or not people address us correctly is really important. Getting the pronouns right and using my chosen name can have a real psychological impact. In the first couple of years, trans people can be very sensitive and very vulnerable. Socially transitioning is a massive thing to do and being misgendered stabs us deeply in our hearts and hurts us. Names CAN hurt as well as validate.

Churches can be very gossipy places and it gets me so angry when the congregation tell new people my background. That's not your place: by doing that you take away my personal control. It's up to me to tell people when I want them to know and most importantly it is up to me to not tell people too. Sometimes it can be a safety issue. Violent attacks on trans people are very common - you are opening up the possibility of me getting assaulted. Nobody needs to know. It is my business not yours and only mine to share.

I once had someone take a picture of me during communion - that's not OK. You can't take my picture without my permission. Early on, trans people can feel very paranoid. Society has made us that way, made us afraid. Sometimes we get it wrong and you weren't looking at us at all, but we're just scared - please be sensitive to that.



I'm a trans man but really I'm just a man



## God is genderless to me, it's not father God it is parent God

I've had people I hardly know walk up to me and ask if I've had surgery. Well that is just like walking up to someone in the street and asking what they have got in their pants. It's so rude. Just because I am a trans man doesn't mean that I don't have the right to privacy. If I bring the subject up then that is me giving you permission to talk with me about it, but even then it is up to me if and how much I want to share.

People presume I chose to be a trans man. Please believe me when I say that no one chooses to be transgender. Nothing about this journey is easy; who would choose to put themselves through this, all this pain and stress and medical procedures? It's not about choosing to be transgender - it is about choosing to live as your real self and in the end that is a choice you don't really have. You can't go on any more - you have to live as yourself. That's why suicide rates for the trans community are so high. You can't carry on living a false life.

I have always been involved in church. When I first started preaching I was very black or white about gender - very binary - one or the other. We live in a very binary world, even our theology is binary. But now I think I align myself more with Queer Theology. For example, in Queer Theology we would look at the story of Jesus and the woman at the well and we would note that she was an outcast, a Samaritan, and we would see that the parable is actually about Jesus reaching out to the outcast of that society. Transgender people are the outcasts of our modern society. That parable is about us. Jesus used everyday examples to help his followers understand, like farming and fishing. We need to do this too with the parables - putting in modern day examples and situations.

I always knew I was never going to be a mother but I can still identify with parenting. Now I struggle with the wording of the Lord's Prayer because I see God as my parent not my father. The Scriptures are very patriarchal; we need to update them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. God is genderless to me: it's not father God it is parent God.

As I transitioned later in life everyone knew me. I was very well known in my church community. It would have been easier for me to move churches and start somewhere new as Andrew but that is not where my heart was, not where my theology lay. Going back to your home church as a different person is extremely hard but I know it was right for me. During transition and before I came back I was meeting with my minister for support. That was really helpful and it was important to have that support there in case things went wrong when I came back. It also gave me an opportunity to hear what they were thinking, hear their perspective which was really important because early on in transition you can become a bit blinkered just focused on your own journey. But actually everybody's been lovely. There have been no problems on that front; people have got used to it quite quickly. In fact, life is on the up and up - it's the best thing I've ever done. For me it's been the difference between life and death.

- Q1** Do we talk with and talk about trans people in the same way as we talk with and about non-trans people?
- Q2** Could using more expansive language in our readings and services be considered a pastoral care response?
- Q3** Why do you think suicide attempt rates are so high in the trans community and how does knowledge of this affect our pastoral care approaches?



I remember about 17 years ago getting a phone call in the middle of the night and it was Julie phoning from university and she said 'Is there anything I could do that would make you hate me.' I thought - what is she going to tell me - I was shaking like a leaf. She said 'I want to be a man'. I said, 'Is that all?'

When something like that is thrust at you, immediately there are feelings of guilt because you have created that child and if that child has a condition then you feel guilty - was it something I did or didn't do? As a parent you feel that it's wrong - it's a condition you wish they didn't have because life is going to be so much more difficult for them. I had always wanted a daughter and I got my daughter and she was beautiful and very feminine. Who would ever have thought she would turn out a bald middle aged man like James. But James is perfect to me. You see they are the same person. The same qualities I instilled in Julie are still there in James and I see them all the time.

But there is still a sense of grief- a loss. I was grieving for the things that you do with a daughter; the mother-daughter bond. I can't go clothes shopping with James and he can't help me with my eye makeup.

So, yes, there was initial loss: a disappointment at losing my daughter but I just accepted it and got on with my life.

When he first dropped the bombshell there was so much worry. Things like what if you change your mind, won't this be dangerous? All I have family wise is James so he was my support. I would phone him up at odd times in the night - what about this and what about that - and he would calm me. He always knew all the answers; he was very knowledgeable. He must have really researched it. We got through it together.

James had to deal with all of my issues and questions because, although my friends were very supportive, they couldn't help me as it was just so far out of their experience. There were no support groups then and very little information around. I was living in a small rural community and I was worried I might get a brick through my window. I didn't tell anyone for a long time. James had to cope with supporting me all by himself. Some friends did find it difficult when I told them but they haven't abandoned me. One in particular

# DYAN



compromise is the key



if Julie said she wanted to be James then by golly I was going to support it



## weddings and funerals – they can be a very difficult time for trans individuals and their families

couldn't get her head round it as she had known Julie since birth and was reluctant to meet James in case she used the wrong name or pronoun.

There is a terrible long time where some people know and some people don't. This came up at my father's funeral. James was going through that stage of transition where you have to live as a man for a year. He said as it was a formal occasion he would wear a suit and a tie. I told him he couldn't and he said it would be a good time to let the whole family know. "You can't come out at this funeral James. They are coming here to grieve for your grandfather and that is enough for them to cope with without you throwing a bombshell into the situation." But he was worried that he had to fulfil the conditions of his year and I did accept that so we compromised. He still wore a suit but no tie. I asked our friends at the funeral not to discuss it with the family as I wanted to be able to tell them in my own time in my own way with my words. Church has to be aware of these occasions – weddings and funerals – they can be a very difficult time for trans individuals and their families.

Things are good now but looking back Julie was a very unhappy teenager. There was self-harm and suicide attempts. Julie would have killed herself and it was killing me – I couldn't watch her all the time. She was a nightmare teenager. She'd go into her room and I was terrified about what was going on, certainly some cutting. I'd hide every blade in the house. There were no sharp knives in my kitchen during that time. There had been no mental health problems until adolescence arrived because if you feel you are male and you start getting breasts and periods – well that is when he just flipped out – couldn't cope with it. That's where the self-harming came in because of disgust at the body – he had no self-esteem.

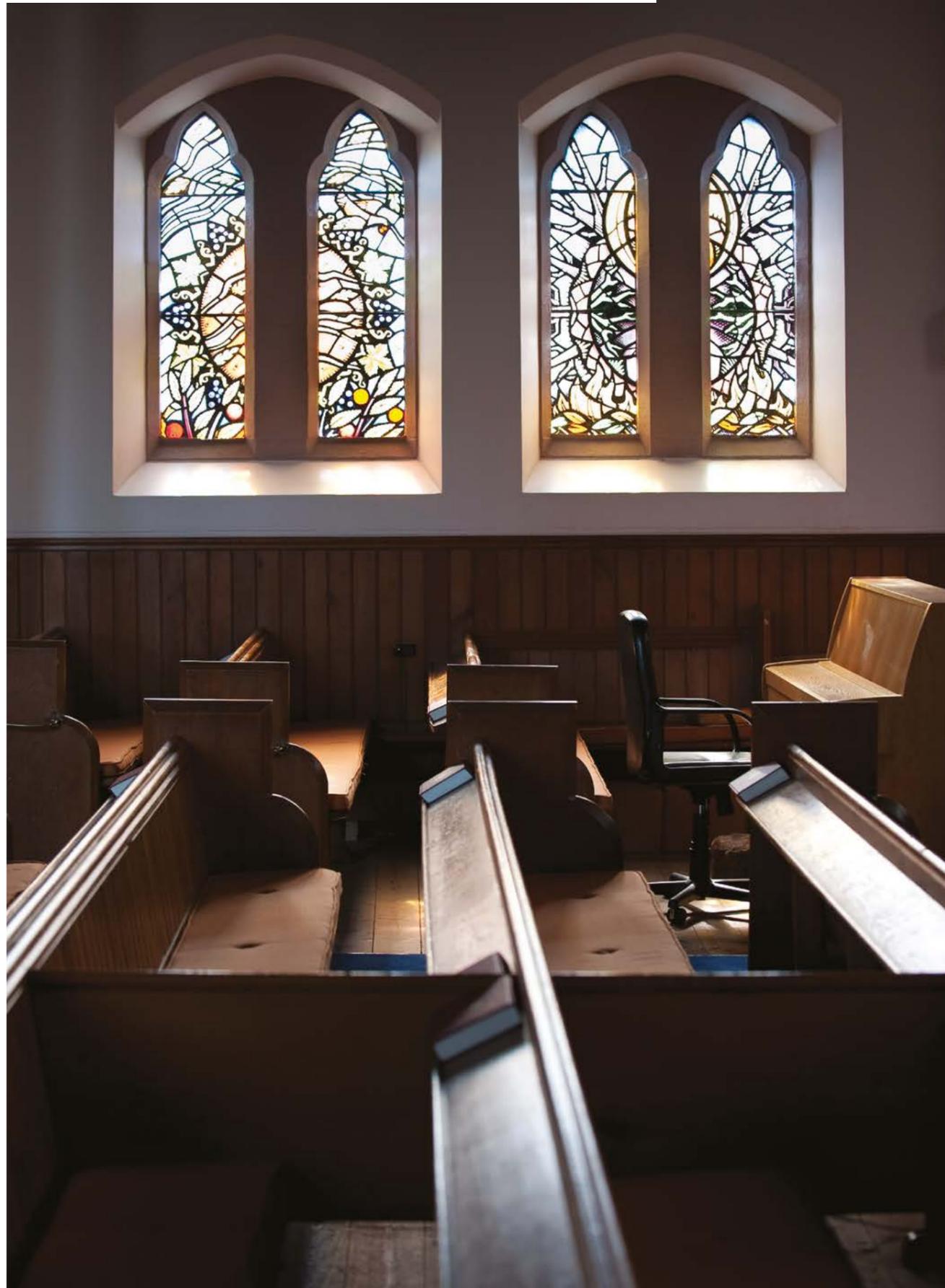
Julie was a desperately unhappy person who was trying to kill herself so if Julie said she wanted to be James then by golly I was going to support it. We knew we had to go down this route because eventually a suicide attempt was going to be successful. The improvement in his mental health was huge and as he's continued on his journey; it has all sorted itself out now. I have no worries on that score anymore.

In terms of my own fears, I suppose at first I was terrified about the road he was going down because you can't go back. What if he went down that road and then wanted to come back. I was also awfully sad about losing the prospect of grandchildren. I remember going into the hospital after he had had a hysterectomy, when all hope was gone; that was really hard. That's the real blow as a parent especially of an only child.

These days I am thinking about what my death announcement will be. I would like it to mention Julie, partly to acknowledge her existence for twenty years and also to let people who knew me before his transition know it's me but that will need to be discussed with James and another compromise made. Compromise is the key.

- Q1** How do we help people through feelings of guilt as we pastorally care for them?
- Q2** What is the role of 'loss' or 'bereavement' in this parental story?
- Q3** Church is often the setting for important mile stones in our lives. What is the role of pastoral care at weddings, baptisms, funerals etc. in the context of identity change?

# MAXWELL



I remember thinking 'I am not going to be someone's wife, and I don't want to have any babies'. It was quite an epiphany. I was about 16 years old, going to the local church youth group and attending membership classes in the Church of Scotland. I had nowhere to go, nowhere to have a conversation about why I might feel like that. I felt isolated for a long time and I struggled against the desire to withdraw.

I didn't know what I thought and back in the 1980s there wasn't a lot of information about transgender issues around and there was no internet with "Google" so I just presumed that I must be a lesbian. I came out to my family and they found this difficult. I was expected to go to church and somehow it would all be made better. But it didn't. In fact I felt like I had no choice but to leave church. I felt that no one would support me, that they wouldn't understand, so I just walked away. I felt sad and hurt that no one ever contacted me to see where I had gone. I wasn't angry with church or God but I was left believing that if I wasn't going to get married and have children then I did not belong there. It wasn't that anyone actually said that directly to me. It was just a complete lack of articulation of the opposite: the fact that there were no positive role models of any alternative identities meant you had no other conclusion to draw.

I went to a Catholic church for a while because the priest in that church was very welcoming and caring but then I moved parish and had to go somewhere else that had a different priest who really was not welcoming - I never went back. The good thing about that was that it started my search for a LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) welcoming and affirming church. I found the Metropolitan Community Church, an inclusive church founded in 1968 by Rev Elder Troy Perry.

I became a minister in 1993 but it wasn't until 1996 that the penny finally dropped and I acknowledged that I was a trans man. It came about because of a documentary on the TV called 'The Decision'. Watching that programme was another epiphany moment. It was as if someone said 'there YOU are'. Everything made sense, everything I had felt and experienced finally fitted together like a jigsaw. That did not mean there wasn't fear and anxiety because there was, mostly around telling my family, but there was also excitement about new beginnings.

At this time I was a minister in the Metropolitan Community Church but even within that community transgender folks were still not really visible. The community was very welcoming to the L the G and the B but the T was yet to be added. It is hard to come out when you are a leader because you're public; lots of people know you and they feel like they have some kind of ownership over you. They think that they can comment and have an opinion on you - about why you are doing what you are doing. That can add additional stresses to the dynamic of transitioning because you are so visible.



I knew I was made, loved and affirmed by God



## I can link my transition experience to the resurrection story

So I took some time out, not because my life was falling apart or anything dramatic but because I knew that I needed to pay attention to my own care needs before I could return to a role where I was pastorally caring for others.

Thankfully, I never had any kind of fear that God would have any difficulty with my transition. I knew I was made, loved and affirmed by God. I knew that I was made in God's image and that being transgender was truly a gift from God. My gut feeling was that it was all good and that God had finally got me to the place I needed to be.

I can link my transition experience to the resurrection story. Being resurrected in a different way, being transformed in a new way, you become who you were meant to be. I often hear transgender folks in a church context talk about having a resurrection experience and I feel like that is what God has allowed me to have.

Queer Theology has become more accessible in recent years through many different well respected academic institutions, conferences, workshops and publications. It's become easier for people to tap into theology that recognises values and celebrates difference. Sometimes in church we don't realise we can look for something different – if it's not in the lectionary then we often don't get to hear about it. That's what is different about the church I am in now. There is always some positive reference in church: references to Queer Theology in the sermons or prayers that mention LGBT issues. There will be LGBT groups mentioned in the notices and church events to remember significant LGBT anniversaries or celebrations. There are posters on the wall that advertise LGBT support agencies. If you come to our church you will know that you are welcome and that is very public. All community members are part of the everyday life of the church so of course they are going to be mentioned and recognised. This inclusivity runs throughout the church. In our junior church children who have two mummies or two daddies, or children whose gender identity is not clear need to know they too are included. We're not just presenting a one dimensional picture of how individuals and family should be.

This was the void that I noticed in church when I was a teenager. I want our young people to grow up in a community and a church family where they can be who they are – loved, affirmed and accepted without question. This includes transgender folk and people whose gender expressions are different to others.

The best way to become an inclusive community is to be upfront about it. Be clear that this is the intention. Work with the existing community and take them on that journey of transformational love that will be positive for all involved.

- Q1** Do our pastoral duties continue after someone has left our congregation?
- Q2** What part does having, showing or talking about positive role models play within our pastoral care?
- Q3** "I knew I was made, loved and affirmed by God." Coming to this conclusion has made a real positive difference to Maxwell. Is there a role for exploring theology as part of pastoral care?



I don't know when I first thought I might be a trans woman, though I had feelings of wanting to be a girl back in my primary school days. However, it wasn't until my early twenties that I learned about trans people – from a slightly remote perspective, in the pages of New Scientist! I used to cut out all sorts of articles that I found interesting, only later realising how many of them were about the biology of sex and gender diversity.

What I read made me think that perhaps being trans could explain my thoughts and feelings. Even though I was assigned male at birth, *perhaps I was actually a woman*. However, my lack of knowledge at the time led me to believe that trans people were very rare, and that the chances of me being a *lesbian* trans woman were vanishingly small. (Thankfully, in the internet age, so much more information is available to us.)

In my mid-twenties I became a Christian and had my first real encounters with the church. I was told what I took to be *the Christian view* on many things, and being unaware of a broader spectrum of Christian belief, I was scared of throwing the baby of my new-found faith out with the bathwater. So in my early years as a Christian, I felt that I needed to hide my true beliefs about things ranging from plate tectonics and evolution to sexism, sexuality and gender. I picked up the message that being trans was incompatible with being a Christian and, consequently, suppressed the thoughts and feelings that I'd had.

Over 25 years later I am still a member of the Church of Scotland, but about eight years ago I felt I had to move to a church that preached more about the love and acceptance I see in Jesus. I am happy in my new church and have been very involved in leading worship there.

Last year stress-related health issues led me to see my GP and seek some counselling. That was the first time I told anyone else my feelings about my gender identity. Both my GP and the counsellor were very supportive and I was referred to a Gender Identity Clinic. When I subsequently came out to my wife, she felt the need to talk to someone else, so we both went to speak to our church's Pastoral Associate. She was really open and positive, as were other people I later told within the congregation, not least our minister.

I knew I wanted to continue to lead worship, and as that is such a visible position we had to think about how the church was going to handle my transition. The issue was first raised at a regular Kirk Session meeting.

# ANNA



now I lead worship as Anna. It feels amazing

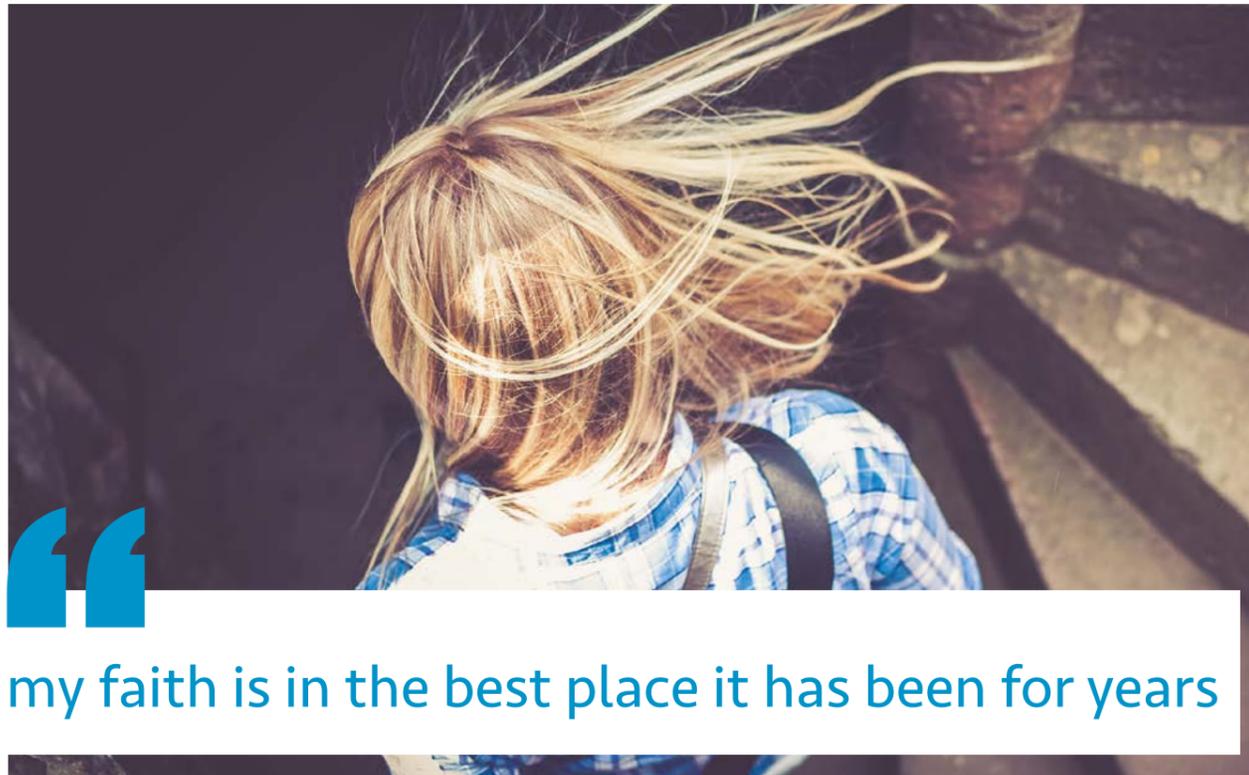
Then an extraordinary Session meeting was arranged specifically to discuss my transition. It felt a little uncomfortable to know I was being talked about at such length. By this time, I had legally changed my name and was living as Anna six days a week, but on Sundays I was still attending church and leading worship in disguise, as it were. I couldn't keep that up for much longer.

We agreed that the minister would tell the congregation at a Sunday morning service. The week before, he went round various church groups and informed them of the situation. Again, it felt odd not to be present: I'd have loved to have been a fly on the wall! Then on the Sunday morning he gave a pastoral announcement, lasting about 15 minutes and mentioning legal and medical aspects of my transition. I normally sit at the front of the church but was very glad that I chose to sit in the balcony that morning! I thought it was important for me to be there, though, and I came dressed as Anna for the first time. Several people came up to me after the service and were very nice and supportive, though it was still a very nerve-racking morning.

I always thought it would have been good to have my change of name marked with some kind of liturgy, but by the time the congregation was aware of my circumstances, I had been living as Anna for a few months and it would have felt strange. I didn't want to hear my old name used at all – even in a service like that. Having my old name used, or being misgendered (e.g. called 'sir' or 'him'), can be a very hurtful experience.

Now I lead worship as Anna. It feels amazing. I feel a better connection with God. It feels as though a barrier has been taken away. As Anna, I worship God as my true self: the facade has gone and I can really be me. I feel closer to God because of it and my faith is in the best place it has been for years.

- Q1** Why did Anna feel like she had to attend church as a man when she was living the rest of her life as Anna?
- Q2** What is the role of every member of the congregation in pastoral care?
- Q3** What are the positive and negative factors for Anna of a congregational announcement?



For more information contact the Scottish Trans Alliance:  
[www.scottishtrans.org](http://www.scottishtrans.org)  
[www.facebook.com/scottishtrans.org](https://www.facebook.com/scottishtrans.org)  
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