

## **The Blackburn Motion GS2071 - 'Welcoming Transgender People' proposes:-**

*"That this Synod, recognising the need for transgender people to be welcomed and affirmed in their parish church, call on the House of Bishops to consider whether some nationally commended liturgical materials might be prepared to mark a person's gender transition".*

I have tabled an amendment to this as follows:-

*"That this Synod:*

*(a) recognise the dignity of all people as made in the image of God and so affirm our commitment to welcome unconditionally in all our churches people who experience (or who have experienced) gender dysphoria;*

*(b) acknowledge different understandings around gender dysphoria and the field of gender identity more widely;*

*(c) consider that the preparation of liturgies to mark gender transition raises substantial theological and pastoral issues that the Church of England has not yet considered;*

*(d) ask the House of Bishops to consider the theological, pastoral and other issues that gender transition raises for the Church and to report back to General Synod."*

Please note that in writing this brief paper I have not sought to give background information on Transgender/Gender Dysphoria - rather I commend the CMF file on 'Gender Dysphoria' by Rick Thomas and Peter Saunders which has already been circulated.

The Blackburn motion is helpful because Transgender people are often vulnerable, bullied and marginalised and as Christians we should be welcoming everyone, especially those at the margins and in pain, into our churches. Issues around Transgender and Gender dysphoria are also increasing and it is right that we give them serious consideration. So if this is the case why do we need an amendment?

- 1. Theological.** Liturgy needs to follow theology and doctrine - as the Secretary General points out the Church of England has no settled doctrinal position on issues around Transgender, so some serious theological thinking is required before any transition specific liturgy could be contemplated. The theological survey in Martin Davie's monograph (available on EGGS website / homepage) well illustrates the current diversity of theological opinion.
- 2. Pastoral.** It is surely right that we seek to help people with gender dysphoria to get the right holistic outcome for them - physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. But at present it is difficult to see how this can be achieved in the absence of any clear theological underpinnings to our pastoral care. Furthermore different Trans people work through these issues in different ways, many concluding that full transition is not for them, therefore if our sole contribution to this subject is liturgy around transitions we may inadvertently undermine what is best for them.
- 3. Sociological.** The vast majority of Transgender people are not campaigning for a post modern deconstruction of gender (in fact they are very committed to gender, they just feel that theirs is incongruent with their physical biology). However there is an increasing sociological trend to see humanity redefined not as being 'in the image of God' but as a self-defined construct with gender being either fluid or irrelevant. Five year old children are coming home from school asking whether they are a boy or a girl

because the teacher has told them it is up to them to decide. We are seeing large increases in adolescents presenting to mental health services with identity disorders. We need to be clear in our thinking so that we can give a genuine welcome and compassionate pastoral care to transgender people without undermining the emotional security of young people for whom confusion over gender identity will not be a problem unless we make it one for them!

- 4. Practical.** It is right for us to unconditionally welcome transgender people into our churches, but it would be naive to suggest that this will not require some careful discussion around practical issues. Some central guidance on what it means to genuinely welcome transgender people (co-produced with trans people and reflecting the churches theological thinking) would be very helpful in truncating much heated PCC debate.

Some pointers for debate:-

- 1.** At this stage I think it is more helpful to emphasise the need for liturgy to follow theology (which will certainly attract broad support) than trying to define the theology, which will inevitably divide opinions.
- 2.** It is helpful to keep reminding ourselves of the benefits there are for all of us in having an Identity that is in Christ.
- 3.** It may be helpful to build on the dangers of a consumer based, individualised approach to identity - 'the self made person, who worships their creator!' But be careful not to blame trans people for this. The danger is that in our legitimate wish to compassionately welcome trans people we may be seen to 'normalise gender fluidity and diversity' in a way that harms other vulnerable people, particularly young people. With careful reflection we should be able to do the former without doing the latter.
- 4.** We might wish to consider whether or not it is appropriate for the thinking around this to be incorporated with the Bishops' work on sexuality or whether we think this should be a completely separate piece of work.

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