

A ROADMAP TO INCLUSION



SUPPORTING
TRANS
PEOPLE OF
FAITH

SHAAN KNAN

Edited by The Revd Dr Christina Beardsley

 gires

The logo for Gires features a stylized, symmetrical icon composed of a key and a heart shape, with a small flame at the bottom. The word "gires" is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font to the right of the icon.

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Foreword

The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) is pleased to have developed this important guide on supporting trans and gender diverse people of faith. This booklet has been funded by a generous donation in loving memory of Alison Challis. GIRES is deeply grateful to two of its trustees, Shaan Knan and Christina Beardsley, for the sensitivity and professionalism they have applied to creating this accessible and useful publication.

It is intended to serve as a companion to the charity's previous successful booklet: 'Inclusivity – Supporting BAME Trans People.'



A Roadmap to Inclusion: Supporting Trans People of Faith

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Introduction

In recent years, trans and gender diverse people have become much more visible in all sectors of British society.

This visibility has helped to raise social awareness about the wider gender diverse population, and to create a greater understanding that trans people are not all the same. There is a range of responses to the discomfort that leads some trans people to transition, that is, they adopt the social role and gender expressions that are in tune with their gender identity, rather than meeting the expectations associated with their birth certificate. Trans people come from many different cultural and societal contexts.

Faith can be an important part of many trans people's lives. Nonetheless, the myth is perpetuated that trans people cannot possibly belong within faith communities; this is deeply damaging.

As the visibility of trans people has expanded, so, unfortunately, has the backlash against them. Despite legal protections, trans people in the UK face huge levels of abuse and inequalities. This is not helped by the many myths and misconceptions that are repeated constantly in the media.

Religious institutions have too often played a negative part in this. Historically many religions have treated those in vulnerable groups - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people - harshly. However, within nearly every religious denomination there are now openly supportive leaders and groups that have adopted affirming positions on gender diverse people as well as the affiliated groups in the LGBTQI+ communities. As society becomes more accepting, many faith strands have become more inclusive.



How inclusive are you?

The chances are that your community, group or organisation is already one that cares deeply about inclusion. Organisations that seek to welcome trans people are often already supporting multiple types of diversity and inclusion in powerful ways. It is likely that you are instinctively doing many things right and that your group or community can become more inclusive by simply utilising and building on the skills and resources that you already have.

You may, though, be interested in the following data.

Some facts and figures

Many people have not come across a trans person. They don't understand or they may misunderstand what transgender means, or they might have questions about trans and faith identities. The more people know about trans people and different gender identities, the more accepting they become over time. Having the facts is really important.

Stonewall research¹ found that one in four trans people of faith (25 per cent) aren't open about who they are in their faith community.

Just one in four LGBT people of faith (25 per cent) think their faith community is welcoming of trans people.

Half of BAME LGBT people (51 per cent) face discrimination within the LGBT community.

¹ www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-britain-home-and-communities



Did you know?

Many trans people of faith have a BAME background. Do check out GIRES' Intersectionality resource by Sabah Choudrey. Find the link in the appendix.

One in five trans people (20 per cent) have been pressured to access services to suppress their gender identity when accessing healthcare services.

The National LGBT Survey (2018)² reports that five percent of [all survey] respondents had been offered so-called 'conversion' or 'reparative' therapy (but did not take it up) and a further 2% had undergone it. These figures were higher for trans respondents (e.g. 9% of trans men had been offered it and 4% had undergone it). Faith organisations were by far the most likely group to have conducted conversion therapy (51% of those who received it had it conducted by faith groups), followed by healthcare professionals (19% of those who received it had it conducted by healthcare professionals).

Conversion therapy (or 'reparative' therapy) refers to any form of treatment or psychotherapy which aims to change a person's sexual orientation or to suppress a person's gender identity. It is based on an assumption that being lesbian, gay, bi or trans is a mental illness that can be 'cured'. So-called 'conversion therapy' can range from pseudo-psychological treatments to, in extreme cases, surgical interventions and 'corrective' rape. These therapies are both unethical and harmful.

In the UK, all the major counselling and psychotherapy bodies, as well as the NHS, have concluded that conversion therapy is dangerous and have condemned it by signing the Memorandum of Understanding Version 2.³ Since the National LGBT Report in 2018, the UK Government has expressed the commitment to bring forward proposals to end the practice.

Official statistics and figures highlight the high rate of discrimination and marginalisation of trans people of faith in the UK. But it doesn't have to be that way. Trans people of faith need to be and deserve to be respected and included in their faith communities, just as they need respect and acceptance in wider society. Your community can contribute by creating a safe space for gender diverse people of faith.

Faith has this almost unparalleled ability to bring people together in the name of love and compassion. Here is an example of a young person subjected to completely inappropriate 'treatment' in an attempt to 'cure' them. Her opportunity to be 'properly cured' enabling her to live as herself, was secured through the loving response of her vicar and church community.

“ At the age of 17, I was subjected to electro-aversion therapy where painful electric shocks were administered to my arm to try to make me associate pain with my deeply felt desire to be female. I was a regular church-goer and running a church youth club as well as singing and playing in the church's youth choir. As pressure in my mind built with regard to my gender dysphoria, I truanted from college as I couldn't face the day ahead. I stayed at home and cried contemplating suicide.

As 'luck' would have it, my vicar called to my house without prompting that day and I let him in. We talked through my tears and I explained, for the first time to anyone, my issues. He did not reject me; did not quote scripture; and supported me. I told him I wanted to be 'cured'. At no time did he say I needed to be 'cured' but he arranged for me to visit a psychiatrist who then referred me for 'treatment'! It could be argued that my vicar arranged the abhorrent way I was dealt with but that would be untrue. He accepted me totally and only responded to my requests.

Both he and I believed that God had sent him to my house that day and it probably saved my life. From then on, we never discussed the issue again but he was always accepting and supportive of my contributions to the church and its youth work. He supported my application to a church teacher training college to study Divinity and Mathematics and sought to employ me as a teacher when I qualified. His view of religion was that we are all loved by God for who we are. At a church reunion in 2012, I was able to tell his family the story of how he 'saved my life' and, now, properly cured and living with a gender expression matching my gender identity, I showed that the pain, mental and physical effects of my barbaric treatment were diminished. My vicar and the church did not reject me - I was, and am, accepted. They saved my life and, then, helped me fulfil my life. The God they worshipped would want that.

Carolyn Mercer, B.A., M.Sc., Cert. Ed., trans-historied woman, Christian

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report

³ www.psychotherapy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/UKCP-Memorandum-of-Understanding-on-Conversion-Therapy-in-the-UK.pdf

A Roadmap to Inclusion: Supporting Trans People of Faith

Questions often come up around religion, faith and gender diversity. This is common and whilst answers have been provided below, note that these do not speak for everyone, nor are they the final word on the matter. These are a starting point to common queries the community faces.

Are trans and non-binary people a modern Westernised concept?

Gender diverse people have always existed in every culture and community, including religious communities. Not all cultures and faith traditions have strictly defined binary gender roles.

While found in a number of non-Western cultures, concepts like non-binary gender categories are still somewhat new to mainstream Western culture and conceptual thought. These concepts are most likely to be embraced in the modern queer subcultures or in ethnic minority cultures that exist within larger Western communities. Mainstream Western scholars who have tried to write about indigenous gender diverse people, have often sought to understand terms such as 'third gender' in the language of the modern LGBTQI+ community. Other scholars – in particular indigenous scholars – emphasise that the Western scholars lack of cultural understanding and context has led to widespread misrepresentation of gender diverse native people.

“ It's called Babaylan, a male with the female traits, and they [are] said to be a peacemaker of the society that can help if there's some sort of an argument, there's some sort of thing to be done. So the people, the native Filipino people, will have to seek the Babaylan for an answer.

They're sort of one of the hierarchy. It's really amazing to learn the history, but obviously it's gone, it's a long time ago now. But you know, there's already a group of Filipinos wanting to preserve this identity.

Victoria, trans woman, UK/The Philippines @RainbowPilgrims



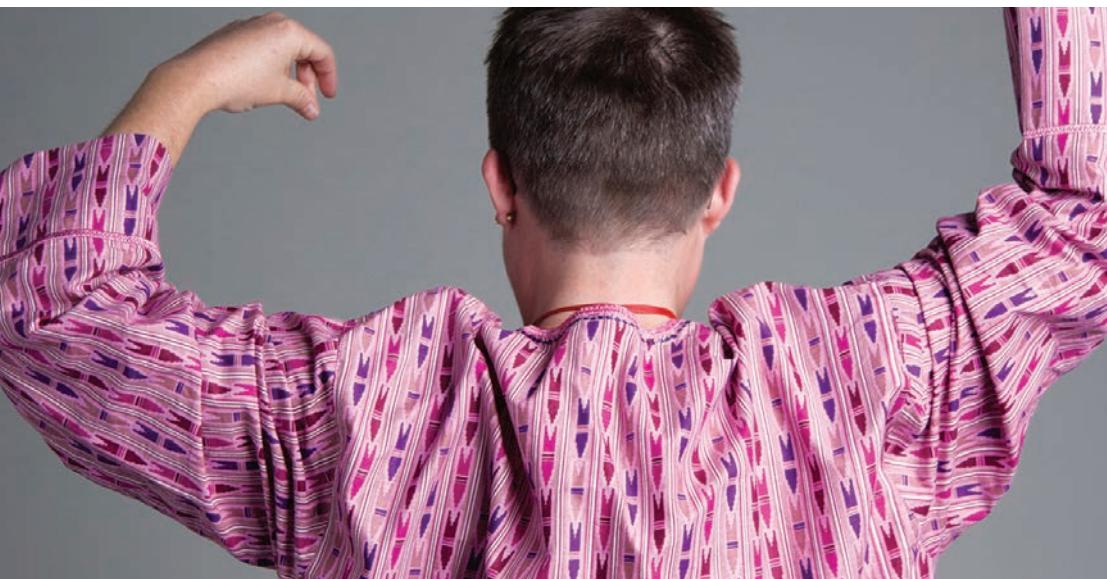
Too often the very specific cultural and social context of these non-Western identities is used to validate Western non-binary identities. This could be damaging to the social reality and lived experience of many indigenous LGBTQI+ people. Yet, these examples do indicate that all cultures and societies have had a wide variety of gender identities even though the cultural contexts may be quite different.

Cultural appropriation needs to be avoided at all costs. Cultural appropriation is the adoption of elements of one culture by members of another culture. This can be controversial when members of a dominant culture appropriate from disadvantaged minority cultures. This could be wearing religious clothing (e.g. sari or hijab), or adopting indigenous identities (e.g. two-spirit) which are not from your own culture.

Are faith and trans identities at odds with each other?

The relationship between trans people and religion varies widely around the world - from condemning any gender variance to honouring trans people as religious leaders. Views within a single faith can vary considerably. Though stated differently depending on tradition, most faiths value the inherent worth and dignity of all people, recognizing their interconnectedness and interdependence as human beings. Yet, for many trans and non-binary people, accepting the interconnectedness of faith and trans identities can be hard.

Gender diverse people are increasingly visible in faith and belief communities as leaders, rabbis and imams, clergy, nuns and monks, priests and pastors. For some, acceptance by their community came easily, others have had to struggle against the system in order to continue in a leadership role.



Case Study

A recently ordained minister who came out as non-binary in a trans-accepting denomination was surprised to discover that being non-binary was perceived as a novelty and regarded as an administrative nightmare.

“ My strongest relationship is with myself, in terms of listening to myself and giving myself time to come back to faith. I think that has been the hardest part of my identity to come back to. Out of gender, race and sexuality, it has been faith that's been the toughest. It's a struggle. It's never going to be simple and easy. I'm always going to be questioning it.

When I understood that, it did feel peaceful. I want to be in a place where I can talk about parts of my identity as well as talking about faith, because I think that is still a taboo that needs to be broken in queer spaces and spaces for queer people of colour. We just don't talk about faith anymore.

Sabah Choudrey, trans Muslim activist @TwilightPeople

“ I'm fortunate in that my first appointment as a minister is going well, and I've been accepted as an openly trans person. It doesn't mean it hasn't been a struggle at times, and I've really wrestled with where God is in the current hostile environment for trans people in the UK.

However, I have no doubt at all that both ordination and transitioning have been about becoming the person God always meant me to be.

The Revd Dr. Karl Rutledge, trans man, Christian minister

“ I think that apart from that one period at university, faith was always an ally to my gender journey rather than there being antagonism. When there was, it was from outside and not within me. I knew that God was completely happy with me the way I was; I was always certain of that.

When the church tried to tell me I was wrong I felt very free to say 'No. I am not'. I didn't feel the need to be told what to think.

The Revd Peta Evans, non-binary trans man, Christian minister

Do all religions embrace trans people?

Faiths have very different perspectives. There is no single 'faith' position on gender identity. There is a wide variety of views between faiths and within each faith, but there are also faiths that make more of an issue of gender identity and sexuality and those which are less concerned about them.

Some religious traditions have been used to exclude groups and individuals in the past. These understandings and interpretations, however loudly and frequently they might be shared, are not the only way to read the articles of one's faith or to be a practising member of one's faith. There are many devotional paths with welcoming theologies within Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and many more.

Within a denomination, individuals and groups may hold different views. Furthermore, not all members of a denomination necessarily support their faith movement's official line on trans people.

“ I came out as trans quite late in life, after moving to the UK to join the Liberal Jewish Movement. My faith actually really helped me to come to terms with my identity, and I feel blessed to be part of such a progressive faith community.

Jewish, trans man, mixed heritage @TwilightPeople

“ When I approached our church leader about my gender identity issues, they said what I did in my private life was up to me, but not to bring Jenny-Anne to church activities.

My faith is central to my life and finding finally a church that not only accepted and supported me, but also taught me that God loved me just as I am and that they had created me the way I am, was core to my transitioning successfully. My mission is to help other trans people find their own pathway to self-determination.

Jenny-Anne Bishop, OBE, trans rights activist

“ One of the big barriers for me was just a general lack of education on gender diversity, so having to educate folks in my spiritual community whilst having to advocate for myself there, too, alongside the challenging experience of navigating healthcare support was just exhausting. It's frustrating that humans from any faith group will find doctrinal evidence to support their own biases, this happens in Buddhism, too!

We have very clear foundational teachings on kindness and compassion and yet if you come out as trans you may find that those teachings get pushed to one side. What we are working on now (in my spiritual community) are a pair of documents on proposed pathways for trans and non-binary people. This will provide cis people with guidance on how to support us better.

If someone comes out as trans and is about to start having some physical changes the bare minimum their faith community should do is get some training, some education.

Kamalanandi, Triratna Buddhist Order, male identified/trans, white British



Although the negative voices tend to dominate the media, many faith leaders and groups are already doing this crucial work in schools and local communities to promote love, compassion and messages of inclusivity. There is also a widening stream of queer theologies across the various faiths. You will find some links and resources in the appendix.

Did you know?

It can be problematic to try to apply today's labels to people from a different time as the understanding of gender or sexuality may have been different from how people understand those things today.

Even so, the sacred texts of many faith traditions also refer to other genders, as well as to the traditional categories of men and women.

Here are some examples:

Mukhannathun

A classical Arabic term that literally means 'effeminate ones' or 'men who resemble women'. It appears in several hadith.⁴

Tumtum

A person whose sex characteristics are indeterminate or obscured. 181 references in Mishna and Talmud; 335 in classical midrash and Jewish law codes.⁵

Saris

In classical Jewish texts, a term that can refer to a male who doesn't fully develop at puberty and, or, who subsequently has their sex organs removed.

Tritiya Prakriti

A being that is neither fully male nor fully female both in mind and body. Sacred Hindu texts speak extensively of a third gender that is actually highly respected and revered.

“The Christian New Testament, reports (Matthew 19:12) Jesus talking about three types of eunuchs, all of which were well-known in the ancient world. The Roman economy in the time of Jesus was reliant on slaves, many of whom were castrated, hence “those made eunuchs of men”. But the ancient world also understood that some people were born eunuchs. The term “natural eunuch” is often used for them. It generally meant men who were born with no sexual desire for women. We would call such people gay men, or asexual.

Finally, Jesus talks about those “who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake”. In Jesus’s time there was no church, and the only people who castrated themselves for religious purposes were followers of various Middle-Eastern goddess cults. The most common were the Galli who served the goddess Cybele. The Galli lived full time as women after their surgery, and historians have noted many parallels between them and the modern-day Hijra in India.

Cheryl Morgan, science fiction critic, e-book publisher, trans history geek.



⁴ Hadith in Islam refers to the record of the words, actions, and the silent approval of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

⁵ The Mishnah are short explanations of the Torah. The Talmud are long and complex explanations of the Mishnah. The Midrash are commentaries on the Tanach (which include the books of the Torah and the books of prophets).

Why might trans people turn to religious communities?

For many people, faith and spirituality are core to their identity and journey. Regardless of denomination or practice, people look to faith-based leaders and institutions for support, comfort and guidance in many aspects of their lives. Gender is no different. Trans people's gender journeys may bring a great many uncertainties, sometimes with no clear answers. In such instances, one's faith traditions may be the most important source for support in seeking to understand one's gender journey.

For those addressing their gender and how to express it, spiritual or religious communities are likely to be one of the first places someone will turn to, especially in terms of how it affects their relationship to their faith. There's a non-exhaustive list of welcoming strands of UK faith movements and groups in the appendix.

For some people, transition is a spiritual journey and something they will be keen to talk about. Faith and community leaders who are open to such conversations and well-informed will be ideally placed to help.

The connection between mental health, wellbeing and spirituality is unfortunately often ignored when it comes to trans people. There are however a few recent initiatives that address the need for holistic healthcare.

“ Being fully and truly who God created me to be is very much part of my faith journey as much as it is part of my gender journey, the two go hand in hand.

The Revd Shanon Ferguson, non-binary @TwilightPeople

“ God doesn't make mistakes. The part of me that is a woman and the part of me that society misinterprets as being male are both very, very intentional. God gave me this gender identity experience.

Reubs Walsh, PhD (Cand), genderqueer trans woman @TwilightPeople

“ Involvement with faith communities is important for many people's mental health and wellbeing, but unfortunately trans and gender-variant people sometimes find it difficult to access safe and supportive congregations.

Furthermore, the spiritual care to which all NHS patients have a statutory right is often absent from gender identity clinics and throughout the process of gender transition.

The Modelling Transgender Spiritual Care project highlights the importance of dedicated chaplains for GICs, and the need for spirituality and religion to be given due weight in holistic healthcare for trans and gender-variant people.

Dr Susannah Cornwall, University of Exeter



“ Transition is about spirituality from start to finish, because it is about making the outside reflect what is inside and what is inside is spiritual.

Project participant @TwilightPeople

Why do some trans people turn against religious communities?

Acceptance as part of a faith community can be extremely important, but trans people can often be left feeling unwelcome. Trans people's identities are often questioned and denied within faith communities, leading to exclusion from community life and possibly even emotional and spiritual abuse.

In conservative religious communities it can be a problem for trans people to renew baptismal vows (or equivalent), and receive a certificate in their current name, reflective of their gender identity.⁶

Even faith communities that aim to be inclusive, sometimes fail to take seriously the issues that trans people face.

Some religious denominations seemingly welcome LGBTQI+ people, yet, ultimately operate along the lines of 'love the sinner, hate the sin', in other words 'we welcome you but we want you to be different than you are'.

For some trans people their faith community equals their ethnic community, and coming out as trans may put them at risk of losing both.



“ As far as they [the church congregation] are concerned there is only one positive outcome – for my child to de-transition, and unless that happens there is no good that can come of that life at all. And that hurts, that really hurts.

Mother of a trans daughter⁶

“ These [rites of passage] are things of great importance. I have tried to find someone to help me through the official routes. I can't find them and if supposedly there is such a person they will never get an OK from the bishop, the archbishop, whatever.

Greek Orthodox trans man⁷

“ Some liberal churches like to think they are [welcoming to trans people] when they rarely face the situation. [It was at the Quakers] that I have felt some level of exclusion so maybe it's true that the more liberal churches aren't doing as well as they think they are.

Christian trans man⁸

“ I get more negative comments from black and Asian people than I do from white people. There aren't many LGBTI people who are BAME where I live in London. When I'm at work I present myself in a certain way. When I'm in my local area I tone it down just to make it bearable.

I have the grudging acceptance from my family now, they're not comfortable but they're not antagonistic. I think my cultural background makes it harder. Religion isn't so much of an issue as my parents are Hindus and Methodists.

In Hinduism you have a lot of gender-fluid gods and saints, and Methodism is one of the more liberal Christian denominations. I try to be gender neutral at religious events so that it's easier to interact with people.

Rani, trans woman, Sri Lanka/UK @RainbowPilgrims

⁶ Quoted in Beardsley & Dowd *Trans Affirming Churches* (forthcoming 2020)

⁷ Quoted in Beardsley & Dowd *Trans Affirming Churches* (forthcoming 2020)

⁸ Quoted in Beardsley & Dowd *Trans Affirming Churches* (forthcoming 2020)

Some gender diverse people – and in particular immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers – have lived with the damaging legacy of colonial penal codes, introduced by the British in the nineteenth century, for instance in India and many African countries.

There has been a lack of resources available to help faith communities actively support trans people and their families, but this is changing and it's important for leaders to equip themselves in this subject area. You can find some useful resources in the appendix.

“ Diversity is key to integration, colonial codes are barriers causing human obstacles that separate us from love and authenticity. The world is made for everyone so unity should be our legacy. My life as a refugee is a burden with limited opportunities making it hard to transition as a transgender man. Arriving in the UK in 2008 I thought it was my freedom but somehow it became my pain with this immigration hostile environment.

Jullian Barnes, trans man, Jewish, KwaZulu-Natal, South African

“ It's quite sad, there is as much discrimination thrown at me by the LGBT community because of my faith as I get from faith organisations because of my sexuality and gender identity. Many LGBTQI people think that faith is against them, some think you must be mad to go to church and accept your sexuality and gender identity. But I want to get across to people that you don't have to separate these things. Church maybe say all sorts of terrible things but that's not God, that's the church which is made of human beings.

The Revd Shanon Ferguson, non-binary @TwilightPeople

Are LGBTQI+ communities welcoming of people of faith?

Both LGBTQI+ people and people of faith are often discriminated against and face at times double if not triple marginalisation, for example, if they are also from less progressive BAME communities. Being marginalised would theoretically make these communities natural allies, and this does happen. However, only too often cultures and opinions clash, and especially when it comes to the intersection of faith and LGBTQI+.

“ I have spent a lot of time in the queer community over the last few years and it is really good but I know that a lot of my friends and a lot of others are very anti-faith and anti-religion and sometimes I feel that there aren't many people who understand both sides of me; that I'm trans and queer and Christian at the same time.

CJ Bruce, Trinidadian Londoner, genderqueer @TwilightPeople



How do trans equality and faith equality overlap?

The UK Equality Act 2010⁹ ensures that everybody is legally protected from discrimination both within the context of employment as well as wider society.

The Equality Act protects people with characteristics including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Note these are deliberately written in alphabetical order to indicate that there is no hierarchy between the protected characteristics. Having one characteristic does not give you the right to discriminate against a person with a different characteristic.

Although these protected characteristics can be looked at individually, nearly everybody can associate with more than one. Some of these crossovers or intersections are spoken about more openly than others or have more of an association with one another.

One intersection in particular that is often overlooked is religion/faith/belief and being trans (referred to as 'gender reassignment' in the Equality Act).

In the UK, to be protected under the Equality Act from gender reassignment discrimination, you do not need to have undergone any specific treatment or surgery to change from your birth sex to your 'acquired' gender.

What if trans equality and faith or belief collide?

Many organisations and professional individuals express concern about how best to manage the rights of LGBTQI+ people and the rights of people of faith if they come into conflict. Sometimes the anticipation of conflict may prevent organisations from fully pursuing actions toward full inclusion. Some organisations are unsure about the law in relation to employment and service delivery, and often there is a degree of confusion about how to implement the legislation.

There is also confusion about how any exemptions apply. The Equality Act 2010 contains very narrow exemptions which only permit religious organisations to discriminate if the post or service is directly associated with the doctrine of any faith.

Since all characteristics have equal status in law, it is the case that religion or belief must be respected, but must not be used as a reason for discrimination against trans, non-binary, non-gender or LGB people – in other words, those covered by gender reassignment and sexual orientation.

There aren't many legal cases in the UK that concern trans people of faith. The UK Government guidance around such issues can be found in the resource section, in particular when people of faith request single gender (trans exclusive) spaces for religious practice or prayer.

Case Study

"collision of two unconnecting worlds"

In December 2017, the Court of Appeal in Manchester overturned a decision that would deny a trans woman contact with her children because of possible hostile reactions to the woman's gender identity. The family court had reasoned that the possible hostile reactions of the social environment to the parent's gender identity would harm the children and would thus justify a no-contact arrangement. The Court of Appeal, however, found that neither the right of the children to be cared for by both of their parents, nor obvious issues of discrimination had been addressed. The case touches upon freedom of religion as the family is part of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Manchester.

The verdict is not final. The case has been returned to the family court.

A spokesperson for the trans woman's legal team said: 'This decision is one that will be welcomed not just by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals living within small religious groups, but by the LGBT community in general. It sends a clear message that no religious community can operate on their own island but must conform to the law of the land.'

Trans parents often find themselves in similar situations where their parental rights are challenged because of their gender identity.¹⁰

⁹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

¹⁰ www.tgeu.org

How to support a person of faith coming out as trans?

If your co-worker or group member decides to come out publicly, you should react positively. First of all, thank them for trusting you. Ask how you can support them and if they are feeling safe. Don't ask personal questions. Be proactive. Would they like an announcement through the staff network? Or a little celebration? Is there a spiritual ceremony they would like to have? Would they want to speak to HR or a community leader? Most importantly, don't 'out' them, this is not only disrespectful but could put them at risk. And be an ally by appreciating their experience, but do not expect them to educate you.

For some people, coming out within their religious community is not an option. And some people prefer to live their trans identity discreetly, perhaps frequenting a safe community space occasionally or cross-dressing in private. Such choices have to be respected and no one should be forced to come out in a specific way.



“ It's important to be aware that you don't have to lose religion and faith when you come out as trans. I think one of the ways I live my life is being true to myself. If you're struggling, be true to yourself and enjoy the journey.

Bella Segal, Jewish woman with a trans history @TwilightPeople

Should trans identities be debated in faith schools?

In a word, 'No'. Faith schools should be safe places where all young people can thrive and enjoy learning in a supportive environment that enhances their well-being and supports their self-development.

Many faith schools around the country already deliver LGBT-inclusive education to children and young people, and are supporting the incoming regulations for teaching Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). From September 2020, all secondary schools will be required to teach about sexual orientation and gender identity, and all primary schools will teach about different families, which can include LGBTQI+ families. Recently we've seen several clashes between local communities and education leaders, and some faith schools appear to have a particular challenge in meeting statutory requirements whilst reflecting their own belief systems.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires all schools to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people. The Equality Act 2010 lists 'gender reassignment' as a protected characteristic, as well as religion or belief. This means that all schools have a duty to make sure that their students are not discriminated against, either because of their faith and/or because they are trans. Existing and new policies must be checked to ensure that they do not inadvertently create the possibility of people with either or both these characteristics, experiencing a detriment; this could amount to 'discrimination' under the 2010 Act.

Stonewall reports that more than four in five trans young people have self-harmed, and 64 per cent of trans pupils say that they are bullied at school.¹¹

Faith schools should support trans pupils in all relevant policies. Staff should work together with each trans young person to ensure that they feel safe and comfortable.

¹¹ www.stonewall.org.uk/media/lgbt-facts-and-figures

What can your organisation/group do?

Top tips to include and welcome trans people of faith

Training

Ensure that your team/group members are as educated and well-informed about faith identities as they would be about LGBTQI+ people and their needs.

Hiring a faith-based LGBTQI+ organisation to deliver training can also serve as a starting point for partnership work, as can setting up a sub-group.

Make sure you allocate a budget for this. If the training organisation can provide a free service, consider making a donation to support their work.

Provide resources

Make available resources about the intersection of faith and LGBTQI+ people. Distribute these resources both in digital and hard copy format. Include resources in your staff induction, and make them compulsory for all team members.

You can find a number of links and resources at the back of this booklet and via GIRES online.

CJ Bruce, Trinidadian Londoner, genderqueer @TwilightPeople

I found a church that is really accepting and they're not only accepting but they encouraged me to express myself.

So, I decided to finally get baptised and I invited my whole family. That was really great.

Create safe and welcoming spaces

You can sign up to a national religious body that promotes full inclusion in a faith community, especially for those who can be easily marginalised due to their protected characteristic(s).

Some national religious organisations focus on LGBTQI+ inclusion and invite local groups to sign up to their agenda via their websites, which may list spaces and gatherings that are safe for LGBTQI+ people. Find more information in the appendix.

Electronic lists of inclusive religious spaces need to be approached with caution as information can quickly date, but host bodies will be keen to help so that people experience the welcome and affirmation they are looking for and deserve.

Where gender identity and sexual orientation are still regarded as a religious ‘issue’ trans people are unlikely to feel safe. No one wants their life constantly debated, least of all in one’s faith community. Faith communities that signal that they are safe for trans people of faith are likely to be person-centred and compassionate in their approach and open-minded in their thinking.

Some trans people of faith may fear rejection by their families and religious communities and some will have experienced such rejection. Organisations – especially LGBTQI+ groups – that can provide a safe space for them have an important role to play.

Use the correct pronouns and titles

If you do not know how to address someone the simplest solution is to ask. The question ‘What pronouns do you use?’ is a very easy solution to this dilemma.

To misgender a person (that is, to incorrectly name a person’s gender) undermines the identity of the person, can be personally very painful for that person and implicitly gives the message that this person is not accepted.

Nowadays, gender-defining titles can be omitted in most instances. If you do require people to indicate their title, in official documents, for example, there is a non-binary option: Mx. Just as Ms enables women not to indicate their marital status, this title, which is now more widely used, allows people not to indicate their gender.

Provide the right facilities and services

Allow everyone to select the facilities and services appropriate to their gender. If possible, install secure, easily accessible, extremely private, 'all gender' cubicles in restrooms and changing rooms. Do not assume that it is enough to have an accessible toilet option: care must be taken not to impede access for disabled people. And please don't force trans people to use the accessible toilet.

Some trans people may want to make use of single-sex provisions, such as changing rooms, others may prefer gender-neutral ones. It is always best to treat every situation on an individual basis, being mindful of existing legislation. And some trans people may require a discrete or indeed a discreet space, for example, for faith rituals; you should always make reasonable adjustments.

Name tags can be a great option

Blank stickers on which people can write their own pronouns are also helpful. Encourage non-trans people to also include their pronouns on name tags. It is a strong statement of solidarity when those individuals who are never forced to explain their own gender, freely choose to state their own pronouns. Let's shift the responsibility of claiming one's identity away from those who are perceived as different and open up the conversation of gender diversity and inclusion as a responsibility for the entire group.

Remember...

It is okay to be curious; it is okay to be uncomfortable. It is not okay to violate a person's privacy with inappropriate questions. Be ready to apologise quickly if you get it wrong.

Frame questions carefully

Semantics matter; sometimes the way a question is asked is equally as important as whether or not the question is asked at all. The difference between 'I don't know what to call you, what is your gender?' and 'what pronouns do you use?' is significant. The former suggests discomfort, while the latter demonstrates a desire to meet the individual in the space where they are most comfortable.

Asking what pronoun a person uses is more helpful than the commonly asked question 'What pronouns do you prefer'. For most people gender identity speaks to the core of their being; it is not a preference, but a fundamental aspect of their identity, which is why one should ask what pronouns people use.

Listen to trans people's stories

Listening to someone's lived experience is incredibly important; it is the best way to educate yourself and your group members.

For example, why not dedicate your next Pride event to the intersection of trans and faith and invite a gender diverse role model to speak. You may be able to locate speakers via the groups recommended in the back section of this booklet.

Make sure you offer a speaker's fee and expenses.

Take an intersectional approach and reach out.

Bring multiple groups together because identities overlap. Invite your BAME, faith and LGBTQI+ staff networks to run a joint event. Show a film (you might find some suggestions via the links and resources in the appendix), or invite an external speaker. Reaching out into the community and developing relationships with organisations and communities outside your usual remit, may also open doors for future collaborations.

Celebrate and commemorate

Give trans-specific events a faith angle, for example organise a Transgender Day of Remembrance (annually on 20 November) commemoration that includes spiritual elements. For instance, you could recite the Twilight People prayer – find it in the back of this booklet.

Or queer up faith and cultural celebrations where appropriate. For example, include a trans flag in your ritual or altar display and mention the significance of it in your service.

Promote visibility

Visual representation of trans people of faith and affirming, positive statements can be very important. This could be something simple like ensuring photos and stories are on your website and social media. Print out Stonewall's LGBT History Month faith role model posters (see in resources).

Be mindful that some trans people of faith (in particular BAME people) may not want to or be able to disclose their identity. Putting someone's name or photo out on social media may put their life in danger. Safeguarding always comes first.

“ It's a spiritual quest, being transgender and a person of faith, and it's a quest to find true humanity.

Jewish trans man @TwilightPeople

Be creative with religious texts

Look at scripture and the different ways it can be interpreted and discussed with regard to relationships and expressions of gender. Ensure that a balance of views and beliefs is presented to highlight the theological diversity that exists relating to gender identity in faith. Explore some of the sites in the resource section of this booklet, many of them have extensive queer theology resource banks with literature recommendations.

Signpost

There are small but lively pockets of faith and LGBTQI+ networks all over the UK. Most of these are social or support groups who receive no funding but are a safe anchor for the people who attend. A significant proportion of these groups are secret, for safety reasons, and it is important to remember and respect this. If a staff or group member would like to make contact with such a group, signpost to for example TranZwiki.net or find them on Facebook.

Avoid tokenism. Be genuine.

Having run an awareness event about trans people and faith, or having a trans friend or co-worker does not automatically make your organisation inclusive, or make you a great ally. Simply adding more letters to the LGBTQI+ acronym in your documents and promotional activities does not make your group or community more inclusive. When putting together teams or boards, make sure that a wide range of people, including trans, BAME, faith, is involved. Make sure this includes people with multiple intersections of identities. This shouldn't be tokenistic, but a genuine attempt to ensure that your organisation is truly inclusive and diverse. Employers should advertise the fact that they are LGBTQI+ friendly.

Golden rule...

Just Ask. Ask trans people of faith how you can support them.

Appearances can be misleading

Try not to assume someone's gender simply by their appearance or voice. The latter is particularly important to remember on the phone.

Someone who presents their faith on the outside, for example by wearing religious headgear, garments or jewellery, can also be LGBTQI+. Before making assumptions, it is always good to start a conversation and try to get to know someone better. And, by the way, of course you can't always identify LGBTQI+ people, as well as people of faith, by the way they look.

Inclusive ceremonies

Faith communities can offer trans people rites of their faith in their self-declared gender and name. For instance, a naming ritual could be an important and affirming part of a trans person's journey.

Places of worship should support and facilitate trans people's marriages and partnership commitments, acknowledging the relationships and the marriages of those who have transitioned.

It is important to note that some religious bodies have opted into the equal marriage legislation while others have not, and to advise people to do their research carefully when seeking to have their relationship celebrated in a religious setting.

Use formal processes

Ensure that all policies and practices are robust and state clearly what is expected from staff in terms of equality and diversity. All employees, service providers and suppliers should abide by diversity and equality policies. Ensure your equality and diversity statements are easily accessible and visible.

Be prepared to use formal disciplinary proceedings if necessary. Ensure that those who manage formal processes understand how and why issues might arise for trans people of faith. Also ensure that they apply the principles of the organisation fairly. Be consistent in your approach.

Accept a range of ID other than a birth certificate. You do not need to see a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) to amend personal details. Very few gender diverse people have one.

Don't forget...

Trans people of faith are just people and they require the same respectful treatment as everyone else whilst considering the additional sensitivities they may face.

" We transform institutions by transforming people. So trans people along with straight people, gay people, people of various ethnicities, race/religion, we have to be these agents of transformation, but it is about other people and the society we live in and the workplace we are set in and what we can do to make it better.

Ordained Christian woman with trans history @TwilightPeople



Intersex people of faith

Whilst the letter 'I' is increasingly being added to the LGBTQ+ acronym, the unique experiences of intersex people of faith deserve their own individual attention.

In fact, some intersex activists prefer the acronym to be LGBTIQ+ (rather than LGBTQI+), because it shows that the issues of lack of bodily autonomy and the fight against genital mutilation are prioritised.

Intersex Genital Mutilation (IGM) is a form of infant genital surgery carried out for cultural or religious reasons. Medical needs are also cited as a justification for the surgery but the evidence of actual need is slim at best. Intersex Genital Mutilation is conducted on babies and children when their external genitals do not look "normal" enough to pass unambiguously as male or female.¹²

Yet the majority of people born with intersex variations have biological differences that are not externally visible. Despite the many ancient religious figures that allude to the fact that intersex people have always been part of faith communities and cultures, there's very little - and less positive and affirming - discussion of intersex people in modern religious discourse. Find some positive literature on this subject in the resource section of this booklet.

“ It is time to stop instrumentalising intersex people. Too often, the church's current conversations are not about our concerns as intersex people, and the discrimination that we face. Where is the good theology that can help to address our concerns about non-consensual surgeries, secrecy, stigma, and the lack of informed health care?

It is time to listen to simple churchgoers like me, who do not hold positions of power and authority. Many intersex people are overcoming the secrecy and stigma and finding their voices outside the church. The challenge now is to find ways to create a church in which people can find their voices and flourish. Those outside the church have much to teach us.

Sara Gillingham¹³

“ Being intersex is like being any person, we each have our own unique experiences in life and with faith. For some of us who are also LGBTQ we can be left out of the discussions relating to 'reconciling faith with sexuality and gender' because intersex is not a gender identity and is not a sexuality. Many of us are read as gay, lesbian, trans or non-binary, or as gender fluid or queer. While many of us are also any of these things, we are not all, and if we are to be included in any discussion about inclusion we need to first be heard, listened to and respected for our own experiences, many of which LGBTQ people are barely aware of.

Choosing a faith which accepts us and does not attempt to further enforce a gender or sex identity that is based on a binary notion of sex and gender is important. It is not enough that we hear gender inclusive language that replaces male language with male and female, some of us are neither, and intersex people know this too well.

Did God create man and woman and we're free to express fluidity within that spectrum? Or did they in fact create a whole spectrum of sex that is not just male or female? Intersex people are the proof of the latter, not the former, and it's time we were visible and heard within any LGBTQ space or discourse, and certainly within religious spaces, whether LGBTQ inclusive or not.

Martin

Did you know?

Intersex people are not explicitly protected from discrimination by the Equality Act but must not be discriminated against because of their gender or perceived gender.

“ Christ does not look at one's genitals if you like, he looks at the heart and it is the heart in which he lives. Because every human being and creature alike hold the spark of God. Everybody has the spark of God, a spark of the Creator, the one who breathed life into them in the beginning.

**The Revd Sister Maria Renate, Franciscan nun and ordained priest
@TwilightPeople**

¹² www.oiieurope.org

34 ¹³ www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/22-february/features/features/my-intersex-story

Terminology – a word about words

Can we define ‘**faith**’, ‘**spirituality**’, ‘**belief**’ and ‘**religion**’?

In reality there isn’t one understanding, many people attach different meanings to these words and/or use them interchangeably. Throughout this booklet, you will find many examples of different, personal meanings and uses.

LGBTQI+ communities have seen such major growth and transformation in recent decades, it is hard to pin down universally accepted definitions for how our people describe themselves. Rather than get too caught up in definitions, it’s better to focus on the larger issues of inclusion and equality. It is important to keep in mind that the only way to understand an individual’s identity is to ask that person for clarification.

“ We use the term ‘the faith and belief’ as an aspect of people’s identity, including all religious and non-religious beliefs. ‘Faith and belief’ also refers to the protected characteristic of ‘religion and belief’ in the Equality Act 2010.

The Faith and Belief Forum

Definitions vary¹⁴

BAME stands for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (including, African, Middle Eastern, indigenous and mixed race identities) sometimes written as ‘BME’.

CIS means on this side (as distinct from trans meaning ‘across’ or on the other side). Cisgender signifies someone whose gender identity is ‘on side’ with their gender recorded at birth.

The **GENDER RECOGNITION ACT (2004)** enables trans people to acquire a gender recognition certificate (GRC) and a new Birth Certificate. Discussions to reform the GRA are ongoing as to whether the UK will allow statutory self-declaration as sufficient for obtaining a GRC.

¹⁴ Find more on terminology at www.gires.org.uk/resources/terminology

INTERSEX people are born with variations in sex characteristics (VSC). This means that their bodies have congenital genetic, hormonal and physical features that do not fit into the typical understanding of what it is to be male or female. Being intersex relates to biological sex characteristics, not gender identity.

LGBTQI+ is a label for a broad spectrum of identities, especially those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex. The plus represents other sexual and gender identities and expressions including pansexual and asexual.

NON-BINARY is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn’t sit comfortably with ‘man’ or ‘woman’.

TRANS is an umbrella term that includes all binary and non-binary transgender identities and those who have an absence of gender identity.

SEX is assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION is the attraction to the people to whom one is romantically and sexually inclined. Trans people experience romantic and sexual attraction in exactly same ways that other people do. Just like non-trans people, trans people can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, straight, queer, and/or questioning.

QUEER is also often used by those who identify with a non-normative sexuality or gender identity, and is arguably being reclaimed from its use as an insult.

TRANSITION refers to the steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person’s transition will be different. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have these.

GENDER IDENTITY is an inward and subjective experience of one’s social interactions as a man, woman, non-binary or non or agender person.

Did you know?

Trans(gender)’ is an adjective. The word is properly used with a noun, like ‘trans person’. Do not refer to a person as ‘a transgender’.

To be ‘transgendered’ is grammatically incorrect and an obsolete expression.

Links and resources

LGBTQI+ faith networks & support groups

Muslim

Hidayah www.hidayahlgbt.co.uk

Imaan www.imaanlondon.wordpress.com

London Queer Muslims www.londonqueermuslims.com

Trans Muslims (global) www.trans-muslims.tumblr.com/about

Jewish

Keshet UK www.keshetuk.org

Jewish LGBT+ Group www.jglg.org.uk

Laviot (Queer Jewish Women) www.laviot.org

Imahot va' Avot (LGBT+ family group) www.imahotvavot.co.uk

Gay & Lesbian Orthodox Network email glon_uk@yahoo.com

Christian

The Sibyls: A Christian Spirituality Group for Transgender People

www.sibyls.gndr.org.uk

Diverse Church – online and offline support for LGBT Christians

www.diversechurch.website/about

Find more Ecumenical and Denominational Groups via OneBodyOneFaith

www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk/about-us/partners

United Reform Church www.beaconurc.org

Mormons

Affirmation LGBTQ Mormons www.affirmation.org

Quakers

Quaker Gender and Sexual Diversity Community (QGSDC) www.qgsdc.org.uk

Sikh

Sarbat www.sarbat.net

Buddhist

Diversity Buddhists www.facebook.com/lgbtqandgsdbuddhistsbirmingham

GBTQ men www.brightonbuddhistcentre.co.uk

Indian/South Asian

British Asian LGBT www.facebook.com/BritishAsianLGBTI

Gay Indian www.meetup.com/GIN-Gay-Indian-Network-London

Inter/multifaith

The Faith Belief Forum www.faithbeliefforum.org/lgbt-faith

Queer Spirit & Festival www.queerspirit.net

Radical Faeries www.radfae.org

Global

LGBTQI+ Global Interfaith Network www.gin-ssogie.org

Non-religious

Humanists www.humanism.org.uk/community/lgbt-humanists

LGBT Foundation's monthly event #TRansMCR offers a multi-faith prayer room
www.lgbt.foundation/who-we-help/trans-people/transmcr

There are many social media groups; some are secret and you may have to find a Facebook friend to invite you.

Places of worship

Liberal Judaism www.liberaljudaism.org

Most Progressive strands in the UK have inclusive and egalitarian synagogues.

Inclusive Mosque www.inclusivemosque.org

Metropolitan Community Church MCC www.mccnorthlondon.org.uk

House of Rainbow www.houseofrainbow.org

There may be many more places of worship that are welcoming of trans people but perhaps have not explicitly stated so. Please find out via the various support groups where you can go to worship safely.

Further reading

Twilight People project www.twilightpeople.com

Rainbow Pilgrims project www.rainbowpilgrims.com

Rainbow Jews project www.rainbowjews.com (hosted by Liberal Judaism)

Inclusivity – Supporting BAME Trans People

www.gires.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/BAME_Inclusivity.pdf

Transgender spiritual care project (University of Exeter) www.tiny.cc/h01kfz

Stonewall (faith, LGBT and communities) www.stonewall.org.uk/search/faith

Stonewall faith role model posters (downloadable) www.tiny.cc/mg6dfz

Keshet UK (trans fact sheet) www.tiny.cc/we6dfz

Keshet UK Orthodox Schools Guide www.keshetuk.org/orthodox-schools-guide.html

Gender-neutral marriage contract (Liberal Judaism) www.tiny.cc/9tenfz

Sexuality, Gender Identity and Belief (Leicester City Council) www.bit.ly/2BAHHe2

Transtorah www.transtorah.org

Inclusive Church – reading list www.tinyurl.com/u75qpo9

Ceremonies (Christian examples) (Affirmation) www.tiny.cc/804tfz &

(Naming) www.tiny.cc/734tfz

Trans Day of Remembrance (by Dr Susan Gilchrist)

www.tgdr.co.uk/liturgies/tdor/index.htm

Queer Funeral Guide www.tiny.cc/6l6dfz

Intersex

www.intersexandfaith.org

www.facebook.com/intersexuk

Gypsy Roma Travellers (GRT)

Traveller Pride www.lgbttravellerpride.com

Information sheet for GRT LGBT+ people

www.travellermovement.org.uk/advocacy-support/lgbt

Gender diversity

GIRES www.gires.org.uk

Children, families & young people

Mermaids www.mermaidsuk.org.uk

Gendered Intelligence www.genderedintelligence.co.uk

Health

Naz provides sexual health services to BME communities www.naz.org.uk

CliniQ (holistic health and well-being service for trans people) www.cliniq.org.uk

UK Government

Providing services for trans customers - A guide (with **Gendered Intelligence**)

www.bit.ly/2VWLyuf

Looking for more info on Housing, Immigration, Anti-Hate Crime, Age or Mental Health support?

Find more helpful links via

www.tranzwiki.net

www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk/directory

www.lgbt.foundation/who-we-help/trans-people

This list is not exhaustive and listings details may change.

All information is correct at time of print: March 2020.



Download this booklet for free (pdf)

www.gires.org.uk/category/faith

If you prefer a hard copy, order through the GIRES shop or email web@gires.org.uk.

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Twilight people prayer

As the sun sinks and the colors of the day turn, we offer a blessing for the twilight,

for twilight is neither day nor night, but in-between.

We are all twilight people. We can never be fully labeled or defined.

We are many identities and loves, many genders and none. We are in between roles, at the intersection of histories, or between place and place.

We are crisscrossed paths of memory and destination, streaks of light swirled together. We are neither day nor night.

We are both, neither, and all.

May the sacred in-between of this evening suspend our certainties, soften our judgments, and widen our vision.

May this in-between light illuminate our way to the God who transcends all categories and definitions.

May the in-between people who have come to pray be lifted up into this twilight.

We cannot always define; we can always say a blessing.

Blessed are You, God of all,
who brings on the twilight.

Rabbi Reuben Zellman, TransTorah.org

A ROADMAP TO INCLUSION



A landmark UK publication with practical tips, guidance, and resources dedicated to supporting trans people of faith across all sectors and communities.



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