

Prayer and Reflection Resources for the Transgender Day of Visibility (March 31) and for use in churches and schools on Sunday 27 March 2022

compiled by the Revd Dr Josephine Inkpin

Introduction to Resources

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3.27-28)

Celebrating God's kaleidoscopic love and generous hospitality

These resources seek to offer supportive prayer, reflection, and other materials to help affirm gender diverse people within the Christian community and wider society. For we live at a time when it is finally becoming possible for gender diverse people to express their identities and gifts more authentically. In doing so, they witness to aspects of the image of God which have often been heavily submerged, and even erased, in so many lives, times and places. This movement of the Holy Spirit therefore not only brings health and life to gender diverse people themselves but also invites others to rediscover 'the larger God' and seek the fullness of Christ in us all. As we celebrate our vibrant human diversity, so we are all enabled to come home to the kaleidoscopic love of God, enlarging our hearts and relationships, and enriching our shared faith and lives, embodying Christ's generous hospitality. As Dr Joy Ladin has put it (in *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*):

'transgender people do not have a monopoly on becoming. All human beings change... We are trajectories, potentials, on-going revelations of selves that are always unfolding'

Supporting gender diverse people so that they and their gifts to become visible – safely and in celebration – thus strengthens the whole Body of Christ, as it recognises and affirms our so often hidden, shamed, and unnecessarily suffering members. It enables us all to come home to God more fully, with generous hospitality.

Resources for the international Transgender Day of Visibility (31 March) - and other occasions

These resources have been produced as part of celebrations of the Transgender Day of Visibility, which is such a vital keynote vehicle of gender diverse people's growing self-awareness and expression. The notes and intercessory prayers are also designed for use on Sunday March 27 2022 with the Common Lectionary readings. They can of course be used at any time, and are also produced to encourage others. Please use, adapt and add to them as suits your circumstance.

Contents

- Prayer resources
- Homily Notes (centred on Luke 15.11-32 and other readings for Sun 27 March 2022)
- Keynote Prayers also for possible use as (a) poster(s)
- Some further Christian transgender resources

(see also: Equal Voices/Uniting Network leaflet 'Welcoming Gender Diverse People in Christian Spaces'-https://www.transspirit.org/uploads/2/5/8/6/25866243/ev_welcoming_gender_diverse_people_copy_2.pdf

About the author

The Revd Dr Josephine Inkpin is a transgender woman and an Anglican priest with over 30 years of ordained ministerial experience in a wide range of contexts in her native England, in Australia (where she has lived since 2001) and further afield (through several years ecumenical work for the National Council of Churches in Australia). She now serves as Minister of Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney, and is co-chair of Equal Voices (a national ecumenical network of LGBTIQ+ Christians and allies, an adjunct lecturer with the University of Divinity in Melbourne, and author of the website/blog *Trans Spirit Flourishing* – www.transsspirit.org

Disclaimer

Whilst warmly acknowledging that this work also draws on the work and inspiration of others – not least the support of other Christian transgender people and the wider Australian gender diverse community – any views expressed here should not be taken as the views of the Uniting Church in Australia or other bodies with which she is associated.

Prayer Resources for the Transgender Day of Visibility (March 31)

Keynote theme prayers/collects

Loving source and light of all creation, your life and wisdom is gloriously revealed in gender diversity and in the kaleidoscopic beauty of human difference. We give you thanks for gender diverse people. Bless them with assurance of your love. Grant them strength and joy in their lives, bodies and relationships. And enable everyone to celebrate their gifts: that all may flourish as full and equal expressions of embodied love.

Kaleidoscopic God,
beyond gender and embodied in all,
thank you for your love and your assurance
that we have been
fearfully and wonderfully made.
Grant us strength and joy in being the people
whom you have created and called us to be.
Give us patience and loving persistence in the
face of struggle and adversity, and help us
always to live fully as blessed images of you

particularly also appropriate for the Trans Day of Remembrance (20 November):

In the power and mystery of your presence and peace. Amen.

God of all genders and none,

Source of our glorious difference and true harmony,

Bearer of all pain and Spirit of transformation,

we give you thanks that you have created us in your own image, in the many-splendoured forms of our human diversity.

Hear us as we remember and affirm gender diverse people.

Transform the violence, pain and struggles of the past and present, bring new life out of death, hopelessness and despair,

and empower us with your grace, strength and joy.

May we be like kingfishers catching fire,

dragonflies drawing flame,

beautiful butterflies shining with your love.

In the name of Christ incarnate in a thousand places, and more. Amen.

Contemporary Canticles (by Em Chandler)

Blessed are the margin dwellers

Blessed are the margin dwellers. Blessed are those who are cast aside pushed away, told that they can't stay here

those we are told to fear because they are not the same as us because their skin or song are different from us. Blessed are those who don't belong

those who know that how the world says they should be is not how they wish the world would know them

For they go on not despite fear but in spite of fear and hatred and face the world again and again

and again

and again

We owe them our hearts and our voice, to make the choice to dwell in the margins with them to fight alongside them

until there are

no

margins

left

Endless Spectrum

GOD contains multitudes; infinite universes of expansive being, experiences upon experiences upon

multifaceted, multilayered, multiple multiplicities;

You, me, we, all that could or could not be is GOD, has

GOD within us, around us, through us, surrounding us with love.

Each and every iota, fragment and fractal, each and every one fearfully and wonderfully made in GOD.

For GOD contains our multitudes

Intercessions

God of kaleidoscopic love, we give thanks this day for the wonder and diversity of your Creation, and especially for the glorious gender diversity of humanity, created in your image. God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

As we celebrate the work of your grace in making us new creations, help us come home to your peace and enable others to be at home with you, with themselves, and with all you have created.

God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

We pray for welcoming hearts and arms to embrace. Like the caregiver in Jesus story, who rushed out to meet their offspring with your profound mothering love, enable us to let go of our inherited prejudices and inhibitions., that we may joyfully receive one another's diverse gifts and thus be fully reconciled and renewed together in your love.

God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

We pray for the Church and other faith communities, that they may fully recognise, affirm and celebrate the lives, bodies and gifts of their gender diverse members. Enable the Body of Christ to provide strength that all may thrive, welcoming fresh insights into what it is to become a new creation in God's love.

God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

We pray for our wider communities and world, that they too may embrace the gifts of gender diversity. We ask for a true spirit of listening and commitment to the real needs for gender diverse people, on the part of politicians, media and other opinion formers. Strengthen those who bring light rather than heat and lifts the clouds of ignorance, fear and oppression.

God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

We pray for all who struggle with gender dysphoria, particularly those who have been rejected by family and other loved ones. We give thanks for those who minister with them: for families and loved ones who are supportive; for informed and caring health professionals; for life-giving support networks and agencies; and, above all, for fellow gender diverse people who walk in solidarity.

God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

God of kaleidoscopic love, we give thanks for all those who have gone before us, especially our gender diverse forbears who are numbered among the saints. Inspired by their love, faith and courage, grant that we, and all your people, may come home to your abiding love, and flourish more fully in your eternal presence,

God of generous hospitality, in your mercy

hear our prayer

Litany/chorus of Thanksgiving

For the image of God in every person For human difference and its joys and life-giving challenges

Thanks be to God

For women, for men,

for non-binary, gender fluid , and agender people in all our diversity

Thanks be to God

For those loved ones who share the lives of gender diverse people For professionals who help bring support and strength to gender diverse people *Thanks be to God*

For those who give voice and expression to gender diversity For those who work for justice and empowerment *Thanks be to God*

For faith leaders and congregations who are fully affirming For continuing revelation and life-giving grace *Thanks be to God*

Invocation and Blessing

Loving Creator, Let the rain wash away the painful memories of the heart.

Let the warmth of the Sun heal us wherever we feel broken. Let it burn away the fog so that we see one another clearly: so that we move beyond labels, and celebrate healthy difference so that we can see all people as our neighbours and share our joys and sorrows.

Let the Earth, nourished by sun and rain, bring forth flowers to surround us with your beauty, and let the mountains teach our hearts to reach outward to you.

Then, dear God, grant us comfort, give us peace, and enable us to stand up and be voices for equality.

And may the kaleidoscopic delight of God fill your souls with joy and give you strength to embody Christ's love in the world: and the blessing of God – creating, transforming, and making new bring you to your true and loving home, now and always. **Amen.**

 $(adapted\ from\ prayer\ by\ Rev.\ Debra\ J.\ Hopkins,\ Black\ trans\ woman,\ Minister\ at\ Sacred\ Souls\ Community\ Church\ in\ Charlotte,\ NC,\ sourced\ from\ \underline{\ http://religiousinstitute.org/resources/prayers-weekend-trans-justice/})$

Additional prayer resources

God is Non-Binary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1rqWCYUtog

Created in association with Act Natural Studios, Froonky, Prey Bird Pray, and West End Uniting for Transgender Day of Remembrance, 2021; in commemoration of the trans lives that have been lost due to violence and suicide. The piece speaks to the perfection of trans identities as part of God. After leaving their evangelical church of origin, Boy Renaissance has worked to deconstruct their own religious trauma and interpretation of Christianity, and now stands for the right of queer people not only to be welcomed for who they are in religious spaces, but to be embraced in leadership as diverse and crucial voices. Queerness is holy, and every LGBTQIA+ person is a reflection of God.

Susan Cottrell's Story of the Prodigal Transgender Daughter

Written story online: https://www.patheos.com/blogs/freedhearts/2016/03/08/prodigal-trans/
YouTube version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ps2n HIkQ14

A Prayer for greater understanding

Creator God, the world you gave us is so diverse that its complexities may never be unravelled, so extravagant that it's riches may never be spent, and so extraordinary that we find it a constant source of amazement. Yet when we come to people, we expect it all to be simple, as if everyone made in your image should look and act the same.

God of many faces, help us rejoice in our diversity, to be prepared to be understanding about other people's complexities, to be generous in our dealings with others, and to be amazed at the new revelations you give us each day.

We cannot all agree about everything – that would be unrealistic – but we can follow the pattern set by Jesus, who accepted all who were prepared to take up his cross and be obedient to your will.

Understanding and all knowing God, as we travel this road together, keep our minds open and our hearts united, so that barriers fall and images fade as we join in the work of your kingdom.

(adapted version of a prayer by Marjorie Dobson in Courage to Love: liturgies for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, (ed) Geoffrey Duncan)

Songs from a Holy Other - https://thehymnsociety.org/resources/songs-for-the-holy-other/



Reflection Notes for the Transgender Day of Visibility (March 31)

Seeing 'with gender diverse eyes'

One of the great gifts of transgender visibility is the fresh insight which gender diverse people are bringing to our understanding of both holy scripture and fruitful spiritual life. Some pointers to the growing range of such materials can be found in a later section of this resource. Among the many scriptural texts which have been found particularly rich and affirming are the following (any of which might be helpfully used at times and in spaces of affirmation and celebration):

Matthew 19.11-12 (Jesus himself speaks positively about sexually and/or gender diverse people) Isaiah 56.4-8 (eunuchs are promised 'a monument and name better than sons and daughters') Psalm 139 (the psalmist speaks of how we are all 'fearfully and wonderfully made') Acts 8.26-40 (the Ethiopian eunuch)

Galatians 3.26-28 ('there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus').

Reflections on the Lectionary readings for Sunday 27 March 2022

The readings for Sunday 31 March 2019 in the Revised Common Lectionary are also illuminating for gender diverse people, speaking as they do about vital features of many gender diverse people's journeys, including:

- * alienation, broken & changed relationships and the powerful theme of coming home (in Luke 15.11-32)
- * new creation and God's ministry of reconciliation (in 2 Corinthians 5.6-21) &
- * the ending of disgrace and being fed with good things, with genital surgery (Joshua 5.2-12)

below are some further thoughts (including on the celebration, by Anglicans and others, of Mothering Sunday) which may be helpful....

Luke 15.11-32 – coming home with God with generous hospitality

This well-known parable of Jesus has been read in many ways over the years. Indeed, various titles – not least those of the parable of the Prodigal Son, the parable of the Father's Love, and the parable of the Two Sons – have also helped to highlight different features. In the context of celebrating gender diverse people, some of these traditional emphases also speak profoundly, not least:

- * the experience of alienation from home
 - whether from self, body, family, and/or God (or all of these)
- * the vital importance of being fully embraced by family and/or other loved ones
- * the resistance of others often close family relations even when faced by the joy of renewal
- * the importance of genuine celebration of coming home
 - whether to self, body, family and/or God (or all)

Other features also emerge however when viewed 'with gender diverse eyes':

- * a question about why the 'prodigal' left their home in the first place
 - in what ways did they not feel 'at home' and able to be their true selves?
- * empathy with the journey of the 'prodigal'
 - to what degree were they pouring themselves out in activities which perhaps brought no release to their troubled soul and body because of their alienation?
- * identification with the plight of the 'prodigal' their sense of shame and being outcast symbolised by a willingness even to be among the pigs
- * the joyful, and sadly unexpected, surprise when family (personal, church or other) actively goes

out of their way, not only to accept or even to affirm, but to celebrate them 'with the fatted calf'

As scholars of the biblical context have identified, one of the most startling aspects of the story is the behaviour of the father who rushes out to greet their child, leaving behind the conventional demands of law, dignity and restraint. Their extraordinary generous hospitality offers a profoundly challenging model to us in our welcome and relationship to others.

No wonder then that the father in the story has sometimes been seen as a figure of God in Godself. Yet perhaps the three key figures are best seen as aspects of the same humanity we share: part of which is lost or full of shame, part of which needs to learn to love with a ful embrace, and part of which still remains resistant to full acceptance of those who take different paths. For gender diverse people, like other LGBTI+ people at this time, it often seems as if too much of the Church remain like the elder sibling. The parent's response to their child who is returning home provides us with a better pattern. For it is not enough, the parable suggests, to welcome the one who has been 'lost'. Their very personhood and gifts must also be fully celebrated. This is not after all, a simple return. It is a new creation, a fresh beginning, if we would grasp it, for all.

2 Corinthians 5.16-21 – new creation and the ministry of reconciliation

The theme of 'new creation' is very strongly to the fore in the second reading from 2 Corinthians. Again, read and heard 'with gender diverse eyes' this is a resonating vision of hope and a call to the transformation of attitudes as well as actions. For in this passage:

- * we are encouraged not to regard others 'from a human point of view'
 - as if, for example, they are shaped by former, by-gone, worldly ideas of physical limitations or biological or other determinism
- * the fundamental declaration is that when someone finds their true self in Christ 'there is a new creation', in which that which is old passes away and 'everything has become new'
 - in other words, when we rest in our true identity, we transition into something new
- * it is as transformed beings, as new creations, that we become 'ambassadors for Christ' for we witness by our very bodily transformations, to the fruitful reconciliation of hurts and divisions

Of course St Paul speaks here of the greater breadth and depth of the mystery and ministry of Christ in which all share. Yet do gender diverse people not embody this message in a fresh and liberating way? When not seen in a false 'human' way, gender diverse Christians can indeed be seen in new life-giving ways – as some of those who can witness, in their bodies and souls, to the transformation of old shapes and sufferings into new creations of growing joy and peace, ambassadors of Christ's re-creating love, reflecting 'the righteousness of God.' Coming home to one's true self is an infectious coming home to God's love.

Joshua 5.2-12 – marked as God's own, fed by grace beyond disgrace, with genital surgery

'New creation' is also at the heart of Joshua 5.1-12, which speaks of the new home into which the redeemed people of God are now entering. Again, read 'with gender diverse eyes', it offers some striking resonances with the experiences and faith of gender diverse people, speaking of:

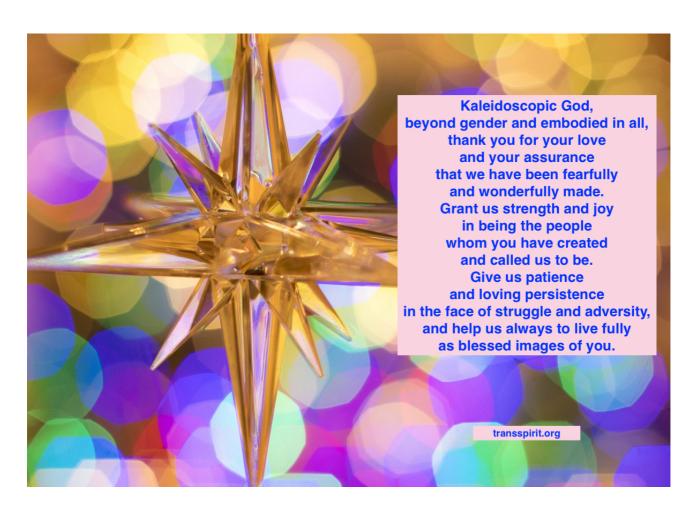
- * an end to exile and oppression 'the disgrace of Egypt' alienated, and being treated differently, from that which is one's true identity and dwelling place
- * finally dwelling, after long struggles, and a passover, in the promise which often seemed so distant, and even at times impossible
- * being marked, as an embodied symbol of new creation, with the alteration of intimate parts

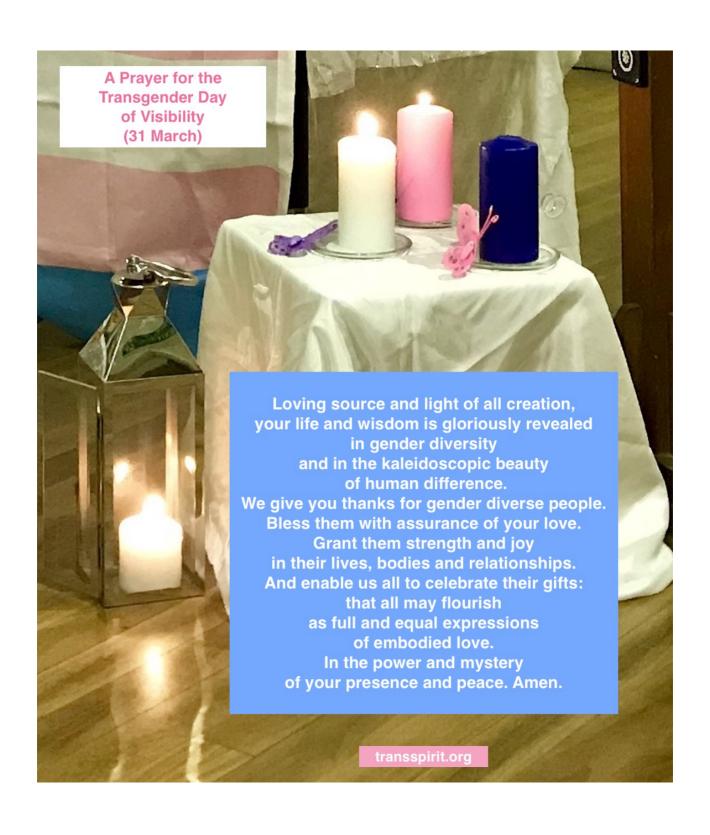
This last element of the story is striking. In the Hebrew story of the people of God, circumcision becomes a powerful feature of saving identity, witnessing to the fulfilment of God's promise of liberation and coming home. How strange then that transgender genital surgery is not more fully celebrated as a similar mark of freedom and new life. As with Christians generally (after the acceptance of Gentiles in the early Church), it is not necessary for all gender diverse people to bear

the marks of new creation through the alteration of their genitals. Nor, as with female circumcision, should it ever be inflicted on those who neither need nor ask for it. Yet, in a powerful sense, genital alteration is much more than merely a physical change. For many transgender people, it is also sacramental of truly 'coming home' and to a new beginning in love.

A reflection on 'Mothering Sunday' – a time for generous hospitality for all coming home

In the Anglophone Church tradition, the Transgender Day of Visibility occurs in 2022 just before what is also called 'Mothering Sunday.' This reflects an old British and Irish custom of people returning to their 'mother church' on the 4th Sunday of Lent: a day on which they might, at least for one day, 'come home' to family. One vital contemporary dimension would thus be to enable gender diverse people to come home safely, and joyfully, to their selves, bodies, church families and God. The parable in Luke 15.11-32, the Gospel story for the day, is again an encouragement in this. The figure of the father in the story after all shares a very motherly-fatherly love, transcending the constraints of traditional male patriarchal expectation. Like Christ who calls us all to be embraced as their bride – whether male, female, or other, non-binary, gender – what we have been, and what we are, does not ultimately matter. What matters is what we are called to become: new creations who know ourselves as fully loved, whatever we are, and who love others accordingly.





Further gender diverse Christian Resources

Although gender diverse people can be found at every stage of history, in every culture, and in every great religious tradition, too little is still known and understood. Too much negative material has also been produced, and is still produced in some places, by others who have no lived experience or real knowledge of gender diverse people's realities and faith. Happily today here is a gradually increasing number of excellent resources now being produced by gender diverse Christians themselves.

Further stories

To learn more about some of the journeys of other gender diverse Christians from across the world, check out some of the links below to the following people:

- * Christina Beardsley Anglican pioneer trans priest speaking here on gender & the spiritual heart: https://themasksofgender.com/episode-3-tina-and-the-spiritual-heart
- * Austen Hartke author of the YouTube series 'Transgender and Christian' author at http://austenhartke.com
- * Sarah Jones Anglican parish priest in Cardiff, the first person to have made a gender change and then be ordained in the Church of England, and then 'outed' at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmTliXVESsU
- * Shay Kearns A Strange Calling: the 1st Old Catholic Priest at http://thesaltcollective.org/strange-calling-1st-old-catholic-transgender-priest/
- * Nancy Ledins former Catholic priest who continued a fine ministry after transition www.newwaysministry.org/2017/09/12/transgender-womans-ministry-continued-long-after-sheleft-priesthood/
- * Rachael Mann Anglican priest, poet, writer and broadcaster based in Manchester at http://rachelmann.co.uk/
- * Justin Tanis leading trans theologian and activist
- at https://lgbtgreligiousarchives.org/profiles/justin-tanis

Voices of Witness: Out of the Box - view at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzCANWGsEdc (a ground breaking Anglican documentary giving voice to transgender people of faith telling their stories of hope, healing and wholeness. Produced in 2012)

Further reading:- with thanks to Inclusive Church - www.inclusive-church.org

- * Althaus-Reid M. and L. Isherwood (Eds.) 2009. Trans/Formations. London: SCM.
- * Beardsley, C., & M. O'Brien (eds.) *This is my body: hearing the theology of transgender Christians*. 2016. London: Darton, Longman & Todd. (Part 1 includes chapters on medicine, scientific perspectives, social theory and theology, Part 2 the personal stories of transgender Christians)
- * Cornwall, S. Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology. 2010. London: Routledge. (Chapter 4 considers 'Theologies from Transgender Perspectives')
- * Dowd, C. & C. Beardsley with Justin Tanis. *Transfaith: A transgender pastoral resource*. 2018. London: Darton, Longman & Todd. based on in-depth interviews with twelve transgender Christians
- * Hartke, A. 2018. *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press. (a clearly written, well-argued volume, aimed at a US audience)
- * Hornsby, T.J. & D. Guest. 2016. *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*. Atlanta: SBL Press. (scholarly exploration of the translation and interpretation of a range of biblical texts)
- * Mann, R. 2012. *Dazzling Darkness: Gender, sexuality, illness and God.* Glasgow: Wild Goose. (autobiographical theological reflections by a Christian priest-poet.)
- * Tanis J. 2003. Trans-Gender: Theology, ministry and communities of faith. Pilgrim Press.