

**181st Annual Convention
Diocese of Chicago
November 16-17, 2018**

Amended RESOLUTION

Subject: **Affirmation of the Inherent Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons
as beloved by God¹**

Originators: The Very Rev. M.E. Eccles, Sandra F. McPhee, The Rev. Kate Spelman, The Rev. Nadia Stefko, The Very Rev. Court Williams, The Rev. Christopher Powell

RESOLUTION

Resolved, that the 181st Convention of the Diocese of Chicago affirms that all transgender people and those whose experience of gender is not restricted to the binary distinction between exclusively male or exclusively female, and anyone whose gender identity and expression differs from that assigned at birth, are beloved children of God and are to be treated with equal rights and privileges as other human beings; and

Further resolved, that the 181st Convention of the Diocese of Chicago opposes any attempt to legislate or make public policy that defines sex and/or gender exclusively based on the physical appearance of external genitalia present at birth or presence of certain chromosomes within a person's DNA; and

Further resolved, that the Diocese of Chicago supports educational, pastoral, liturgical, and legislative efforts that seek to end systemic violence against transgender people, calling special attention to violence against transgender women of color; and

Further resolved, that the Secretary of Convention is directed to convey this resolution to appropriate state and federal bodies.

EXPLANATION

On October 21, 2018, *The New York Times* published an article about a memo they received that was created by the US Department of Health and Human Services. According to the article:

The department argued in its memo that key government agencies needed to adopt an explicit and uniform definition of gender as determined “on a biological basis that is clear, grounded in science, objective and administrable.” The agency’s proposed definition would define sex as either

male or female, unchangeable, and determined by the genitals that a person is born with. Any dispute about one's sex would have to be clarified using genetic testing. "Sex means a person's status as male or female based on immutable biological traits identifiable by or before birth," the department proposed in the memo, which was drafted and has been circulating since last spring. "The sex listed on a person's birth certificate, as originally issued, shall constitute definitive proof of a person's sex unless rebutted by reliable genetic evidence."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/21/us/politics/transgender-trump-administration-sex-definition.html>

The article states that this proposed definition would affect approximately 1.4 million Americans who identify as a gender other than that assigned at birth. Trans advocates and allies have reacted swiftly and negatively. Within hours, the hashtag #WontBeErased began trending on social media and rallies were held around the country. Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, said, "What this feels like to transgender people is trying to make us invisible, trying to say that we don't exist, trying to say that we are nothing."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/us/transgender-reaction-rally.html>

The Episcopal Church has a history of taking action to affirm that trans and nonbinary people as beloved children of God, and of taking material action to ensure their safety and full inclusion in society and the church. In addition, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings have spoken against discrimination against trans people, and in June 2016, the Executive Committee of The Episcopal Church passed a resolution "decrying the wave of anti-trans bills that have been sweeping the country." Links to General Convention legislation, statements by the Presiding Bishop and PHOD, and the Executive Committee resolution can be found here:

<http://www.transepiscopal.org/policies--legislation.html>

A swift and public response to public attempts to erase trans people or enshrine discrimination against them in legislation or public policy is essential. According to a 2015 survey of over 28,000 trans people (funded by the National Center for Transgender Equality), 46% of respondents said they were verbally harassed and 9% physically attacked for being trans within the past year. Over half reported being physically attacked during K-12 school, and 17% said they stopped attending school due to harassment. Trans women of color experienced violence at nearly twice the rate of white trans men. Nearly 40% were living in poverty. In most states, it is legal to discriminate in employment matters because someone is trans or perceived to be. As a result of this pervasive violence and discrimination, 39% of respondents said they had experienced severe mental distress *during the past month*, and 40% have attempted suicide within their lifetime (which is nine times the national average – and keep in mind that those who have died by suicide are not included in these figures).

<https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Executive-Summary-Dec17.pdf>

The good news is support from families, friends, and allies can improve quality of life and reduce the likelihood of death by suicide for trans people. Based on survey responses, having supportive family members reduced the risk of suicide attempts by 32%. Risk of homelessness was cut almost in half. And reported incidence of severe mental distress was 40% lower.

<https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Executive-Summary-Dec17.pdf>

As Christians, we are called to love and to put our love into action. We are called by our baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every human being. Further, Jesus gave us the great commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37) Romans tells us that “love does no harm to its neighbor.” (Romans 13:10) More discussion of how scripture affirms transgender individuals and their experience can be found in *The Bible and the Transgender Experience: How Scripture Supports Gender Variance* by Linda Tatro Herzer.

For those unfamiliar with the terms, transgender or nonbinary, the National Center for Transgender Equality offers this definition: “Transgender people are people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be at birth. ‘Trans’ is often used as shorthand for transgender.” <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people>

These are not the only definitions and ways to think about being trans or nonbinary. The right of individuals to define themselves and their identity, like other rights of self-determination, is given by God, inherent and unalienable. We are all “created equal” and are “endowed” by our “Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” so reads the Declaration of Independence (1776). The National Center for Transgender Equality has resources for being a good ally, which goes into more detail about these issues and many others. These resources focus on effectively supporting trans people, both on an interpersonal level and through public policy and advocacy:

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/supporting-the-transgender-people-in-your-life-a-guide-to-being-a-good-ally>

ⁱ Morrow, The Rev. Andrea and The Rev. Canon William Danaher. Proposed Resolution to the 184th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, “*Recognition and Affirmation of the Inherent Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons as Beloved Children of God*”. 23 October 2018.