

# RESPECTING TRANS LIVES

A Pollicino (they/them)

October 2021



This month we contemplate the Church's designation of October as *Respect Life Month*. In a time when many of us are rethinking our attitudes around how people's lives matter, a group that is often forgotten or left out are trans people. Being raised Catholic and very pro-life (on picket lines before I was out of a stroller, attending pro-life marches as a teen, and regularly praying the rosary for the unborn as a family), the idea of respecting life from conception to natural death is something I've grown up with and thought about quite a bit. In my earlier years, this concept was taught before I could comprehend what the big issues even meant (abortion, the death penalty, war). Growing older I began to realize the positions I had taken on these issues are complex and sometimes at odds with other people's experiences and beliefs. Now as a trans adult I continue to challenge myself to expand and deepen the ways we can conceptualize what it means to be pro-life in this moment.

Within the Church, and our broader society, the most detrimental attitude affecting trans lives today is skepticism. If we think about the attitude of people in the church along a spectrum, we currently have

- a small group of well-meaning allies,
- a middle majority who are not well informed and unsure about gender identity,
- and a small yet vocal opposition that deny our right to even describe our existence without condemnation.

In each of these groups, there is a level of skepticism about trans people actually being who they say they are. If we are to give trans people the quality of life and dignity we afford others, we must unequivocally combat misguided perceptions that often come in the form of rhetoric describing trans identity as a phase, trend, theory, ideology, agenda, or form of indoctrination. We cannot, as pro-life people, afford to continue using that language or allowing others to do so. Period, full stop.

It is this misrepresentation that directly contributes to the serious issues trans people face:

- high youth suicide rates,
- forced homelessness of teens,
- facing upheavals like divorce and job loss as adults,
- elderly trans people having to remain in or go back into the closet,
- the denial of lifesaving health care,
- disproportionately high murder rates,
- anti-trans policies in k-12 schools,
- incarceration, either in prison or in immigrant detention centers.

We cannot move toward equity for trans lives if cisgender people will not allow us to speak openly and show up safely and fully as ourselves.

Much of the uncertainty around what it actually means to be a trans child, adult, and elder can significantly be alleviated by simply believing us and getting to know us. Helping a trans child to navigate growing up in a society not designed for them is as simple as letting them have the name, clothing, and haircut they'd like. This challenges social norms more so than core beliefs. We can allow professionals and supportive family to guide teens through affirming counseling and health care that other community members receive for their needs without scrutiny. Being an ally with trans adults and elders can be life changing as some older people are just now gaining the vocabulary to fully understand themselves having grown up and built a life around an identity that was incomplete. For many trans people, this is the best realization of our lives and it is often met with some of the hardest misunderstandings from people in our immediate family and community.

I love being trans and many of my trans friends are proudly so despite the confusion swirling around public perception which frankly limits the diversity God intended for all of us. One of the most baffling realizations I had coming into my identity later in life was how infrequently cisgender people think about gender identity. It was mind-blowing but perhaps logical that the very group of people who did not often think about their gender would have a hard time believing the group of people that do. By the time you know someone is trans they have thought about it for quite some time.

We don't need cisgender people to understand us as much as we need them to support us. My hope during Respect Life Month is that cisgender people put aside the misrepresentations they may have been exposed to so they can truly show up for and consider what it means to treat trans lives with the dignity, respect, and love.