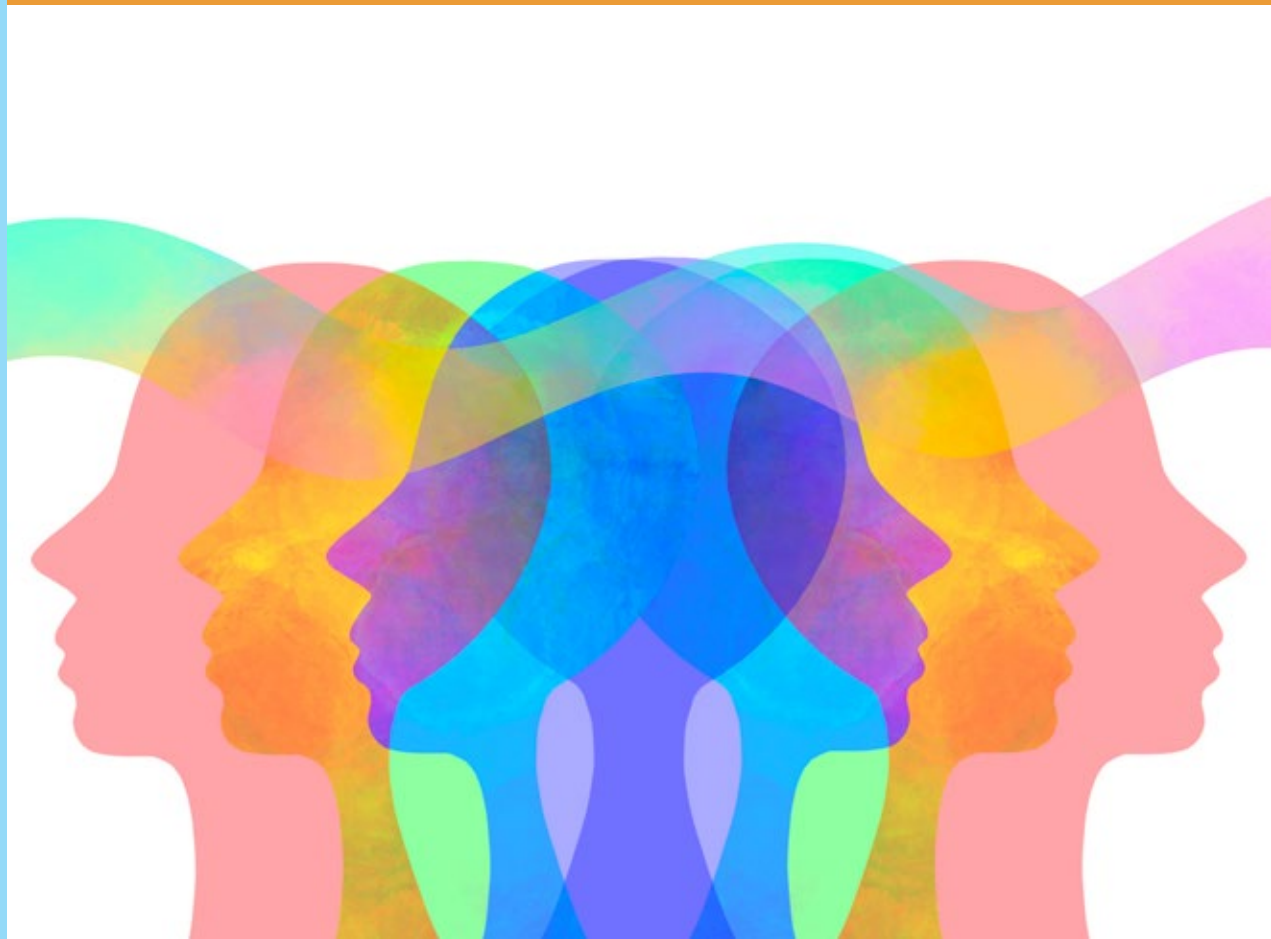


Caring Connections

An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling



Navigating Changing Gender Norms

The Purpose of Caring Connections

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling is written primarily by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable, solidly grounded in the practice of ministry, and theologically probing. *Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and concerned congregational pastors and laity.

Caring Connections also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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When the Inter Lutheran Coordinating Committee disbanded a few years ago, the money from the “Give Something Back” Scholarship Fund was divided between the ELCA and the LCMS. The ELCA has retained the name “Give Something Back” for their fund, and the LCMS calls theirs “The SPM Scholarship Endowment Fund.” These endowments make a limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education.

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News, Announcements, Events: E-mail items to Christopher Otten at christopher.otten@elca.org or David Ficken ESC@lcms.org.

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Call for Articles

Caring Connections seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight within the wider Lutheran community. We want to invite any Lutherans interested in writing an article or any readers responding to one to please contact one of the co-editors, Diane Greve at dkgreve@gmail.com or Bruce Hartung at hartungb@csl.edu. Please consider writing an article for us. We sincerely want to hear from you!

And, as always, if you haven't already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, a subscription is free! By subscribing, you are assured that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that our numbers are increasing. Please visit lutheranservices.org/caring-connections-archive and click on "Subscribe to our newsletter" to receive automatic notification of new issues.

Editorial

Diane Greve

SOME OF THE MOST CAPABLE, COMPASSIONATE CHAPLAINS I have known were queer. Outside the box. They were on a journey to live their own lives fully and could allow others to do the same.

We live in a time and place where gender roles have changed. Women are doctors and men are nurses. Men are deacons and women are pastors. This was not always the case. For some it may now feel normative but not for all. We often still assume all pastors and doctors are men. But not only are gender roles changing, our understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation is changing. We frequently hear and read about schools struggling with having transgender girls/women on women's sports teams, or not. Or states banning gender-affirming care. Yet, in Minnesota, non-binary restrooms are becoming more common in many settings and the state will welcome others who are seeking gender-affirming care. We have many perspectives.

Our two Lutheran expressions (ELCA and LCMS) do not agree on these matters. This has caused some challenges in preparing this issue of *Caring Connections*. Clyde Burmeister, an ACPE Clinical Educator, retired, commented to me that organizations, such as ACPE, the church, individuals, have a difficult time changing, or even becoming aware of their own attitudes, unless they become aware of their own intrapersonal dynamics and how that affects their interpersonal relationships in ministry. So true. Examining our attitudes and assumptions is critical to being a good chaplain or pastoral counselor. I am so grateful for those who have shared their experiences in order for all of us to better understand ourselves and one another.

While I was in formation to become a Lutheran deaconess at Valparaiso, Norman C. Habel, an Australian Old Testament scholar, was a well-loved theologian among deaconess students. You may remember he also wrote the curriculum, "The Purple Puzzle Tree." The nation was going through major changes in civil rights, the Vietnam war, and gender roles. One of the hymns he wrote has stuck in my mind all these years. In spite of the male language, I share it with you.

I know we spin on earth beneath a dancing sky,
I hear a word from God that frees a man to fly,
I feel the bones of slaughter'd sons will soon arise,
For I believe that Christ is changing everything!
Everything! Everything! Everything!

Examining our attitudes and assumptions is critical to being a good chaplain or pastoral counselor.

I hear the tulips laugh beneath the winter snow,
I've seen how little children make their parents grow,
I'm sure that miracles can set the heavens aglow,
For I believe that Christ is changing everything!
Everything! Everything! Everything!

I sense an unseen world beyond the swirling sun,
I look for mysteries that haven't yet begun,
I trust in hands of love to heal the wrongs we've done,
For I believe that Christ is changing everything!
Everything! Everything! Everything!

I know men give their eyes to those who lose their sight,
I've seen men take His holy meal and dance all night,
I want to celebrate my death with all my might,
For I believe that Christ is changing everything!
Everything! Everything! Everything! Everything!¹

Can we proclaim, “Christ is changing everything!”? I believe that God is in the midst of these changes and inviting all of us to expand our understanding of humanity, of possibility, of queerness. God our creator, who has made each of us and all creatures, must be in the midst of all of this change.

In this issue we have some new contributors who bravely have brought their stories and reflections forward for us to ponder. Since personal pronouns are part of this journey, I will include them here. I am also offering a few additional resources toward the end in *Get curious?*

- **Brad Binau** (he/his/him) has opened up a way to interpret the stories of those who are LGBTQIA+ using principles of hermeneutic of suspicion and/or hermeneutic of belief as we read “living human documents.”
- **Anonymous** (she/her) shares her own challenges of being accepted as a female chaplain and later her experience with counseling a transgender client.
- **jj Godwin** (they/them) explores some of the language and experience they have had as a genderqueer, trans person.
- **Albie Nicol** (they/he) looks at their vocational calling through the lens of an article by Dr. Mary Lowe that affirms one's self-expression.
- **Morgan Simmons** (she/her) offers her reflections on the role and perception of chaplains as queer while drawing from the book, *Outside the Lines* by Mihee Kim-Kort.

1 Habel, Norman C., author and Richard Koehneke, composer. *For Mature Adults Only*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.

- **Chuck Weinrich** (he/his/him) lifts up the memory of LCMS ACPE Clinical Educator, retired, Paul Steinke.
- **Henry F Wind Awardees** Three LCMS leaders in the area of Specialized Pastoral Ministry (SPM) received the Wind Award. Congratulations to David Ficken, Donald Sundene and Derek Wolter.

I welcome you to read and ponder the stories and thoughts of these contributors. Some readers may feel confused, others affirmed. You may not agree or affirm the writers' experiences. And, I also believe Christ is changing everything! Hang on for the ride!

Diane Greve (she/her)

Announcement Concerning Issue 2023.3

Issue 2023.3

One Made-A-Difference-in-My-Life Book

What is one book that has made a difference in your life, your relationships or your ministry (other than the Bible)? Tell your colleagues about it, i.e., what it meant to you and why you think it would be helpful for others to read it. Please contact Bruce Hartung (hartungb@csl.edu) to consider contributing to this issue. Articles will be received until September 15.

Suspicion or Belief?

Reading Living Human Documents with Regard to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Brad A. Binau

I AM A STRAIGHT, WHITE, CIS-GENDER MALE, of northern European descent. When invited to write about how pastoral caregivers might engage issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, I wondered what I might, with credibility, have to offer. A brief conversation with my Presbyterian pastor spouse reminded me that my academic training as a pastoral theologian and twenty-nine years as a seminary professor have shaped some potentially beneficial insights. Still, as I hemmed and hawed, Ann cut through my resistance and said, “Brad, people harm themselves, kill themselves, or get harmed and killed every day because of these issues. You cannot *not* accept this opportunity.” She was right.¹

Every Person a Living Human Document

The fundamental principle of my training and work as a pastoral theologian has been to engage every human being as a “living human document.” Anton Boisen, who birthed the clinical pastoral education movement in the 1930s, coined this phrase and explained:

“I was much concerned that theological students should have the opportunity to go to first-hand sources for their knowledge of human nature. I wanted them to learn to read human documents as well as books... to focus attention upon those who are grappling desperately with the issues of spiritual life and death.”²

Significant mental and spiritual anguish shaped Boisen’s life and led him to assert, in the words of pastoral theologian Charles Gerkin, “that the depth experience of persons in the struggles of their mental and spiritual life demanded the same respect as do the historic texts from which the foundations of our Judeo-Christian faith foundations are drawn.”³ More and more, concerns

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1 The “2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention” from the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General reported that LGB adults attempted suicide at 2-3 times the rate of all adults and 30 percent of LGB adolescents reported suicide attempts compared to 8-10 percent of all adolescents. A 2018 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that LGBTQ youth were 3.5 times as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers and attempts among trans teens were 5.87 times higher than the average among all teens. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2704490>

2 Anton Boisen, *Exploration of the Inner World*, NY: Harper, 1936, p. 10.

3 Charles Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984, p. 38.

from a variety of perspectives related to sexual orientation and gender identity contribute to significant mental and spiritual anguish in the lives of those for whom we care.⁴ Those struggling to discern when and whether to “come out” regarding their orientation, those struggling to discern when, whether, and how to transition in terms of their gender, as well as their families, friends, neighbors, and colleagues are the primary source documents of our work. Or perhaps, in this age when many of us read via audio recordings, Boisen’s guidance comes to us in the twenty-first century in the genius phrase of feminist theologian Nelle Morton as the invitation “hear to speech” the stories of those for whom LGBTQ are more than just letters. She writes: “We empower one another by hearing the other to speech.”⁵

The struggle to live or die was carried on largely in silence. Opportunities to be “heard to speech” were rare at best and at worst nonexistent.

Theologian Cody Sanders did a careful reading of nine documents – narratives of LGBTQ persons who attempted suicide because “life at one time or another came to seem unlivable.”⁶ An outstanding characteristic of each narrative was that the struggle to live or die was carried on largely in silence. Opportunities to be “heard to speech” were rare at best and at worst nonexistent. Sanders cites the work of leading suicidologist Thomas Joiner who contends that “a lack of a sense of belongingness is a key factor in suicide ideation and completion.”⁷

Belief and Suspicion: Two Interpretive Modes

Hermeneutics, the art and science of interpretation, is no less important for pastoral caregivers who read living human documents than it is for the preacher or teacher interpreting written texts. In every instance tension always exists between an orientation of suspicion and one of belief. A hermeneutic of suspicion, shaped significantly by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, looks for hidden meanings in a narrative. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur described the guiding principle of this hermeneutic as a willingness to suspect⁸ in an attempt to expose an illusionary view of reality or “false consciousness” that gave rise to a particular text. This hermeneutical approach problematizes a person’s narrative. When used to interpret the narratives of LGBTQ persons it assumes that the authors do not understand their own stories. A hermeneutic of suspicion is the foundation of reparative/conversion therapies.

By contrast, a hermeneutic of belief⁹ engages another’s story with a willingness to listen. One begins with a tendency to trust that what is seen and heard is trustworthy,

4 See Cody J. Sanders, *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk*, Kanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020.

5 Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985, p. 127.

6 Sanders, p. 6

7 Sanders, p. 128.

8 Josselson, “The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” *Narrative Inquiry*, Vol . 14, No. 1, 2004, p. 23

9 Ricoeur referred to it as a hermeneutic of faith. Josselson prefers a “hermeneutic of restoration” in order to highlight the meaning of a person’s narrative that can be brought to more explicit awareness.

that persons are the experts regarding their own experiences, and that people's narratives contain meaning that can be brought from a tacit to more explicit level of knowledge, to use Michael Polanyi's terms. This approach presumes "as little as possible in order to believe in the manner of the believer" and tries to "learn to think in the idiosyncratic language" of the other person.¹⁰

A hermeneutic of belief can break the silence that so frequently entraps LGBTQ persons.

The two approaches do need each other, lest belief devolve into mere credulity, or suspicion block authentic listening. Any document, including living human documents, can be authored to obfuscate, deny, or repress what seems shameful or threatening. Additionally, we must always maintain some measure of suspicion about how our own prejudices may diminish our capacity for truly empathic listening. In general, however, I contend that a hermeneutic of belief is the more faithful and beneficial approach to pastoral care especially when sexual orientation and/or gender identity are in the foreground of our work. It makes little sense to suspect that someone seeking gender affirming care, or acceptance as LGBTQ is doing so to hide from the truth. The struggles, and possibility of rejection involved, add credibility to these narratives rather than subtract from them. Ethicist Scott Bader-Saye states that his way of engaging the narrative of a transgender person, arguably a method of value when engaging *any* person's narrative, is simply "to assume from the start that trans people are simply telling the truth about themselves."¹¹

Ironically, political and religious conservatives shaping the conversation about sexual orientation and gender identity rely heavily on a hermeneutic of suspicion. They contend that any reading of a living human document that is non-binary is an illusionary view of reality. By questioning the motives and self-awareness of those in the LGBTQIAA+ community, and those who seek to be their allies, these conservative activists have unwittingly linked themselves to the hermeneutical methods of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Less likely bedfellows are hard to imagine.

Queer Theory and the Interpretation of the Interpreter

Drawing on the hermeneutical work of Paul Ricoeur, pastoral theologian Donald Capps points out that when providing pastoral care we not only interpret the living human documents we encounter, they also interpret us.¹² The current strong negative reactions to the narratives arising from the LGBTQ community (Target employees being threatened because of displays of Pride merchandise, bills passed or pending in states such as Texas, Florida, and Ohio that would curtail or eliminate altogether

We must always maintain some measure of suspicion about how our own prejudices may diminish our capacity for truly empathic listening.

¹⁰ Josselson, p. 9.

¹¹ Scott-Bader-Saye, "The Transgender Body's Grace," *The Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2019, p. 83.

¹² Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 20.

transgender care for those under 18, Florida's "Parental Rights in Education" bill that sets restrictive guidelines for what public schools can teach about gender identity and sexual orientation) suggest that these narratives interpret their "readers" as incapable of acknowledging a world that is not strictly binary. This fear of losing one's assumptive world manifests itself in denial, rage, and other forms of unacknowledged grief. And it serves to remind us that those so threatened are also deserving of pastoral care. It is also our calling as pastoral caregivers to hear to speech those who themselves are not prone to listen to voices unlike their own.

Queer theory, in its challenge to heteronormativity and insistence that sexual orientation and gender identity are social constructions, has contributed to our understanding of these strong reactions against non-binary realities. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood point out that we love our ideologies because of the security/certainty/normality they seem to offer. They point to a striking similarity between our relationships to ideas and our relationships to other persons. Both can be life-giving and identity-affirming. But they can also be abusive. "People sometimes need to renounce a beloved who has ill-treated them [and] we face here the challenge of renouncing beloved sexual ideologies," they note, and point out that we have "a long history of struggling from the liberation of former ideological abusive loves, such as racism, sexism, indifference toward the poor (if not active cooperation towards their oppression) and colonialism."¹³

LGBTQ living human documents disclose a decidedly non-binary world. Queer theory challenges us to get out of binary boxes and come to terms with the fact that while Genesis 1 may suggest a binary creation, (day/night, land/sea, male/female, etc.) liminality is as much a part of creation as is polarity. There is day and night, but there is also dawn and dusk. There is land and sea, but also swamps and marshes. Amphibians defy the polarities of land animals and sea creatures.¹⁴ If received with a hermeneutic of belief, the narratives of LGBTQ persons disclose a world far larger and more freeing than one constructed of binary boxes.

Almost everything in the political climate in the United States today is characterized by binary thinking. Nowhere is this more evident than in current legislative initiatives aimed at restricting and in some instances criminalizing gender affirming care. At present nineteen states have enacted legislation that restricts access to gender affirming care focused particularly on minors.¹⁵ To the extent that

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13 Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, "Thinking Theology and Queer Theory," *Feminist Theology*, Vol. 15, No3., 2007, p. 305.

14 See David Cloutier and Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Church and Transgender Identity: Some Cautions, Some Possibilities," *Commonweal*, Vol. 144, No. 5, March 10, 2017), p. 21.

15 As reported by the Human Rights Campaign, 5/15/23, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/attacks-on-gender-affirming-care-by-state-map>

these legislative/political initiatives reveal something about how those with legislative and political power interpret the living human documents that are the narratives of transgender persons they are the concern of pastoral caregivers. As pastoral theologian Stephen Pattison has noted, “If theology is worth thinking about at all then it should be of public interest well beyond the religious community.”¹⁶

In Ohio, House Bill 68, the SAFE Act (“Ohio Saving Adolescents from Experimentation”)¹⁷ has been introduced in the Ohio House Public Health Policy Committee. The bill seeks to outlaw gender affirming care for minors experiencing gender dysphoria, to open the door to professional discipline for medical and psychological clinicians who provide such care, and to require health care providers to submit detailed annual reports to the state department of health regarding all minors seeking gender affirming care. At public hearings, opponents of the SAFE Act have outnumbered supporters nearly twelve to one. I sent to the bill’s sponsor, Rep. Gary Click, a list of detailed questions regarding portions of the bill and the studies cited to justify the bill’s necessity for the sake of public health. I received from his legislative aide forty-four pages of responses to “frequently asked questions,” none of which responded directly to my questions, and nearly all of which coincided with positions taken by the Center for Christian Virtue, “Ohio’s largest Christian public policy organization”¹⁸ which is a major supporter of the bill. As its mission this center “seeks the good of our neighbors by advocating for public policy that reflects the truth of the Gospel.” For pastoral caregivers who embrace the truth of the gospel as neighbor love rather than adherence to binary ideology, awareness of these legislative initiatives is an essential part of our calling.

For pastoral caregivers who embrace the truth of the gospel as neighbor love rather than adherence to binary ideology, awareness of these legislative initiatives is an essential part of our calling.

Being an Ally

In preparation for writing this article I spoke with a number of people. About half identify as part of the LGBTQIAA+ community. The others, from ministerial, educational, or medical backgrounds were willing to share their perspectives on what it means to be an ally – one willing to learn about, advocate for, and support members of the LGBTQ community. As I stated at the outset, as a straight, white, cis-gender male, of northern European descent I am on the outside trying to learn my way in. In conclusion, a few key things I learned from those who generously opened their pages as living human documents for me to read:

¹⁶ Cited in Sanders, p. 126.

¹⁷ https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_135/bills/hb68/IN/00/hb68_00_IN?format=pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.ccv.org/>

- Aspire to be an ally, but don't claim the title for yourself. Others will bless you with that designation as they see you offering tangible signs of support like showing up at a Pride Parade, writing letters to the editor, including their concerns in public prayers, and striving to educate yourself.
- When aspiring to be an ally bring both curiosity and empathy to your reading of living human documents. Don't insist that others teach you as if their lives should conform to our questions. Listen to the whole of what others have to offer (i.e., don't skip over the challenging parts of a living human document) and not just the parts that interest you.
- In the words of pastoral theologian John Patton, "Don't be so intimidated by what you don't know about something that you can't make use of what you do know."¹⁹ So love persons for who they are, and listen for who they are longing to be.



The Rev. Dr. Brad Binau is Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology and former Academic Dean (2010-2017) at Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. He retired in the fall of 2022. A graduate of Capital University, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and Princeton Theological Seminary, he served La Jolla Lutheran Church in southern California before joining the Trinity faculty in 1993. His scholarly interests include pastoral care, shame, leadership, rural/small town ministry, and the deadly sins. With his wife, the Rev. Ann Palmerton, he is the parent of three children.

¹⁹ John Patton, *Pastoral as Counselor: Wise Presence, Sacred Conversation*, Nashville, TN: 2015, p. 111.

A Gendered Conversation with a Chaplain

Anonymous

“WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?” you may ask.

“Hi, come on in, have a seat, get comfortable and let me share a bit of my story with you. Go ahead and get a cup of coffee if you would like one, I’ll have a diet Dr. Pepper as we share this time together. I am sharing this with you without putting a name to it at the end, as some of what I share would be recognizable even if names were changed to “protect the innocent.” I would rather just draw you into the story, to the essence of why we do what we do – help others process their *stuff*.”

“I worked as a chaplain in a state institution for over 25 years. I began in Chaplaincy at a time when it was considered “a man’s profession.” It was when most of those holding the office of the keys served in parish ministry for a number of years and then transitioned, for various reasons, into Chaplaincy. I am a member of the LCMS and when I began there were five female Chaplains out of 164 (if I remember the total number correctly) LCMS Chaplains. I know this because at one point in time the LCMS held a mandatory Chaplain retreat for all their Chaplains and only 5 women were present.

“At the beginning of my Chaplaincy ministry years some believed I should behave/think/process like a man, while others believed I wanted to be a man – a statement today that, for some, has taken on a much different meaning. Let me say that I do not want to offend anyone with anything I say, but times have changed and things have taken on different meanings over the years.

“As I said, when I started in Chaplaincy it was considered by many to be a position where a Pastor or Priest would minister to those within an institution or enlisted in the military. It was foreign to encounter a woman in such a position and, due to that, the exchange sometimes became awkward. At times the individual seeking a Chaplain would be uncomfortable with a woman, or the administration would consider that a woman should only minister to other women, or other staff members would discourage contacting the Chaplain thinking there would be boundary issues or things would become too emotional. It felt as though I was proving myself over and over again for various reasons.

“I had taken CPE and had developed excellent boundaries. I knew I was competent and could hold my own, yet I was, at times, ignored at meetings, questioned, or just generally treated as though I was less than my male counterparts. I actually had bosses that would accept an idea I had if it were repeated by my male

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counterpart. He gave me lower evaluations than my male counterpart (even though he believed I had done much more than he had throughout the year), but it was a time of change as well. I had a top administrator who told me that he didn't believe I belonged in my position simply because I was a woman. I had men of the Church telling me I was usurping my husband's authority even though he thoroughly supported what I was doing. I was also always aware that there was a line to walk between being a Chaplain and being perceived as a pastoral wannabe.

I was also always aware that there was a line to walk between being a Chaplain and being perceived as a pastoral wannabe.

“There were also those that encouraged me and stressed that I was exactly where God was calling me to be, doing exactly what God called me to do. At times even protecting me within the institutional and LCMS structures.

“As I grew into my position as Chaplain, I became respected for what I had to offer my institution as I used my skills to help people deal with life's questions, crises, joys, and journeys. People came to respect the office I held rather than judge me by my gender.

“Although I had been set up by people within the administration who believed I didn't belong, even other conservative Christian women, God saw me through, giving me individuals who believed in what I was doing. They saw my integrity and skills and supported making me successful ... both male and female individuals. At one point in time, it became apparent that I was rather well known throughout the hierarchy of the institutional structure and I had other women who would actually seek me out and thank me for what I had done to advance the presence of women throughout the institution and organization.

“To me it was a journey of trying to follow where God was leading. I often questioned why I was the one having to be the trailblazer, enduring both the pain of the thorny foliage and the joy when I found the sunlit clearing to stand in for a bit. At the time it often seemed like I encountered agonizingly difficult individuals who simply had a power agenda with moments of hope for better days ahead. I took complaints to the union, various administrators, and also found joy and support from fellow staff, volunteers, and as time progressed, bosses and administrators. So looking back over the years I can see the growth of the culture of the institution, the times I triumphed, the times I overstepped and ultimately the times of respect and admiration that came along with my Chaplaincy position and knowledge.

“As the years progressed the issue of gender became an entirely new arena with new terms, new situations and new ways of addressing gender. I had an individual who worked for me who was openly trans-sexual, loaded with hormones, and experiencing herself for the first time as a female as she transitioned to who she felt she needed to be. According to her self-description of how she reacted and responded

when she was male, she was arguably a much nicer individual as a female than the former male self. She was looking for acceptance of her journey, but when we met, she was still unsure of the certainty of her decision or of how far she should carry her change. She wanted someone to talk to about what her decisions might mean for the future.

“As we sat and spoke to one another regarding her decisions, I found she had deep spiritual questions regarding this change as well as practical questions revolving around marriage and children. What would she possibly think or feel years down the road? What kind of choices would need to be made based on the choices of today? I happened to have friends who were in a monogamous marriage who are a lesbian female and a trans female with 2 children who had some experience in this area, so I was happy to pass along questions to them. My co-worker said that it seemed to her that people were afraid to discuss the possible outcomes, drawbacks, potential consequences of her decisions today due to not wanting to appear politically incorrect, biased, judgmental, or perhaps just ignorant. I counseled with her for many months learning more about her concerns, fears, joys and the freedom she felt in being about to experience a new life. She was expressing on the outside the individual she had always felt like on the inside.

“I supported the fact that by doing this she had less anger, which led to less violence and aggression on her part. We discussed the difference between aggression and assertiveness and what that looks like. We discussed the Christian Church and the rigidness sometimes encountered there. I also learned more about trans-gender undergarments than I ever wanted to know, but again this was a subject that very few would discuss with her as she sought to make some personal decisions.

“Ultimately, she chose to follow an earth-based spiritual path, but she said that at least she could believe that the God of her upbringing (which was Christian) still did love her and would forgive her if she ever chose that path again.

“This was one of the most positive steps I felt she made in the discussion around Christianity and trans-gender issues of today. I was able to share my conservative theological stance with her without her feeling judged. I shared that we all sin and fall short of God’s glory and that I choose to love the sinner while leaving it to God to judge and forgive our sins. This way I pointed out I could walk on a variety of journeys with others.

“The one thing she always got a kick out of is when I would see her respond or react to some situation and then just shake my head and say, “you are such a girly girl.” She was never offended by this as she knew from our conversations that I

As we sat and spoke to one another regarding her decisions, I found she had deep spiritual questions regarding this change as well as practical questions revolving around marriage and children.

accepted her for who she was, whether I theologically agreed with her choices in life or not.

“So, what’s it all about?”

“For me as a Chaplain it is all about sharing God’s love with people who are each on their own journey through this world. It is about showing them support, care, and compassion. It is about listening, accompanying, and empathizing. It is about meeting people where they are in that moment, walking with them for a bit, and hopefully helping them find a peaceful path to continue on as we part. That’s what it is all about. Thanks for listening and accompanying me on this bit of my journey.

“God bless you with peace, strength and love as you journey forward.”

This article is written anonymously to protect the identity of the counselee.

Knock...knock...Who's there?

Deacon jj Godwin

THAT MOMENT WE STAND AT THE THRESHOLD of the hospital room, ER curtain, sliding glass ICU door, the bedroom or rehab facility door, their zoom room, the prison yard, jail cell, chapel space, police scene, war zone or our own offices to meet the person who we have been invited or “voluntold” to receive our chaplain skills; something else shows up with us. Maybe it’s curled up in the most unconscious recesses of our brain; *it could be a couple of chickadees chirping for our attention*; maybe they slipped into our back pocket when we weren’t looking, or its the cape wrapped around our heart or souls. Usually, this phenomenon is barely detectible when I am at the threshold of meeting the person asking for care. Sometimes, it will show up when the nurse calls from ICU and paints a picture of who is waiting for me. Occasionally, I find it when I pre-read a chart before my rounds.

Most often, when it does show up, it’s visceral, embodied and called forward by my senses. Sometimes it even feels like a complete betrayal of my honed and practiced chaplain skills. It’s the smell of alcohol and sick that reminds me of someone as a child who gave me wet kisses on my cheek. It’s perfume or cologne so thick I can taste it, that forces me to consider if my whole self can stay in this room one moment longer. It’s hearing one of my favorite songs playing behind the threshold, I immediately think that I am comfortable around this person, “they are my people” and even “I am safe to be fully me.”

I recall in my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) residency “trying to leave” my bias at the hospital room door. I spent a good deal of time noticing through action-reflection-action how my unconscious bias showed up, noticing its nature and how it changed my behavior. While it is nice to think I could be “bias free,” I recognize that my lived experience will show up, *chirping at me creating a cognitive dissonance or my visceral response to the moment*. And the harder I try to ignore it, the louder it will be. So, I am resolved to chaplain my own biases.

Would I even want to be “bias free?” In my religious context, I believe where there are two (or more) gathered together to give and receive care, a divine third expression of creation enters into the conversation. That if the two present didn’t bring their own unique, complete, life experiences to freely share with each other, that something of the divinity created between this caregiving/



Sometimes, when we stand at the threshold ready to connect with the people who called for our care, a couple of chickadees show up needing our attention, reminding us to tend to our bias.

Photo Credit: @DeaconjjGodwin

receiving experience would be missed and go unnoticed.¹ So, while biases, especially unconscious ones, can feel like a liability at times, when we are fully conscious and learn how to navigate them in relationship, we are able to celebrate so much more about ourselves, each other and the creation within and around us all.

In Matt 18.21-22, Peter asks Jesus if the effective frequency of forgiveness is 7 times. This reminds me of the marketing concept “Rule of 7” where it is believed that if someone is shared a concept seven times, they will retain it.² Jesus proposes that with forgiveness it takes seventy-seven or seventy times seven, 490 times (depending on translation) in which we forgive others, and probably need to forgive ourselves. This brings me back to my bias because I know that I will show up with it, it will betray my intentions and I will need to ask for forgiveness both of myself as care giver and of the person across the threshold, the care receiver.

In chaplaincy, we enter into the space of someone who might live outside of societal norms, is marginalized, and they might be someone we have never encountered or considered.

With all of this bias, the desire to experience the divinity between us all, and our willingness to forgive all of it, we move past the threshold. In chaplaincy, we enter into the space of someone who might live outside of societal norms, is marginalized, and they might be someone we have never encountered or considered. When I walk into a room, it is human nature for me to make an assumption about the person sitting in front of me seeking a caring connection. This assumption can be an asset or a liability. I am bringing with me my unconscious and implicit biases, including the societal norms I have learned along with my own lived experience.

I invite you to consider your assumptions and biases about trans or gender expansive people. They are people who do not identify or express themselves in the same sex and/or gender they were assigned at birth. I also want to be clear that I am talking from my own experience which, of course, is not the same for every trans, non-binary, or gender expansive individual. I am using my own experiences to help contextualize what you may encounter when crossing this particular threshold bringing the biases and assumptions that you carry today. I invite you to notice when you read my experiences what *chirping you hear from your own biases*, and encourage you to write them down and explore them in your consciousness so you have the opportunity to tend to them.

As a non-binary person, gendered assumptions occur for me all the time. Society genders kindness and importance, like the honorifics or terms of address, “Sir, Madam and Ma’am” which are clearly sex based (female/male), gendered (feminine/masculine) and assumptive. And these titles might be unavoidable in some chaplaincy

1 The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, Matthew 18.20-22, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018%3A20-22&version=NRSVUE>

2 Symonds, C., & Valier, K. (2023, February 24). *The rule of 7: The power of social media - factorial*. Factorial Blog. <https://factorialhr.com/blog/the-rule-of-7/>

experiences, like the military or police departments. It is ideal to ask, if there is a preference to using one title over the other, or using a new title, like Mx., which might feel like a novelty. Language change can take time. Take for example Ms. which was invented as early as the 1760s but didn't gain popularity until the early 1970s with Ms. magazine.³ Having worked as a chaplain in Texas, where these gendered terms are used by everyone almost all the time, most people see me from behind and say, "Sir, can I help you?" Then when I turn around, I get the embarrassed, "Sorry, Ma'am, sorry." This is because polite societal norms required this person to consider my external genitalia, causing cognitive dissonance and shining a light on their unconscious bias of what people's gendered bodies *should* look like.

In my mind, to be at least a trans competent caregiver, we, as chaplains, need to take the opportunity, and really the privilege, to open ourselves to the expansiveness of creation. This allows us to invite the whole human being we are caring for into the room.

As a transgender person, when I meet a chaplain in a place of healing and vulnerability, like a hospital, I have a few seconds to use my own experience and bias to decide if I should mask my authentic self to essentially survive the encounter. Here are some things I consider:

- *Does the chaplain ask for and use my name, jj Godwin, or do they use a name found on my legal and medical documents?* It is important to acknowledge that legal name changes aren't available in every state for trans people and are often very expensive and labor intensive when they are. Using my legal name, which I consider a *dead name*, is offensive to me, unless absolutely necessary. Using my dead name reminds me of how I was not allowed to express myself fully growing up. To keep myself safe I had to express my gender in a way that society accepted. As a result, I took abuse from people who ridiculed me as a child for being too tall, stronger or more muscular than my female peers. Later some medical providers told me I was not female enough to bear children because of my unique genetics and that I needed to try harder to change my body to fit society's expectations of what it means to be a woman. In essence, I was intelligently designed to be gender non-conforming.
- *Does the chaplain ask me my personal pronouns and use them?* Pronouns (he, she, they, xie, etc.) are personal, they are not *preferred*. "Personal pronouns" is a grammar concept which substitutes a short word, like they, for a person's

In my mind, to be at least a trans competent caregiver, we, as chaplains, need to take the opportunity, and really the privilege, to open ourselves to the expansiveness of creation.

3 Baron, D. (2019, February 21). *What's in a name? for "ms.," a long history.* Ms. Magazine. <https://msmagazine.com/2010/08/27/whats-in-a-name-for-ms-a-long-history/>

name, like jj.⁴ The words, “I” and “you” are first person and second person singular, respectively. “He/she/they” are third person singular and usually occur when you are talking about someone to someone else, often when that person isn’t in the room. Learning new terminology can feel difficult, and each time a chaplain changes their context there are acronyms and new terms, like ICU in a hospital or the mess hall in the military. Learning language to better support the caregiving experience is really part of the chaplain role. Sometimes society acculturates incorrect terminology. *Preferred* pronoun implies that society’s assignment of my gender assigned female at birth (AFAB) overrules my human dignity and body autonomy rights to know my own experience of gender as a trans person. The expansiveness and variety of gender means that the binary, male and female, is cultural preference for some and that gender is more of a spectrum than our socially standardized two restroom options.

Learning language to better support the caregiving experience is really part of the chaplain role.

Just because gender is a cultural preference doesn’t mean that it is static and permanent for all people.⁵ In the expansiveness of gender, there are people who might not connect with pronouns at all, or might have a different or multiple pronouns, such as “xie/they” or “any/all.” It is possible that on any given day their pronoun might change, which could be in relation to something they are feeling internally or expressing externally. To be person-centered with gender expansive people, affirm pronouns each time you meet, by sharing your own pronouns first, which indicates that it is safe to express pronoun changes. Alternatively, you can use the care receiver’s name, rank or title, instead of using pronouns at all, which can be a way of not assuming someone’s gender, and may be preferred for people who do not use pronouns as a means of identification at all. An example, “Chaplain jj wrote this article and the chaplain is non-binary.”

- *Lastly, is the chaplain using inclusive and/or expansive language?* For example, the Bible passage cited earlier, has Peter asking “If my brothers or sisters sin against me, how often should I forgive?”⁶ This immediately enforces a binary system of gender and relationship. A simple change from “brothers and sisters” to “siblings” helps me, a non-binary person, feel included in the narrative. I won’t go into a debate about translating Greek or if non-binary people were in the Bible. What I will point out is inclusive and/or expansive shifts in language help trans people see themselves within the authentic connection being established between

4 Caulfield, J. (2023, February 24). *Personal pronouns: Definition, list & examples*. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/nouns-and-pronouns/personal-pronouns/>

5 *Lutheran introduction to sexual orientation, gender identity, & gender expression*. ReconcilingWorks. (2022, March 16). <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/sogie/lgbtq/>

6 The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, Matthew 18:20-22, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018%3A20-22&version=NRSVUE>

care giver and receiver. These three questions will take practice to feel authentic in a chaplain conversation, and I encourage you to try to practice them on friends and colleagues prior to working with trans care receivers

It is at this point I have personally experienced the most spiritual and psychological harm as a transperson and chaplain care recipient. Some caregivers offer unsolicited advice, eg. “with a name like ‘jj’, I thought you were a man when you asked the nurse to meet with me, but you are clearly a woman. You might want to change your name to make that easier for people to know who you are in advance.” Or they ask boundary trespassing questions, such as “I think you meant to write your name with periods, J.J., my son’s name is J.J. for Joshua James, what does yours stand for by the way?”

Religious and healthcare providers, usually in perceived positions of power and privilege, have continuously misgendered me (using *she* pronoun in my presence or when I am out of the room to others, instead of *they*). When I correct them by saying, “My pronoun is they.” I get responsive looks of confusion and shock to disgust and horror. Then I am often told in a dismissive way that they are too old to learn a new pronoun like singular they because “*they*” is a plural pronoun. Small children, even by first grade, are fully comfortable knowing exactly what I mean when I point to a single human figure a little too far down the road to see clearly and say, “Who is that person there, and what do you think they want?” Or, “You met them at the park, do you remember their name?” Even after this explanation, if I still get push back to the difficulty of using this new terminology, I inform them that misgendering is sex and gender-based harassment, protected by federal law. The staunchest transphobic person will then tell me that they don’t have to use my personal pronouns or even my name because of freedom of religion.

In other situations, chaplains, perhaps motivated by those *chirping biases*, move into lurid curiosity or clunky questions⁷ about what it means to be trans or even proselytize how my “lifestyle” or even mere existence is against G-d or creation. Similarly, it is easy to hear and see words, also known as qualifiers, in the news and on hospital forms, like “lifestyle” and “preferred pronoun” and not understand how insulting or demeaning these terms can be received by marginalized people. Similarly, qualifiers, as a figure of speech, have historically been used to intentionally devalue or marginalize the queer community, especially with gender roles and norms, such as, “You fight *like a girl*, you’ll never be a real man” or “You dress *like a man*, but you will never be one.” It may be helpful to know, that when a trans person tells you

Religious and healthcare providers, usually in perceived positions of power and privilege, have continuously misgendered me (using *she* pronoun in my presence or when I am out of the room to others, instead of *they*).

7 Clunky questions. ReconcilingWorks. (2016, April 12). <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/sogie/clunkyquestions/>

that they are trans and what their pronouns are, they are telling you this to stay safe and not to invite follow up questions. This invitation should be received with a nod that you will respect them and not with an interrogation.

Researching and staying current on terms and concepts can be crucial to maintain and strengthen our trans-care competency as chaplains.⁸ This is where the work of uncovering our unconscious or implicit biases surfaces as we all intentionally refine and hone our craft. It is helpful to understand the various types of biases, like gender bias, and how they may appear as intentional or unintentional slights to marginalized communities. Working through our biases is not comfortable work. Being professional chaplains and caregivers means we take time to reflect and challenge the biases we carry. If we prepare ourselves for those *chirping biases* to show up with us when we stand at the threshold by being present with them, we can be ready to witness and appreciate all of the diverse and expansive ways that humanity and the divine show up in creation.⁹

Now, when we stand at the threshold of the hospital room, ER curtain, sliding glass ICU door, the bedroom or rehab facility door, their zoom room, the prison yard, jail cell, chapel space, police scene, war zone or our own offices to meet the person who has invited us to support them with our chaplain skills; *we show up fully conscious of our biases and more prepared for meaningful and safer caring connections with gender expansive people.*



Deacon jj Godwin uses they/them pronouns, and is an ordained, trans-clergy member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), currently under call as Director of Operations for the Sierra Pacific Synod. As an AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth) non-binary or genderqueer person, Deacon jj is currently walking in formation with the Deaconess Community of the ELCA. They and their family recently moved from Texas to California in late 2022, and now in California, Deacon jj has been able to receive improved access to gender affirming health care and legal name changes. In addition to completing their Master of Business Administration and Master of Divinity, they are professionally pursuing Board Certification in Chaplaincy while volunteering with the San Francisco Night Ministry to care for unhoused and community neighbors in the Trans District of the Tenderloin in San Francisco.

⁸ Terminology an ally's guide to - GLAAD. GLAAD.org. (n.d.). https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/allys-guide-to-terminology_1.pdf

⁹ Acton, C. (2022, March 4). Are you aware of your biases?. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/02/are-you-aware-of-your-biases>

Living a Radical Truth

Albie Nicol

WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER, I heard the cast recording of “Kinky Boots.” Soon after that I told my youth pastor that I thought God was a black drag queen in beautiful go-go boots. The musical is a story about answering your call and vocation with a little help from one’s friends, both the likely and unlikely. Lola, one of the main characters, was my first introduction to drag queens. Their grandeur, their boldness, their love is how I imagine God’s love for us: bold, grandeur, radical love, and embodiment. This was my early beginning as I dipped my toes into queer theology.

I’m twenty-four now and that vision hasn’t really changed much, especially not during my seminary studies and Clinical Pastoral Education. As I have grown into young adulthood Billy Porter, who played Lola in the Original Broadway Cast of “Kinky Boots,” has continued to be one of my role models. In an interview with *Out* magazine, he said, “I’m so grateful that I’ve lived long enough to see the day where my queerness, which I was told would be my liability by allies and haters alike, and was my liability for decades, now that queerness is my superpower.”¹ But for me, during most of the time in ministry, it has also become my best kept secret and the reason I am uniquely shaped for ministry.

I’m beyond blessed with church communities in the ELCA that support me fully as a transgender and queer candidate for Word and Sacrament in the ELCA. When I enter new contexts, however, I’m not always aware of the reception my loud and proud-ness could evoke. So, I live out the values expressed in my queer and trans community in those new contexts without explicitly outing myself to congregants and patients.

Recently, I read an article from the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* by the Reverend Dr. Mary Lowe “Reimagining Vocation: Queer, Lutheran, with Room for All.”² She helped me name these values. In my queer community *we value God’s ongoing creation, the baptismal and enlivening presence of the Holy Spirit, loving faithfulness to oneself, and foolish truth-telling.* These values, while only four of the seven she names in reimagining vocation queerly, are at the core of my pastoral care and practice, as well as my communal gathering with fellow LGBTQIA+ individuals. These values make my queerness, into my superhero-ness.

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1 Editors, Out.com. “Billy Porter Talks Importance of Representation & Big Return to Music.” *Out Magazine*, 2 Apr. 2023, www.out.com/out-exclusives/billy-porter-cover-party-interview#toggle-gdpr.

2 Lowe, Mary. “Reimagining Vocation: Queer, Lutheran, with Room for All.” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 27 July 2022, learn.elca.org/jle/reimagining-vocation-queer-lutheran-with-room-for-all/

As a transgender individual, my embracement of *God's ongoing creation* combines with my *loving faithfulness to myself*. God's ongoing creation manifests in physical ways as we grow into the human that God is forming alongside us. In the same way that Jacob became Israel after many years of walking the earth, so too does Madeline become Albie. Days transition through sunsets and into the night sky. With each new daybreak we are reminded that God is in transition with us throughout the seasons of our lives. In the LGBTQIA2S+ community³, we deal not only with gender transitions, but legislative transitions and safety transitions. When the abhorrent Pulse shooting happened in June of 2016, owners of gay bars and queer businesses had to decide whether it was safe to operate. Thoughts of installing shatterproof glass and security processes flowed through their minds. Currently, I actively have to watch legislation to make sure I can access life-sustaining healthcare related to my gender transition in Ohio.

Of course, it is not all doom and gloom, I delight in and find joy in the transitions of my queer life.

Of course, it is not all doom and gloom, I delight in and find joy in the transitions of my queer life: how my beard continues to grow, gender euphoria when I find a clergy shirt that fits just right instead of too tight or baggy, and having found family and friends to celebrate with all in different stages of our lives. In congregations and hospital settings this comfort and delight in the process of God helps me acclimate to the occasional trauma imploding in the emergency department, or self-regulate on my way to see a hospice patient seeking prayer for healing. My faith in the ever-changing path of my call helps me navigate tough situations as a ministry professional and opens me to new doors that may seem like dead ends to others. In listening to *the Spirit of God flowing through me*, I am being lovingly faithful to myself while also serving the person next to me.

The baptismal and enlivening presence of the Holy Spirit is uniquely and authentically embodied in the existence of queer and trans individuals. We are constantly being reborn into new relationship with our beloved community and into relationship with Christ. Given the stigma and political warfare against LGBTQIA2S+ individuals in the current climate, we know what it looks like to have to build from the bottom up just to be seen as human. Especially for trans individuals, we know what it means to have to be "born again." As part of my social transition, I legally changed my name. This was a metamorphosis. A shedding of protective tissue to reveal the sacred human within. My youth pastor at that time performed a reaffirmation of baptism to symbolize this rebirth: the enlivening of Albie Gilbert Nicol. I felt new to each person, and to myself. Relationships were more authentic and sought-out because I knew I could show up as my full self. These experiences of continual self-development, such as, legally changing my name, my sex, going

3 Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/allies, two spirit, plus any other

on hormone-replacement therapy, etc. have prepared me to catch the Holy Spirit in the act. Other examples include working alongside nurses and doctors preparing a patient for transfer, as well as resting quietly alongside the burnt-out pastor praying at the baptismal font. I can name these movements and walk alongside those present because I have been there too.

Foolish truth-telling is in the very nature of being both a pastor and a chaplain. It's a joy when I see it offered by patients and congregants first. Foolish truth-telling is the sharing of truths of authenticity and freedom while pushing back against the norm. It takes bravery to share deep truths. In the queer community, we live these truths every day. Whether it is coming out to a loved one, trying on a new name we're enamored with, going into the bathroom in public, or coming out to our candidacy committee, we find the bravery to foolishly tell our own truths. When I stand up in front of an unfamiliar Reconciling in Christ congregation and share my identities of transgender and queer, I am foolishly truth-telling. They may have never met a trans person, or seen one in the pulpit. When a patient is sitting across from me sharing a dicey decision they made, a past trauma that has haunted them, or the secret they have held onto for years, they are foolishly truth-telling. When I level with them and disclose a truth that I hold dear, e.g., that we are humans meant to be vulnerable creatures, I get to see the relief wash over their face in kinship. Foolish truth-telling brings forth the kingdom of God through vulnerability to each other.

Foolish truth-telling is the sharing of truths of authenticity and freedom while pushing back against the norm. It takes bravery to share deep truths.

These queerly-centered values are not necessarily something I think about critically, and equip myself with before walking out the door each morning. As someone who has been some form of "out" for almost a decade, these values are ingrained in my everyday life. It's similar to muscle memory. I have walked alongside many friends, found family members and colleagues who have come out, have lived longer than I in the community, and/or are just beginning to think they may not be straight or cis. We have lived in community, whether physical or virtual, for so long that we have learned we cannot harden our hearts when our values call us so clearly towards vulnerability and wonder. These values are ingrained in my heart and come naturally to my behaviors and lived experiences, yet it is only after reading the Reverend Dr. Lowe's article and reflecting on it, that I can name them.

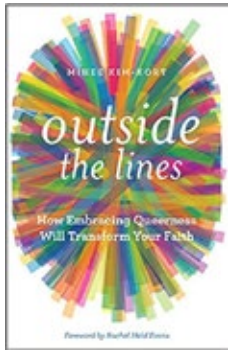
In the same way that Billy Porter reflects on how our queerness has been our liability in the past, I reshape that to inform my own understanding of LGBTQIA2s+ history. We were never a liability. It's just harder to recognize a superhero without a cape. From the Cooper Do-Nut Riots in 1959⁴ all the way to today, with anti-trans

⁴ According to Wikipedia, the Cooper Do-nuts Riot was a small uprising in response to police harassment of LGBT people at the 24-hour Cooper Do-nuts cafe in Los Angeles in May 1959. This occurred 10 years prior to the better-known Stonewall riots in New York City and is viewed by some historians as the first modern LGBT uprising in the United States.

legislation littered across the United States, we have refused to be liabilities. Our capes get erased in history. Our humanity gets lost. My identities in the LGBTQIA2S+ community and the values we share make me a better seminarian, student, and chaplain. I have faith in my superpower, second only to the faith in my beloved-ness as a Child of God. But they work in tandem, to make me a better pastor to come.



Albie Nicol (he/they) is a rising third year student at Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University in Columbus, OH. He is a candidate for Word and Sacrament in the ELCA and lives with his two cats, Simon the Zealot and Lazarus the Living. When he's not working at the seminary library or as a chaplain at Doctors Hospital, he likes to hammock, collage, and catch up with friends over coffee. He is passionate about his work-in-progress podcast, and his 3rd year of classes.



THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE STRANGE
*Outside the Lines: How Embracing
Queerness Will Transform Your Faith*

Kim-Kort, Mihee. Fortress, 2018

Reviewed by Morgan Simmons

THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE, I WILL BE USING THE WORD "QUEER" A LOT. This word has been understood to be used as a slur for a very long time and the emotional association with this word will not be erased easily. This is a disclaimer to not promote an agenda on others' views on queerness as we see in sexualities and gender identities. Yet, I do implore you to challenge yourself regarding your connection to this word and how it has impacted your worldview and your understanding of how you witness queerness in the world. And with that...Let's get started.

In her book, *Outside the Lines: Embracing How Queerness Can Transform Your Faith*, Pastor Mihee Kim-Kort, a Presbyterian minister who is currently leading a congregation in Annapolis, Maryland, seeks to unravel the concept of queerness. She begins the book by breaking down the word queer in general, reminding the reader that the definition of Queer is, "Strange, odd." That is the dictionary definition for queer. Out of the ordinary. This got me thinking about the actual profession of chaplaincy or anyone whose career or livelihood is out of a ministry or spiritual context. Chaplaincy as a profession and a skill is a counter-cultural endeavor. Many hospitals or medical systems do not find chaplains necessary because they don't bring monetary gain. Some communities have been calling on chaplains to attend protests or memorials. Others are understanding that chaplains walk a fine line of being ready to approach or to step back, depending on the needs of the people being served.

How many times have people asked you about your profession and you have crafted an answer that tries to not belittle your passion to care for others, while also not making it a lengthy explanation, or going into your call story?

Not a lot of people understand chaplains. They do not understand what we do, how we do it, why we do it and why it is important. Many people do not understand chaplains unless they themselves have received the care of one. We are just starting to get a grasp on what mental health is and the need to break the stigma of how that plays out in people's lives, let alone spiritual health because, let's face it, we are in a big world with big feelings! And people have many different understandings of the Divine; or to some the lack

The definition of Queer is, "Strange, odd." ... This got me thinking about the actual profession of chaplaincy or anyone whose career or livelihood is out of a ministry or spiritual context.

there of, and how that is connected to physical health or someone's stay in a hospital, transitional care, protest, etc.

When I did my unit of Clinical Pastoral Education in the Summer of 2022 (Yes, I am still new to this chaplaincy "business"), I would explain my summer position and many people gave me head tilts, indicating their curiosity and confusion. And I got a lot of, "Well that sounds really tough." or a few, "Well, that is an odd thing I have never thought about." Then explaining some experiences to friends who also were in a similar position of summer internship of CPE, there were definitely some, "That IS strange."

This profession, this career, a call from the Divine is queer. It is strange. It is odd. It is not something where capitalism can thrive. Getting to know a person, their lives and their passions, their fears and doubts and dreams, in a sense is queer. Again, I challenge us to press into this word. Understand I am not necessarily talking about LGBTQIA2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two Spirits and more). I am talking about serving outside the box, on the margins.

I had the privilege and honor to meet Mihee Kim-Kort when she preached at the Festival of Homiletics in mid-May in Minneapolis. I asked her how chaplains from all walks of life can be challenged by the idea of queerness. Her response to this question was the following, "I would love if chaplains would dive into the spirituality of queerness. That there are different types and forms of care. Exploring and respecting boundaries and to have more conversations about consent."

There is one point she lifted up that I would like to dig into with you.

The Spirituality of queerness. Let's repeat that and say it out loud in whatever space you find this in. It might feel silly but just try it out: "The Spirituality of Queerness." Ponder that phrase and think about it. Going back to the beginning of the book and the beginning of the exploration of why you should wander into a library and read this book is the definition of queerness. The Spirituality of Oddness. The Spirituality of the Strange. The Spirituality of the Unfamiliar. The Spirituality of the "Out of the Normal." Now that sounds like something that I, as a Lutheran, have been called to do. I have been called to engage in a spirituality that does not fit into a particular mold; a spirituality that does not fit into a specific creed or motto of sorts. But, getting into the fibers of the human being and all the strangeness and oddities and queerness of their stories, is my calling. I feel reading "Outside the Lines" will give a background and a support on how to do this with creativity, care and dedication for the beloved person in need of a form of care that others have deemed odd.

The other aspects of Kim-Kort's request for chaplains — boundaries, consent and humanity — are themes that chaplains are navigating daily. Families, patients,

This profession, this career, a call from the Divine is queer. It is strange. It is odd.

medical and hospital staff may approach chaplains with strange questions and wonderments on what you do. We all are a little strange and different for engaging in this work. Wherever the Divine, Jesus, takes you in your ministry, the oddness of this work could be what drives you to take care of those suffering and experiencing the lows and highs of life. May the strangeness, the oddness, the out-of-the-normal, the queerness be what you delve into.

In her introduction, Kim-Kort states, “Queerness matters because we need to see all the ways that we ourselves are loved by God and loved in so many ways. And then we see and feel this in the myriad ways people love each other, which deepens and widens the very love of God in the world.” I hope you may approach this book with grace and excitement, embracing the God who desires us fully.



Morgan Simmons is a Master of Divinity student at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota. She currently serves as a Minister of Faith Formation at University Lutheran Church of Hope in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Originally from Maryland, Morgan has a background in food insecurity, homelessness prevention and children and youth ministry. Morgan lives with her husband Seth and her two dogs; Evie and Toby, her foster dog, Naya and her cat Rocket. Morgan likes to hike, go camping,

cook, read and write.

Get curious, want to learn more?

If you think you would like to explore this topic in more depth, here are some resources for chaplains and pastors to engage in order to become more informed when engaging those in our care who are LGBTQIA2S+ or particularly trans.

“Healthcare Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care for Trans People: Envisaging the Future”
Cornwall, SM. *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* - 26 April 2019. Equinox Publishing

Abstract of this article:

Spiritual care has the potential to mitigate against “gaps” left when waiting lists (and times) for the National Health Service in UK (NHS) gender identity clinics (GICs) spiral, and trans people awaiting medical interventions are at increased risk of suicide and self-harm. Healthcare chaplaincy has an explicit role to play, particularly for the sizeable number of trans people with religious faith or who struggle with finding support from faith communities. Spiritual care should be integrated within direct care provided by healthcare professionals, with additional care from specialist chaplains where desirable. Findings from the Modelling Transgender Spiritual Care project point to a need for additional training and resourcing in gender identity care for spiritual carers; a new prioritization of healthcare chaplaincy for gender identity services, which has implications for budgets and commissioning; and increased accountability for fulfilling the statutory requirement for spiritual care in the NHS. [\(PDF\) Healthcare Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care for Trans People: Envisaging the Future | Susannah Cornwall - Academia.edu](#)

Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians
by **Austen Hartke** (2nd ed. March 2023)

Amazon describes this resource in the following way. In 2014, *Time* magazine announced that America had reached “the transgender tipping point,” suggesting that transgender issues would become the next civil rights frontier. Years later, many people—even many LGBTQIA+ allies—still lack understanding of gender identity and the transgender experience. Into this void, trans biblical scholar Austen Hartke brings a biblically based, educational, and affirming resource to shed light and wisdom on gender expansiveness and Christian theology. This new edition offers

updated terminology and statistics, plus new materials for congregational study, preaching, and pastoral care.

Transforming deftly weaves ancient and modern stories that will change the way readers think about gender, the Bible, and the faith to which Jesus calls us. Hartke helps readers visualize a more inclusive Christianity, equipping them with the language, understanding, confidence, and tools to change both the church and the world.

The LCMS position as provided by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) is stated in the document “Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective” and can be located by way of your search engine. This is dated 2014.

Portico Benefit Services is sponsoring a podcast entitled “**Being Here.**” The June offering focused on Gender Identity and the Church. They introduce the 30 minutes program as follows:

There are some subjects that we have a hard time talking about at church—gender and gender identity are two on that list. In our latest episode of Being Here, Pastor Melissa speaks with [Austen](#) Hartke, founder and executive director of Transmission Ministry Collective, an online community dedicated to connecting and empowering gender-expansive Christians. Austen shares his experience as a transgender person of faith as they discuss the challenges and joys of creating safe and inclusive faith communities. This episode offers both hope and practical ways to support gender-expansive Christians.

You may access this resource through the following link: [Gender Identity and the Church](#)

*A Roller Coaster Through a Hurricane One Wild Ride:
My Journey with Gender Identity*

Eilers, Greg. first published by Greg Eilers ©2019. Available on Amazon.

Greg Eilers was at the center of privilege: a respected minister in a conservative church (LCMS), a middle-class male in a rural community, a family man with a wife and kids. But he harbored a deep secret—a lifetime of questioning his gender identity. In 2013, the questioning had morphed into crushing gender dysphoria, and Eilers found himself in a battle to save his life and sanity. He also found himself in a conundrum: gender identity issues don’t fit with a traditional life and conservative

values. How could a man who followed all the rules, and made the church his life's work, be transgender?

In 2015, Eilers transitioned to female to resolve the internal struggle. The road to inner peace, though, was rife with sacrifices. Transitioning took him from the job he loved, put his relationships to the test, and cast him to the margins of society. Scorn replaced privilege. Then, 2018 brought a development just as confounding as 2013's struggle, and Eilers faced yet another transition. Through it all Eilers held firm to his faith, and found room in the Gospel for an outcast such as himself. He resolved to speak out—to share his story so others would know they're not alone, and to speak up—to educate the public about transgender and bring dignity to a highly misunderstood group of people. *A Roller Coaster Through a Hurricane* is a memoir, a unique transgender experience, and an inspiration to the Christian church to lovingly minister to transgender persons.



In Memory of Paul Steinke

Prepared by Chuck Weinrich

ACPE Retired Certified Educator **Rev. Paul David Steinke** died on March 7, 2023, with his wife Ann at his side. Paul was ordained in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1961. He worked for more than 50 years as a Certified Educator in the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education [ACPE]. Paul trained in CPE at Norwich State Hospital in Connecticut with Rev. Clarence Brunniga, as well as at the Philadelphia State Hospital. Before he retired in 2016, Paul was the Director of Chaplaincy and Clinical Pastoral Education at both NYC Health and Hospital/Bellevue Center, and NYU-Langone Medical Center. He was also a certified Marriage and Family therapist in Virginia, where he taught and counseled at Mental Health Services of the Roanoke Valley.

Paul's creative educational style influenced thousands of students in their pastoral formation and development. He was also a compassionate pastor and chaplain, as was attested in a letter from a fellow supervisor in the Eastern Region of ACPE. At the ACPE Conference in Breckenridge, CO in 1991, that supervisor suffered "the worst migraine headache I've ever experienced." He contacted the Conference office for help and shortly thereafter Paul Steinke knocked at his door and introduced himself as the "chaplain for the Eastern Region" ... "Paul came into my darkened room and in a gentle, sensitive, strong manner entered almost immediately into my world of overwhelming pain and irrational but real terror. He touched my shoulder. He rubbed my foot. He spoke words of understanding about the stress of changes with which I had been struggling... He told me that as I had often been a pastor to others, so now he had come to be my pastor! As he talked and I cried and we waited in silence, a strange, wondrous thing happened. I could feel the nauseous pain in my stomach begin to leave... By the time I arrived at the doctor's office I was already feeling better... I know that the healing I was experiencing that morning began in my soul through the ministry of my 'chaplain.' I shall always be grateful to Paul Steinke... for the pastoral care that was given to me in a time of great personal need."¹

Paul and Ann had three children and five grandchildren. Paul was the older brother of Peter Steinke, who also graduated from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis in 1964. Peter was a recipient of the *Christus in Mundo* award at the ZION Conference in 2001.

¹ A letter from W. Joel Warner, Jr., Overlook Hospital, Summit, NJ

Recent Henry F. Wind Award Recipients

A highlight of the LCMS Specialized Pastoral Ministry (SPM) conference this March was the presentation of the 2023 Henry Wind awards. The award was created in 2018 as a way to recognize SPM workers for outstanding leadership in advocating for and promoting (SPM) and is named after the Rev. Dr. Henry F. Wind (1891–1966), who was the first executive secretary of the LCMS Department of Social Welfare, which operated from 1953 until 1967.

There were three recipients of this year's award:

- **The Rev. David Ficken**, a third-career pastor who previously served as a field representative for GE Aircraft Engines and as a financial representative for Thrivent Financial. Ficken is pastor of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Plover, Wis., and serves as a volunteer police and fire chaplain in Portage County, Wis.
- **The Rev. Derek Wolter**, who has served as an institutional chaplain for 27 years, including in the Air National Guard, as a health care chaplain, and in long-term and memory care. Wolter is director of spiritual care at Lutheran Home and Harwood Place in Wauwatosa, Wis.
- **Donald Sundene**, executive director of Lutheran Ministry Services Northwest, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization that provides pastoral and spiritual care in Seattle-area hospitals, nursing homes and jails/prisons.



The Henry Wind award recognizes those who serve in specialized settings. The 2023 Henry Wind recipients are, from left, the Rev. David Ficken, Donald Sundene and the Rev. Derek Wolter. (LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford)

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