

# 76/19 Gender Identity – Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

## Key Points

- After considering the amendments proposed at Synod in 2019 and since, a slightly amended form of the Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes, and a separate list of Suggested Responses to Practical Questions is recommended.
- Responsibility for the content of Practical Guidelines and Suggested Responses should rest with the Archbishop. He has arranged for their distribution to parish ministry staff and parish councils through the Regional Bishops.

## Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to address the request of the Synod in relation to the form and content of Gender Identity – Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes.

## Recommendations

2. Synod receive this report.
3. Synod, noting the report *76/19 Gender Identity – Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes*, note that in response to resolution 76/19 Archbishop Glenn Davies, acting through the Regional Bishops, has distributed the Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes and the Suggested Responses to Practical Questions attached to that report to all parishes.

## Background

4. In October 2019 the Synod passed 3 resolutions in relation to Gender Identity –
  - “**73/19 Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity**  
Synod, noting the report, ‘Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity’ –
    - (a) affirms and adopts the Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity in Annexure A of the report (‘Doctrine Statement’) as the principal statement of the doctrines, tenets, beliefs and teachings propagated by the Anglican Church, Diocese of Sydney with respect to gender identity, subject to amending –
      - (i) clause 5 to omit the word, ‘favouritism’, and insert instead the words, ‘privileged status’, and
      - (ii) clause 6, following the word ‘wholeness’, to insert the matter, ‘and sharing with them the good news of the Saviour through whom he will make all things new (Revelation 21:5)’;
    - (b) recommends that the relevant governing body of each diocesan school and of each diocesan organisation which exercises pastoral care for, or otherwise engages with, people who struggle with gender identity issues –
      - (i) affirm the Doctrine Statement as the principal statement of the doctrines, tenets, beliefs and teachings with respect to gender identity, and
      - (ii) develop and implement a publicly accessible policy on Gender Identity which is consistent with the Doctrine Statement; and

- (c) requests the Archbishop-in-Council to consult with and consider providing further advice to organisations concerning the implementation of the recommendations referred to in paragraph (b).”

**“74/19 Gender Identity – Pastoral Guidelines for Churches, Schools and Organisations**

That the ‘Pastoral Guidelines for Churches, Schools and Organisations’ pass as a policy of the Synod for the parishes, schools and organisations of the Diocese.”

**“76/19 Gender Identity – Practical Guidelines for Parish Councils**

Synod –

- (a) defers consideration of the matter at B9A (Gender Identity – Practical Guidelines for Parish Councils),
- (b) requests Parish Councils to provide feedback on the proposed policy to the Diocesan Secretary by Friday 6 March 2020, and
- (c) requests the Standing Committee to bring the proposed policy, with any recommended changes, to the 1st ordinary session of the 52nd Synod.”

5. At its meeting on 18 November 2019 the Standing Committee noted the terms of Synod resolutions 73/19 and 76/19 and resolved to refer the request of paragraph (c) of each resolution to the Gender Identity Committee, and ask the committee –
  - (a) to coordinate under the direction of the Archbishop, advice for organisations concerning the implementation of the recommendations of paragraph (b) of resolution 73/19, and
  - (b) to provide a report with a proposed policy for Parish Councils, to a future meeting of the Standing Committee by July 2020, for promotion to the next ordinary session of the Synod.
6. The members of the Gender Identity Committee are the Rev Dr Andrew Ford, Bishop Peter Hayward (Chair), Dr Chase Kuhn, Mr Michael Meek, Dr David Nockles and Dr Claire Smith.
7. In response to the request in paragraph (a) of the Standing Committee’s request the Committee was involved in the preparation of 2 documents containing advice to Anglican Schools and Anglican Organisations regarding matters concerning Gender Identity. At its meeting on 15 February 2021 the Standing Committee –
  - (a) received the advice from the Archbishop to Anglican Schools in the Diocese,
  - (b) received the draft advice from the Archbishop-in-Council to Organisations of the Diocese, and
  - (c) noted that a copy of each document has been sent to the relevant schools or organisations of the Diocese for comment.

Standing Committee then also noted that the Archbishop invited comments or suggested amendments to each document, so that a suitable form of each Advice can be promoted as being endorsed by the Archbishop-in-Council, in accordance with Synod resolution 73/19, at the March 2021 meeting of Standing Committee.

## **Content of the Practical Guidelines**

8. In relation to the proposed policy for Parish Councils, in 2019 a number of Synod members had given notice of their intention to move amendments to the text of the draft of the Practical Guidelines for Parish Councils prior to the Synod passing resolution 76/19.
9. While no formal comments were received from parish councils in response to the request in part (b) of resolution 76/19, one comment was received from a member of Synod.
10. Each of the suggested amendments were considered, a number of which were incorporated into the attached revised form of the Practical Guidelines. The heading on the document has been changed to “Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes” to reflect the fact that they are primarily addressed to those in the parish with responsibility for pastoral leadership.
11. In addition to presenting the Practical Guidelines in this revised form, it would be helpful to also provide examples of the suggested responses to some of the frequently asked questions that church leaders face. While not attempting to be comprehensive, the attached list of Suggested Responses to Practical

Questions aims to uphold the doctrine and guidelines of the Diocese, while demonstrating appropriate loving care and concern for those who are struggling.

## Responsibility for the Practical Guidelines

12. Given the nature of the Practical Guidelines, the process envisaged in Synod resolution 76/19 – that the Standing Committee recommend a revised form of the proposed Practical Guidelines for adoption by the 1st ordinary session of the 52nd Synod – was not ideal.
13. It was considered preferable for the Archbishop, acting through the relevant Regional Bishop, to send the Practical Guidelines and the Suggested Responses to Practical Questions to all parish clergy and licensed lay pastoral staff, with a copy to each Parish Council for their information.
14. Under this process, the Synod would remain responsible for the Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity and the Gender Identity – Pastoral Guidelines for Churches, Schools and Organisations, both of which were adopted at the 2019 Synod. However, just as the Archbishop's Advice to Anglican Schools and the Advice of the Archbishop-in-Council to Anglican Organisations are not the responsibility of Synod, the Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes are best categorised as a pastoral matter for which the Archbishop bears ultimate responsibility.
15. This approach was adopted for a number of reasons –
  - (a) guidance in pastoral matters should come from the Archbishop and the Regional Bishops, and the responsibility for implementing the Practical Guidelines will fall primarily on the ministry staff (ordained and lay) of the parish,
  - (b) the Synod as a body is not well qualified, trained or equipped to decide the practical details of such matters, and may not be able to respond in a timely manner when circumstances change or new situations arise, and
  - (c) it may not be helpful for individuals struggling with gender incongruence or gender dysphoria if the Practical Guidelines were a publically accessible document, as would generally be the case if they were adopted by Synod.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

DANIEL GLYNN  
**Diocesan Secretary**

6 April 2021

## Gender Identity – Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes

(To be read in conjunction with the Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity and the Pastoral Guidelines for Churches, Schools and Organisations.)

### 1. Christians struggling with Gender Incongruence or Dysphoria

- 1.1. Christian congregations should be safe places for all who are struggling with life and need to hear the message of hope. We must seek to demonstrate the compassion of Christ towards those who are hurting and vulnerable.
- 1.2. Some issues for discipleship, such as the experience of gender incongruence or dysphoria, are more public than others, and therefore require different sorts of attention, acknowledgement and care.
- 1.3. The person should be encouraged to speak to a member of the ministry staff whom they trust. While church friends and family can continue to love and support the person, the church itself may be able to offer additional practical resources as well as providing pastoral care and reassurance.
- 1.4. Confidentiality is crucial among church members that may know about the person's concerns as well as among staff. However, where appropriate the Rector may advise the Regional Bishop of the situation, so that staff might be offered any assistance they require, such as professional supervision.
- 1.5. Be aware that the experience of living with gender incongruence or dysphoria should not in and of itself be categorized as sin or unrepentant sin.
- 1.6. Church staff should love and care for the person, offer pastoral support, and make available information (reports, research etc.), in addition to biblical teaching in line with the Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity.
- 1.7. Assistance in accessing appropriate professional counselling should be made available.

### 2. Christians considering or already Transitioning<sup>1</sup>

- 2.1. Beyond applying the points in 1 above, the relevant member of staff should:
  - 2.1.1. attempt to discern whether transitioning is a desire that is being explored or the decision has already been made, and
  - 2.1.2. In the context of continuing pastoral and practical care, explain the goodness of God's creation and his intention for human beings. Carefully indicate that our sex is something given to us by our Creator and that gender transitioning involves repudiating God's gift and seeking to determine our own identity apart from him.
- 2.2. Nevertheless, if a person continues to pursue social or medical transitioning, ministry staff are to continue to provide for the person's spiritual needs. This includes telling and showing the person that they are loved and welcome at church, despite their decision being inconsistent with faithful Christian living. As with all pastoral correction and discipline, this will include a call to repentance and faith issued with patience and sensitivity, taking special account of the vulnerability of the person concerned.

### 3. Christians who have already Transitioned

- 3.1. Christian brothers and sisters in the person's church, as well as the staff, are to uphold the foundational truths expressed in the Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity.
- 3.2. Ministry staff and congregations need to recognise that transitioning often happens in stages, involving continuing distress, and medical intervention may be irreversible. Any discussion about the appropriateness of transitioning should only be given in the context of care and compassion and ideally in a relationship which has established trust.

- 3.3. An encouragement to be content with our biological sex as a gift of God may raise for the person questions about de-transitioning. Such conversations should be given in the context of care and compassion and ideally in a relationship which has established trust in which care for the person's spiritual, physical, emotional and social wellbeing is paramount.

#### 4. Unbelievers struggling with Gender Dysphoria or Transitioning

- 4.1. Our first concern should be to encourage all unbelievers, regardless of present struggles, to turn to Christ and accept him as their Lord and Saviour.
- 4.2. Bible teachers in the church are to be clear on the Bible's teaching on sex and gender, and are to explain this with love and sensitivity to non-Christians who may be struggling with their identity.
- 4.3. Assistance in accessing appropriate professional counselling should be made available.
- 4.4. All members of a church have the responsibility to show the love of Christ and care for all people struggling with this issue. This love should take both emotional and practical forms.

(It is recommended that Ministers and other church leaders refer also to the attached:

'Suggested Responses to Practical Questions')

## **Suggested Responses to Practical Questions:**

There are many aspects of pastoral care to consider as we seek to meet the needs of those experiencing gender incongruence or gender dysphoria, their loved ones, and their congregations. The “Doctrine Statement on Gender Identity,” the “Pastoral Guidelines for Churches, Schools and Organisations,” and the “Gender Identity—Practical Guidelines for Ministers and Parishes” all seek to articulate the biblical contours of such care.

We recommend that you discuss with those affected how best to care for them, as each pastoral situation is different and will require careful thought and specific responses. However, there are common practical questions that often arise.

We offer these preliminary responses to assist churches. These recommendations are not intended to be comprehensive. Each response aims to uphold the doctrine we wish to protect, while demonstrating appropriate loving care and concern. Sometimes very simple adaptations or considerations might avoid distress and communicate a great deal of care.

### ***Should we refer to someone by their birth name or their preferred name (even if this represents the gender they identify with)?***

It is appropriate to call someone by the name that they prefer. This does not necessarily express acceptance of their gender identification, but reflects what we do in all of life, where we call people by the name by which they prefer to be known.

### ***Should we refer to someone by their biological pronouns or their preferred pronouns?***

We commend a third alternative, which is to avoid using pronouns for the person suffering gender incongruence or dysphoria, and instead to call the person by their name. This is not only fairly easy to do but upholds the God-given nature of biological sex and avoids causing the person unnecessary distress.

### ***Should we use gendered terms to refer to someone with gender incongruence or dysphoria?***

If possible, and depending on the circumstances, it is often best to identify the person by other means than their gender. For example, instead of referring to the person as someone’s ‘son’ or ‘daughter’ you might identify them as their ‘child’. Alternatively, simply refer to them by name.

### ***What about toilets?***

The goal is for all members of the congregation, including children, to have access to toilets where they feel (and are) safe and which do not cause them distress. Accordingly, if your church is able to provide this, it is helpful to offer at least one non-sex-specific toilet. Often this is easily achieved by redesignating an accessible [OR a wheelchair accessible] toilet.

### ***How can we be more sensitive to those struggling in our corporate gatherings?***

There may be many ways in which our meetings can be more welcoming to those experiencing gender issues. One simple example is that when addressing your congregation, you might sometimes use more inclusive language that is less likely to cause distress. So, instead of always greeting your congregation as “ladies and gentlemen” or “brothers and sisters” you might instead say, “good morning to you all” or “good morning, friends.”

### ***What do we do about sex specific events or groups (e.g., “Men’s Dinner” or “Women’s Bible Study”)?***

Events aimed at ministering to a specific sex should not be abandoned or discouraged. We should continue to celebrate the fact that God makes us male and female, and that there are appropriate and wonderful differences between the sexes. These differences, at times, may call for specific ministry according to sex. However, communication about these ministries should be carried forward with sensitivity and care for those struggling with their gender identity, especially with attention to timing and tone. Furthermore, there may need to be special consideration of how the church will provide alternative ministry structures that are more accommodating to someone struggling with gender incongruence or dysphoria. For example, in addition to single sex Bible study groups, it would be helpful to provide mixed-sex alternatives.