

## Pastoral Care for Trans and Gender Nonconforming Youth

It is a sad reality that the LGBTQIA communities and communities of faith have not stepped up to support the needs of trans and gender-nonconforming (gnc) youth, in large part because these youth are judged to be “confused” about their identities and are therefore left to “figure it out”. As a result, youth are left without adult role-models and allies when they are most vulnerable to homelessness, sex trafficking, addiction and violence. I posit that there are 2 primary causes for this lack of commitment; transphobia (both internal and external), and unexamined trauma from the adults’ own religious wounding. If these communities do not want to instill a legacy of historical trauma on this next generation of queer youth, it is incumbent on these communities to examine their own resistances and wounding, so they can better mentor and support our future leaders.

What appears to be most difficult for both faith and queer communities seems to be how the current generation of youth are not limited by a binary worldview of either their gender or their sexuality. Cody J. Sanders notes, “Importantly, this living between or beyond the male/female binary doesn’t imply any ‘confusion’...Parents, and other adults in the church alike, often speak about youth as ‘experimenting’ or ‘figuring things out’ as if to say they will test it and then presumably come back to what they consider culturally normative.”<sup>1</sup> As in the scenario we roll-played about the two dads, the adults are anxious for a resolution and definition, when that is not a need shared gender fluid or gender nonconforming youth.

Justin Tanis explains, “Christian Burgess writes... ‘Because of the internalization of negative attitudes toward gender non-conformity, transgender youth are at an increased risk for low self-esteem, which may manifest itself through depression, substance abuse, self-mutilation and/or suicide.’ ...In addition to being vulnerable to higher rates of suicide, transgendered youth face higher rates of homelessness and institutionalization as a result of being thrown out of their parents’ homes; violence and harassment in school that make completing an education very difficult; difficulty in obtaining employment (other than on the streets) because of gender nonconformity, victimization and trauma; and high rates of drug and alcohol use.”<sup>2</sup>

Sanders admonishes, “Teens or young adults shouldn’t be made to feel as if they are just ‘experimenting’ and will one day not be a test subject. This quest for self-discovery should be thought of as normal and lifelong, ever changing, always fluid.... Not only should gender queer identifications not be an indicator of ‘confusion’ on the part of the teenager identifying as genderqueer, we should also not view this gender identity as a ‘transitional’ identity on the way to ‘fully’ identifying as transgender...”<sup>3</sup> This same assumption about experimentation, confusion or “a phase” is similar to the experience shared by bisexual people. In Michael Mann’s article from *Pastoral Psychology*, he cites “The Jorm et al (2002) study also indicated that bisexuals had significantly higher rates of suicidal

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<sup>1</sup> Cody J. Sanders, *A Brief Guide to Ministry with LGBTQIA Youth* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY), pg 18

<sup>2</sup> Justin Tanis, *Transgendered: Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith*, (Pilgrim Press, 2003), pg 34-35

<sup>3</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 19

ideation and childhood adversity than both the hetero and homosexual groups.”<sup>4</sup> Like bisexuals, trans and gender nonconforming youth are berated by both the straight and the queer adults to “choose” and thus buy into the dominant binary culture. As I shared in class, (and in reflections about my gender fluid child), we must be wary lest our intent to understand the needs of youth have an impact which negates their reality.

As we learned in the Meyer’s analysis (featured in the Michael Mann article), “Many social theorists have cited alienation from social norms and institutions (anomie) as a factor in suicide, because anomie prevents basic needs from being met. Therefore, disharmony with the dominant culture in society is a primary source of minority stress.”<sup>5</sup> While trans youth (like trans adults) experience all four of Meyer’s 4 types of threats from minority stress, they especially experience two of the types. First, they experience distinctiveness threat, which is “the denial of membership within a group when it is significant to the individual to be a member of that group (such as the rejection of religious affiliation due to minority status).” And, they also experience threat to acceptance, which “is the perception that an individual is rejected by his or her own minority group,” in this case the adult LGBTQ community.<sup>6</sup> Mann goes on to state, “Meyer says the expectation of threat from distal stressors often leads to vigilance... This is similar to the hyper-vigilant reaction individuals suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may experience.... When vigilance to threat becomes chronic and prolonged, a dis-identification reaction occurs, whereby the individual removes the negatively stigmatized domain(s) from his or her self-concept, such as spirituality or intellect.” What we know anecdotally from both youth and from youth providers, is that this trauma and vigilance is what often keeps youth from availing themselves of services. They feel rejected by family and faith communities in the first place, and then by the adult queer community, when they don’t fit neatly into the “distinct” categories of LGBT. Add to this, the fact that adult members of the LGBTQ community have themselves experienced similar threats, resulting in internalized homophobia, external transphobia and trauma from religious wounding. I have observed (and had affirmed by other queer clergy) that there is an even greater disassociation among the adult queer community leaders, with a level of suspicion and unaddressed wounding from their own religious past, which seems to interfere with the ability to partner even with queer clergy (let alone allied faith communities) on issues such as the welfare of queer youth experiencing homelessness.

Mollenkott and Sheridan highlighted a study by Ballou and Gabalac which “outlined a five-stage process for this destructively adaptive thought and behavior method of social control: humiliation..., inculcation..., conversion..., and conscription.... Gender-variant people are humiliated and reduced because of what we are; we quickly learn the rules for acceptable dress and behavior; when we don’t conform to those rules we are punished; many of us are eventually converted into believing the

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<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Mann “The Nexus of Stigma and Social Policy: Implications for Pastoral Care and Psychotherapy with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Persons and Their Families” *Pastoral Psychology* (2013) 62:199-210, (pg 205)

<sup>5</sup> Mann “The Nexus of Stigma,” pg 201

<sup>6</sup> Mann, “The Nexus of Stigma,” pg 202-203

culture's lies about the "inherent dichotomous nature" of gender; and many go on to actively promote that insidious binary gender paradigm to others."<sup>7</sup>

The National Center for Transgender Equality, notes that things are no better at school than at home, citing, "A national survey by GLSEN has found that 75% of transgender youth feel unsafe at school, and those who are able to persevere had significantly lower GPAs, were more likely to miss school out of concern for their safety, and were less likely to plan on continuing their education."<sup>8</sup> And a study on school victimization shows, "Another recent study found that nearly two thirds of gender-nonconforming youth report verbal harassment and nearly one third report physical harassment at school (Kosciw et al., 2008)... Sausa (2005) found that 96% of transgender participants experienced physical harassment and 83% experienced verbal harassment at school... In fact, D'Augelli et al (2006) found that male youth who were gender nonconforming were more likely to receive negative responses from parents than were gender nonconforming female youth."<sup>9</sup> As with the story I shared about the vandalization of and death threats in the gender neutral bathroom, (and subsequent lack of support by the schools lesbian and gay administrators), even the supposedly safest and "queer friendly" of schools are not truly safe for trans and gnc youth.

When youth cannot conform, they experience mental, physical and spiritual violence, are forced out of their homes, and in the worst cases, commit suicide. Sanders, in quoting a study on the effects of family rejection noted, "LGBT young adults who reported high levels of family rejection when they were adolescents were '8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse."<sup>10</sup>

As studies by both the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National LGBTQ Task Force (in partnership with the True Colors Fund) note, 1 in 5 transgender and gender nonconforming people have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. In the case of trans and gnc youth, they were found to depart from home a full 2 years earlier than their cisgender peers<sup>11</sup>, and once homeless (as Cody Sanders tells us) "...the average time away from home, parents, and guardians for LGB homeless youth is twenty-nine months, **and for transgender youth it is fifty months.**"<sup>12</sup> (*emphasis mine*) And 62% of those trans and gnc youth experiencing homelessness are black, with another 20% who are hispanic.

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Vanessa Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys*, (Pilgrim Press, Cleveland OH), pg 154

<sup>8</sup> National Center for Transgender Equality, <https://transequality.org/issues/youth-students>

<sup>9</sup> Russell B. Toomey, Caitlin Ryan, Rafael M. Diaz, Noel A. Card and Stephen T. Russell, "Gender Nonconforming Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: School Victimization and Young Adult Psychosocial Adjustment", *Developmental Psychology*, 2010 Vol 46, pg 1582

<sup>10</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 69

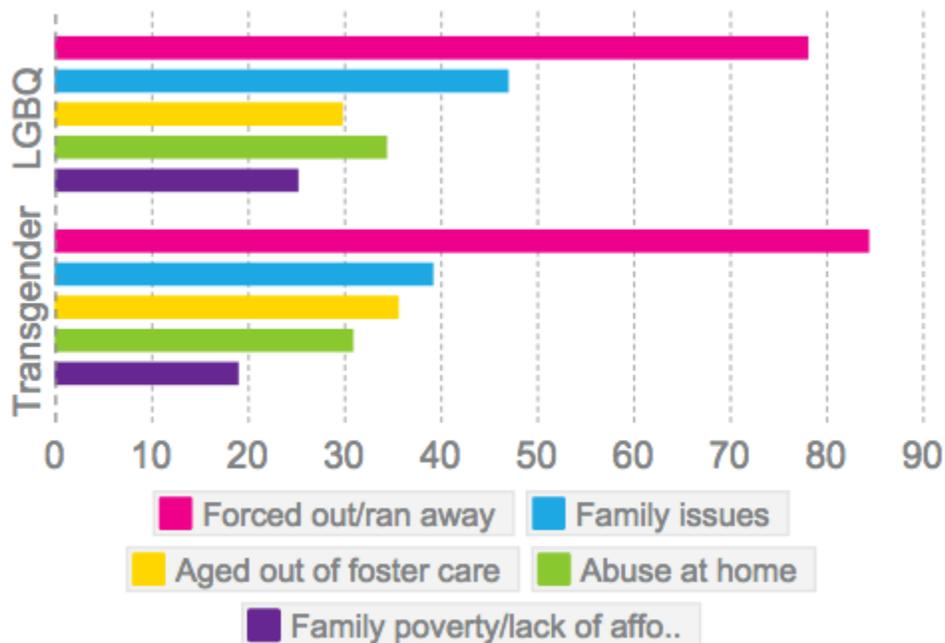
<sup>11</sup> Price et al, *At the Intersections: A collaborative report on LGBTQ youth homelessness*, National LGBTQ Task Force & True Colors Fund, April 26, 2016, <http://attheintersections.org/transgender-gender-expansive-youth/>

<sup>12</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 53

## Why Do LGBTQ Youth Experience Homelessness?

Family conflict is the most common cause of all youth homelessness. For LGBTQ youth in particular, the conflict tends to be over their sexual orientation or gender identity. Half of all teens get a negative reaction from their parents when they come out to them. More than 1 in 4 are thrown out of their homes.

While rejection is the most frequently cited reason LGBTQ youth experience homelessness, it's not the only one. According to service providers, additional reasons include aging out of the foster care system, poverty, and conflict in the home. Often, it's not one thing that causes homelessness, but a combination of many.<sup>13</sup>



So when the people who are supposed to love them reject them, the youth turn to adult people like themselves, in the sexual and gender diverse communities. Adult members of the queer community, having been vilified their whole lives by family, religions and institutions (which associate them with sin and pedophilia) may be hesitant to engage with youth for fear those old stereotypes will put them in an awkward situation; and so, they say and do nothing. But as Sanders states, "...your silence on matters of sexuality and gender identity may signal to youth that these are forbidden subjects to broach with you."<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, the heavy emphasis within the adult queer community on "coming out" presents several problems for these youth. As Sanders explains, "For others, like trans and intersex youth, the notion of 'coming out' may not be a useful metaphor at all, as the goal for many trans people is eventually to

<sup>13</sup> Price, *At the Intersections*, <http://attheintersections.org/transgender-gender-expansive-youth/>

<sup>14</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 10

express their gender identity without revealing that their gender identity may be different from the gender they were assigned at birth.... But this linear process does not always (perhaps does not often) fit the experience of youth whose emerging sense of self is less fixed and static and is instead, more fluid and dynamic.... Expecting LGBTQIA youth to simply ‘come out’ in one singular, dramatic moment potentially forecloses on all of the ways that they might benefit from exploring their emerging sense of self within community, if such a space is cultivated for doing this type of soulful exploration.”<sup>15</sup>

The places that were a source of community, and in some sense an extended family, are the faith communities which were their spiritual homes. But if the only expression of faith they have known also rejects them, is it any wonder these youth cannot trust that any other faith community will *not* reject them? As Brent so eloquently shared, in his story about Connie, “The source of spiritual care was the source of harm.” Jakob Hero points out, “Opponents claim that as transsexuals we change our nature from what God intended. The assumption that the birth body is perfectly formed ignores the reality that many people are born with conditions (birth defects) for which biotechnological intervention is necessary for survival or productive functioning.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Mollenkott and Sheridan state, “Transgender persons are repeatedly marginalized so that fundamentalists and other religious right-wingers might transfer their own fears onto the ‘other’ thereby bolstering a wounded sense of self-worth and reaffirming the ‘rightness’ of their religious ideology.”<sup>17</sup> Rev. Erin Swenson notes, “Perhaps the most common emotional companion to gender identity differences is shame. Attempts to deal with shame lead to many other problems.... Professionals, including clergy, have contributed to shame based avoidance through persistent ignorance and phobic reaction.”<sup>18</sup> And as Sanders similarly points out, “the National Transgender Discrimination Survey reveals 41 percent of respondents (from a sample size of 6,450 people) reported a suicide attempt ....for LGBTQIA people, there is often a religious or theological component to the consideration of suicide.”<sup>19</sup>

Tanis observes, “The experiences of transgendered people within faith communities vary widely, from acceptance and affirmation of a trans identity to intolerance and excommunication to humiliation and mockery.... Many transgendered people that I spoke with were hesitant about participating in faith community for fear of harassment or ridicule.” Furthermore, even when some congregations do welcome a trans person, it is with ulterior motive, “While welcoming transsexuals, they nonetheless expect that through participation in Christian community, a trans person will seek to return to the gender assigned to them at birth. A genuine welcome does not begin with a desire for another person to be different but accepts the other as they are into the community of faith.” And the problem becomes even more complex when, “Some people within gay and lesbian caucus groups of mainline

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<sup>15</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 47-48

<sup>16</sup> Jakob Hero “Toward a Queer Theology of Flourishing: Transsexual Embodiment, Subjectivity, and Moral Agency” in *Queer Religion: LGBT Movements and Queering Religion Vol. II*, ed. Donald L. Boisvert and Jay Emerson Johnson (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012.), pg 146

<sup>17</sup> Mollenkott and Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys*, pg 91

<sup>18</sup> Rev. Erin K. Swenson, TH.M, PhD “Pastoral Care in Transgender Experience”, The Southern Association for Transgender Education, <http://www.welcomingresources.org/pastoralcare.pdf>, pg 4,

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 56

churches have expressed fears that the presence of transgendered people will erode the hard-won gains those groups have made within their communities, while others have seen the issues of gender identity and sexual orientation as parallel and connected movements.”<sup>20</sup>

As a result, as Mann points out, “Thus, they may lose the vital support and connection a faith community can provide and leave clergy members without an opportunity to encourage the development of a personal relationship with the divine.”<sup>21</sup>

And so, it is this milieu, of rejection upon rejection, which drives youth onto the streets. Returning to the 2016 report from the National LGBTQ Task Force and True Colors, “...homeless youth service providers reported high levels of victimization among transgender youth they work with, including histories of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation or trafficking.”<sup>22</sup> The National Center for Transgender Equality concurs, stating, “Unfortunately, social service and homeless shelters that work with this population often fail to culturally and appropriately serve transgender homeless people, including denying them shelter based on their gender identity; inappropriately housing them in a gendered space they do not identify with; and failing to address co-occurring issues facing transgender homeless adults and youth.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Mann states, “Jorm et al (2002) reported a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in homosexual and bisexual adolescents.... GLBT adolescents are exposed to greater amounts of minority stress and violence (via bullying, social rejection and so forth), but have less access to social support than their heterosexual counterparts.”<sup>24</sup> And Sanders reminds us that, “Programs to address LGBTQIA youth homelessness don’t often have the funding and institutional support that other LGBTQIA rights initiatives receive, so there are always needs to help fill.”<sup>25</sup>

Given the stakes, it is clear that progressive faith communities (and especially LGBTQ people of faith) need to be the proactive link in this chain. As Rev. Erin Swenson points out, “Since transgender reality effects all socioeconomic and ethnic groups and is not a matter of individual choice but is, rather, a “given” in a person’s life, then you as a pastor can assume that there are 2 members of your own church for every 100 members on your roll who are in some way transgendered. In other words, if you have a church of 250 members, you may well have five members who have significant gender identity conflicts.”<sup>26</sup> Sanders similarly states, “When an LGBTQIA young person is rejected by their family, they need adults who can assess this reality and find ways to show up for the youth. ...you may be in the best position in your youth’s community constellation to aid them in figuring out who these supportive adults might be, and then facilitating the establishment of a caring and supportive relationship [chosen

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<sup>20</sup> Justin Tanis, *Trangendered*, pg 86-87, & 101

<sup>21</sup> Mann, “The Nexus of Stigma,” pg 203

<sup>22</sup> Price, *At the Intersections*, <http://attheintersections.org/transgender-gender-expansive-youth/>

<sup>23</sup> National Center for Transgender Equality, <https://transequality.org/issues/youth-students>

<sup>24</sup> Mann, “The Nexus of Stigma,” pg 205

<sup>25</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 54

<sup>26</sup> Swenson, “Pastoral Care in Transgender Experience”, pg 7

family] that may be, quite literally, life-saving and will be, at the very least, profoundly life-giving to everyone involved.”<sup>27</sup>

Or as Mollenkott and Sheridan put it, “...all Christians have a responsibility and an obligation to address the specific needs of transgender persons within the church.... We cannot afford to give up or permit a lack of comfort or a state of unfamiliarity to keep us from doing the work of creating God’s justice.”<sup>28</sup> The time to intervene with support is before a youth ends up on the streets or dead.

Authors Hero, Sanders and Tanis outline key considerations for congregations to embody a true sense of welcome and support for trans and gnc youth, so that they might move from trauma to flourishing. Hero, in citing Grace Jantzen notes, “Jantzen invites us to question what the human situation might look like if instead of salvation we turn to a model of flourishing, answering: ‘We could then see human beings as having a natural inner capacity and dynamic, being able to draw on inner resources and interconnection with one another in the web of life, and having the potential to develop into great fruitfulness.’” Tanis similarly envisions, “What if we laid aside any desire or need to regulate those who gather with us for worship and fellowship and instead simply opened the doors to welcome in those who seek solace, refuge, joy and spirit within the community? Perhaps then we will begin to live the words of the prophet Isaiah, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.’”<sup>29</sup> And Sanders suggests, “When you offer a space of compassion and affirmation, treat youth as the authorities on their own experience - as competent to explore ultimate questions about God and spirituality – and invite the sacredness of their stories into pastoral conversation, then you are expanding the potential for them to develop the terms that allow them to live into health, well-being, and spiritual vitality.”<sup>30</sup> And Mollenkott & Sheridan concur, “Compassionate men and women of the church are the ones who need to take action toward resolving the many unjust social, political, economic and religious situations that oppress created beings.”<sup>31</sup>

As we discussed on the first day, two central roles of a chaplain (or any clergy, really) is to communicate acceptance and to provide “unconditional positive regard”. But Tanis challenges us to a higher calling still, “A critical component to welcoming the transgendered is being intentional about attitudes, language, physical space and programs. ...In a number of different ways, a congregation can explicitly or unconsciously create an atmosphere that conveys to transgendered people that we are not welcome there. Communities of faith also need to be aware that they need to extend a welcome that bridges the fear of rejection that a transgendered person may have.... This one barrier is probably the single largest to the participation of transgendered people in communities of faith.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 79-80

<sup>28</sup> Mollenkott and Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys*, pg 157

<sup>29</sup> Tanis, *Transgendered*, pg 114

<sup>30</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 92

<sup>31</sup> Mollenkott & Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys*, pg 85

<sup>32</sup> Tanis, *Transgendered*, pg 115

Similarly, Sanders recommends, "...cultivating the space for youth to enter into open dialogue with their ministry leaders, mentors, family, and peers about these emerging senses of gender difference is vitally important to the health, safety, happiness and spiritual growth of your youth.....creating hospitable space, communicating love and support, and attentive listening are important ingredients in being pastorally sensitive and supportive to youth in the midst of gender identity exploration."<sup>33</sup>

Jakob Hero points out that, "Medical ethicist, physician, and Franciscan friar Daniel P. Sulmasy offers three categorizations of dignity... Attributed dignity... '...constitutes a conventional form of value'. Intrinsic dignity is the 'worth or value that people have simply because they are human...' Inflorescent dignity refers to individuals who flourish 'as human beings – living lives that are consistent with and expressive of the intrinsic dignity of the human.'<sup>34</sup> If we are, indeed, to foster the dignity of trans and gnc youth, Sanders urges, "The best thing you can do if you are unsure about someone's preferred terminology for identifying their sexual or gender identity is just ask: 'May I ask what words you use to describe yourself?'"<sup>35</sup>

Conversely, as Tanis notes, "Another problem occurs when congregations state that they comprise or welcome the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and intersexed communities (LGBTQ or GLBTQ, for short) and then provide no programming or mention of transgendered or intersexed persons. While including these additional terms is politically correct, my opinion is that they should not be used unless a congregation intends, and follows through, on specifically including intersexed and transgendered people." And continues, "People who have a gender identity that is different from their physical appearance can also find it very emotionally painful to have their sense of gender incongruity reinforced every time they need to use the rest room."<sup>36</sup> This, of course, was also echoed in the Mather's article, "[Specifically, this vignette reveals that,] regardless of how an individual personally identifies (i.e., whether they conceive of themselves as cisgender or transgender), others will still interact with them based on cishnormative gender expectations (Sumerau, Cragun and Mathers 2016; see also, Halberstam 1998; Lucal 1999, Schippers 2007.)"<sup>37</sup>

Sanders encourages, "The important lesson for those working with genderqueer youth is never to assume this gender identity label is only a placeholder identity. For an increasing number of young people especially, genderqueer is an important and intentional way of living life between or beyond the gender binary." Indeed, we begin to see that the youth can be our teachers, "The experiences and gender expressions of genderqueer youth help us to imagine and explore theologies expansive enough

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<sup>33</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 20

<sup>34</sup> Jakob Hero "Toward a Queer Theology of Flourishing: Transsexual Embodiment, Subjectivity, and Moral Agency" in *Queer Religion: LGBT Movements and Queering Religion Vol. II*, ed. Donald L. Boisvert and Jay Emerson Johnson (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012.), pg 161

<sup>35</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 10

<sup>36</sup> Tanis, *Transgendered*, pg 120-121

<sup>37</sup> Lain A. B. Mathers "Bathrooms, Boundaries, and Emotional Burdens: Cisgendering Interactions Through the Interpretation of Transgender Experience", *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 40, Issue 3, pg 300

that God not only encompasses the male and female, but theologies in which the Divine is also discovered in that which is between genders and beyond genders in our lived human experience.”<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Mollenkott and Sheridan point out that, “It’s a strange paradox that we are, on the one hand, outsiders who are marginalized by the church, while alternatively, many of us possess the God given ability to view the world and the human condition with unique clarity from a remarkably different perspective.... It’s much easier to see the horizon when you’re already living out on the frontier.”<sup>39</sup>

If we are to meet our youth on those new horizons, Sanders offers one model, wherein, “Darnell Moore introduces the concept of ‘inviting in’ ... Moore says that inviting others to ‘come in’ to our lives functions as a means of hospitable sharing, a choice to disclose to those with whom we may feel safe disclosing to, a choice to disclose when we feel ready to do so.... ‘Inviting others in’ is an invitation to be in community with, rather than simply coming out to.”<sup>40</sup>

To be a clergy or lay person invited in, is an honor; a reflection of the sense of safety and respect one has given to the youth. Tanis points to how critical this role can be, “A spiritual director or another person who acts as a companion on our journeys can be invaluable in helping us to discern our callings.... Our spiritual companions can help us with the process of discerning our paths by providing realistic feedback and encouragement along the way. As we approach decisions about our trans selves, we need both challenging questions, to help us to hone our intentions and understanding of our needs, and encouragement to give us the strength to continue through the challenges and to help us know that a light is present at the end of the tunnel”<sup>41</sup> Sanders cautions, however, when working with youth and their families, “For a wide variety of reasons, LGBTQIA youth may determine that open self-disclosure of an LGBTQIA identity or inviting parents and family into the unfolding journey is simply not preferable at the moment. And that has to be a decision you honor and respect as a supportive presence they have invited into a sacred place in their lives.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, youth providers have noted that it is through inviting one another in, that queer youth experiencing homelessness have manifested resiliency and created their own families, in support of one another, on the streets.

In addition to being responsive to the youth’s invitations, there are important ways in which LGBTQ and ally clergy can model a deeper welcome. Hero notes that “A queer theological lens allows us to see humanity not as a thing created in the past, but as an ongoing process itself.”<sup>43</sup> And Sanders urges, “Religious narratives about relationships and family and sex are so strong – drawing upon symbols of the sacred to give them legitimacy – that they can be a challenge to rework. This may require some careful biblical and theological conversation about where these assumptions come from.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 19

<sup>39</sup> Mollenkott and Sheridan, *Transgender Journeys*, pg 150

<sup>40</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 48

<sup>41</sup> Tanis, *Transgendered*, pg 154-155

<sup>42</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 68

<sup>43</sup> Hero, “Towards a Queer Theology”, pg 156

<sup>44</sup> Sanders, *A Brief Guide*, pg 74

Beyond the written word, making meaning of the moments of change and awakening can extend that sense of meaning for the family and community as well. Tanis reminds us that, “One important way to serve the trans community is to provide meaningful opportunities for people to ritually mark the changes that are occurring in their lives and to have the community’s prayers and blessings.”<sup>45</sup>

While these authors draw us toward a vision of how to support trans and gender nonconforming youth, there still remains the issue of how to facilitate the healing of religious wounding among the adults within the queer and religious communities; particularly when that trauma is deep and unaddressed, and when as a result, their reactivity prevents the adults from working together for the good of the youth. There is only beginning to be literature on recognizing the effects of the “hyper-vigilant reaction individuals suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” which Meyer speaks of; being referred to by some as Religious Trauma Syndrome. I believe that as the research develops we will see that this trauma is pervasive not only in the queer community but in the larger community as a whole. In the meantime, resources such as the material we covered in class, as well as Sander’s more recent book on microaggressions, (*Microaggressions in Ministry*, Sanders & Yarber), can give us the tools so that, at a minimum, the trauma being experienced by youth might not also bear the element of historical trauma absorbed from the reactivity of their adult mentors.

It is my vision, that as adults become aware of the unique challenges of trans and queer youth, that it will remind them of what it felt like in their own youths to be “strangers in a strange land”. It may be that by providing mentorship and sanctuary for today’s youth, we may be able to metabolize our own trauma, so that we may be part of healing our whole community, “speedily and in our day”.

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<sup>45</sup> Tanis, *Transgendered*, pg 125

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