



Triennial Assembly 2016 - Diakonia: Engaging God's Mission Open Space Notes

Transgender - Advocating for transgender folk in the face of discrimination *- Aka, what can the church/diaconate do?*

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Participants:

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1) Where are we as a nation:

Trans issues/lives - hijacked/reduced to "bathroom issue" because of public fears
- intensified by election season which is making this a "wedge issue"

All this makes light of the fact that there is real hurt, misunderstanding and hate experienced by the trans community
- increased risk of suicide from youth
- in light of Orlando, a reminder of the violence perpetrated against trans people

Lots of ignorance which contributes to spiritual/emotional/physical violence

Trans people hear about:

- sinfulness of their person/external expression of their gender
- people asking/obsessed with their genitalia
- God making a "mistake"

2) Sharing our stories:

God calls us to see new horizons, from narrow perceptions to see the broadening work of God

We want to understand the "truth" but we are complex and diverse creatures of God

Our well honed survival instincts have taught us to differentiate us (safe) from "them" (unsafe)
- the church has a responsibility to help tear down the walls between us and them -especially when the "them" is a marginalized group

Deacons may need to check their own feelings of judgement when dealing with parishioners, churches, diocese who do not value transgender people and the stories/gifts that they bring to the church.

continued

Storytelling is essential - once you know a trans person, hear the stories, many people find themselves on the road to becoming an advocate

- many things are abstract until we hear someone's stories

3) Church:

Theologies which include "sin" when related to the trans community are outmoded and dangerous

- for persons with disabilities, we do not use "sin" as a descriptor to explain their being
- to ascribe a sinful state to the trans community labels them and prevents conversation

When we read the stories of gender & gender roles found in Bible (especially Genesis), we have to remember they were written out of a particular Hebrew context

- each generation reads, interprets, claims and rejects the Bible as we grow into a broader understanding of God and our relationship with God

We need a new theology of gender

Theology tends to be developed by:

- Seminaries
- General convention (and local diocesan conventions)

Both these bodies must begin work in this area

Because...

If we remain silent & do not act - violence will continue

Deacons can/must push towards dialogue, conversation and new theology

- how do we read Genesis - male & female vs image of God
- How do we understand the plurality of God ("let US make humankind in OUR image") found in Genesis with respect to gender? With respect to the trans community?

Church needs to partner with transgender community for education

- new language evolving
- People are afraid to offend by using incorrect language (gender pronouns, names, etc)
- we can help our faith communities by pointing them to existing resources

How do we pray for (and with) the trans community?

Stories can center around life and death. When a person begins transitioning, the old person "dies" and a new person lives. Church can develop liturgy to recognize this transitions - a liturgy of new birth and new naming (person claims a new identity/name with community)

4) Would AED members be interested in:

- email list of concerned/interested folks?
- ongoing study group?
- A resource group?
- Formation of subgroup of AED?