

Connor opposition testimony, HB68/"SAFE" Act

Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, I am The Rev. Alice Connor, assistant Rector of St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Anderson Township, representing both dioceses of the Episcopal Church in Ohio and their bishops.

There are some loud Christian voices supporting this bill restricting trans youth. We should not be passing bills in the secular world based on people's faith, but since it's been brought up, I have a thing or two to say about it as a called and ordained minister in the church of God.

The voices supporting this bill do not represent me nor the entirety of the Christian faith. Indeed, there are hundreds of thousands of the Christian faithful who are gay and trans, who love gay and trans people, and who are horrified by bills and theologies like this. The loud Christian voices do not speak for me. They do not speak for my parishioners or my family or my neighborhood. They do not even speak for the majority of - conservative- Christians. There's a recent Fox News poll where 86% of respondents said it's a problem that families with transgender children are targets of political attacks. Of Fox News listeners, 86%. Americans are not in favor of these anti-trans laws.

Furthermore, trans people are statistically significantly more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators. I would love for young women not to live in fear of men attacking them. And I would love for us to blame the appropriate parties here, not give in to scare tactics.

The message and life of Jesus of Nazareth was one of radical inclusion of those the people around him thought were unacceptable. From my faith and from the faith of thousands and thousands of other people, trans people are made in the image and likeness of God exactly as they are. That is, they are made in the image and likeness of God *as trans people*.

That first story of Creation in our Bibles, it's beautiful--a love letter to the wild beauty of the natural world and our place in it. It comes from the wonder early peoples had as they looked around them--how could this be? Who made this? God, they said, God made this and called it all good. And it was so. "Male and female God created them" says Genesis, and that makes sense, right? We typically see male and female. But. Scripture is so much more rich than the surface level--scripture is poetry. There's a way of writing in Hebrew called a merism where two extremes are named to then include everything in between--in Isaiah, God says "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe;" which means God has a hand in the good and the bad and everything in between. God, in the Jewish and Christian traditions, is vast, transcendent, contains all things. God contains all genders, male, female and everything in between. And God created humans in the image and likeness of God, male and female and everything in between.

A parishioner of mine many years ago used to say "God don't make no mistakes." My trans friends realizing who they truly are is not God having made a mistake or them misunderstanding what God did in making them. The fact that they are trans -is- how they were made--fearfully and wonderfully made.

I was overjoyed the day my kid came out to me because of the trust and safety they felt with me to share that part of their life. I am proud to be their mom. I am also terrified to be their mom. When will they be assaulted or insulted because someone can't tell what gender they are? Will they cut their own beautiful skin to relieve the pain because they can't see past the alienation and disgust thrown at them by their peers and by their government?

A couple months ago, a trans friend told me about a 12 year old girl in Mississippi. She had committed suicide because her family and peers were so cruel to her about being trans. She couldn't envision things getting better. Twelve years old. I said to this friend, "I couldn't have imagined at 12 how to even go about committing suicide, much less being so filled with despair that was the only option." He said quietly, "My first attempt was at 9."

This is the result of bills like HB68. At CPAC in March, Michael Knowles said "transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely." This is the future that Representative Gary Click and so many others want. But this is -not- the future that God wants. This bill is the kind of thing the God of the Bible would send prophets about. And maybe he has. The God of the Bible who so many of us worship is a god of liberation, a God of the marginalized, not of the powerful.

Our trans youth are not threats to be eliminated, they are miracles to be celebrated. HB68 is not of God, is not representative of the whole of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and will not work to protect anyone. Please do not pass it out of committee. And please consider calling me for a chat. Thank you.