

Evangelical Alliance guide aims to help churches understand transgender



Transgender issues have become mainstream in recent years. Here people protest President Donald Trump's announcement that he plans to reinstate a ban on

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transgender individuals from serving in any capacity in the US military.

The Evangelical Alliance has produced a guide to help churches grappling with transgender.

Transformed was released yesterday and according to its author Peter Lynas is aimed at making a contribution to wider debates in an area in which there is widespread confusion.

The booklet begins with an overview of transgender in today's culture, noting that 'in recent years the trans conversation has shifted quickly raising new issues and questions for Christians and others'. It explores the nature of 'trans experience', noting that it is 'best understood as an umbrella term for those who experience their gender identity differently to their biological sex'. It distinguishes between the medical condition gender dysphoria, gender incongruence 'to a degree' and the 'transgender ideological movement'.

A section on 'What does the Bible say?' briefly discusses texts such as the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. It also outlines the 'big story', referring to Vaughan Roberts' book *Transgender*, which draws on the creation narrative in Genesis to stress the priority of 'two distinct and compatible biological sexes'. 'Cross-gender identification is a concern because it distorts the creational order of male and female,' the booklet says. It continues: 'As we continue to live in a fallen world, we will struggle between our desires and the will of God.'

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The booklet considers 'key ideas' for Christians, namely the body – an 'integral part of our being'; the fundamental binary distinction between male and female in Genesis, 'a signifier both of fundamental reality... and our future destiny (when the marriage of Christ and his bride, the Church, will take place)'. It also urges acceptance of 'biblical' norms about gender, saying Christians should not 'unwittingly accept society's stereotypes about sex and gender'. It critiques the culture's individualism, which 'emphasises chosenness over givenness', and draws a parallel with the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism, which claims a 'secret knowledge', relating this to some transgender people's view that there is a 'real me' trapped in the wrong body.

In a section on how the church can respond pastorally, the booklet draws on the work of Mark Yarhouse, who distinguishes between three 'frameworks' – 'integrity', which speaks of the sacred integrity of maleness and femaleness in creation, 'disability', which sees gender dysphoria as a non-moral disability, and 'diversity', which sees transgender issues as something to be celebrated. Yarhouse suggests an 'integrated framework' and a compassionate and cautious approach.

There are also sections exploring the issue of 'naming', in which churches might struggle with what to call a transgender person, and practical steps around issues such as baptism or lavatory facilities.

Another section considers the scientific data around transgender and therapeutic interventions, including what happens to children, and there are also sections on the law

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and free speech and on cultural trend. It concludes with a glossary and further resources.

Lynas – director of the EA in Northern Ireland – said pastors, teachers and youth leaders were increasingly asking the Alliance for more information on transgender issues.

It was particularly a live issue in schools, he said: 'Over half the secondary schools in Northern Ireland would have at least one transgender person.'

He stressed the need for compassion, but said, 'We want to stress that there is a biblical framework around this pastoral guidance and we need to get that truth and grace balance, which can be quite difficult.'

While he said the contribution the Bible had to make the debate was 'maybe not as simple as for some other issues', he said: 'Biblically the biological sex reveals and determines gender. The male and female of Genesis 1 become the man and woman of Genesis 2.'

Lynas said it was important to treat each person with compassion and recognise that each case was individual. However, he said that in a pastoral relationship there would need to be 'integrity moments'. 'At some point you have to have the conversation,' he said, adding: 'That's not going to look identical for everyone, but I hope it's going to be a redemptive, transformative experience.'

He said of surgery to alter gender: 'I can't see how that would ever be appropriate for somebody following Jesus, or from a faith perspective. I understand that as an adult, somebody can ultimately do what they like, but can I support

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them in it? I just don't know of any rationalisation or way in which that fits with the biblical text.'

However, he said: 'We are not the only voice in these conversations – healthcare professionals, families and others are going to be voices at the table. We have to engage with other professionals in that conversation.'

The Transformed booklet is part of a range of resources being created by the Alliance which will include video interviews and a talk.

Retirement of Bishop Good recognised by Northern Ireland inter-church education council

The Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, the Rt Rev Ken Good, is to retire next May after almost 17 years in the position. His decision was announced to the Diocesan Council at a meeting on Wednesday.

Addressing the Diocesan Council, Bishop Good said that before he stood down he was looking forward in particular to welcoming the General Synod of the Church of Ireland to Londonderry next May. It will be the first time the Church of Ireland's 600-strong governing body will ever have met in the city.

Bishop Good, who is 66, was consecrated on June 11th, 2002. He said one factor in choosing the date of his retirement was his wish to ensure that there was adequate

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time for his successor to be elected and in place before the next Lambeth Conference, which will take place in July and August 2020.



Bishop Good spoke appreciatively about his 16 years in episcopal ministry. “I feel blessed to have been called to serve in such a great diocese as Derry and Raphoe,” he said. “I have met so many memorable people and enjoyed so many wonderful experiences that it will be a wrench to retire. It has been a joy for Mary and me to live and work in such a vibrant community.

“I thank the Lord for the many friendships I have made, and for the great team of people with whom I have been privileged to work. I am confident that my successor will inherit a committed and talented team of clergy and lay people to help develop God’s kingdom in this diocese.”

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The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) – which represents the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Methodist Church in Ireland in school management and education policy – has send Bishop Good its best wishes on news of his impending retirement. The Council states, “Bishop Good has been Chair of the TRC for the last seven years. He has brought great wisdom and leadership to the role and will be sorely missed when he retires. We wish him a long and happy retirement.”

New lead for Christians Against Poverty in Lurgan

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) has announced there will be a new face at a free Lurgan debt counselling service.

Ruth Waddell is to lead the CAP Lurgan Debt Centre, based at Magheralin Parish Church, Newforge Road, Magheralin, which works to help people escape overwhelming personal debts.

She said: “I am delighted to have been recently appointed to manage the running of the Lurgan Debt Centre.

“From working as a volunteer for CAP over the last seven or eight years now, I know our local community’s needs and I really want to be part of the solution. As a supporter of CAP for several years, I have seen their in–depth care and professionalism transform countless lives.”

The Lurgan Centre, which opened in 2009, is one of around 300 CAP Debt Centres across the UK, helping to date over

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tens of thousands of people every year. Ruth (right) and her team offer home visits to some of Northern Ireland's most desperate and isolated people, supporting them until they become debt free.



Ruth said: "The great thing about CAP's free service is that it is available to everyone. If you know things are out of control and you're stressed, missing meals or sleep, please give us a call and let us help you get your life back on track."

Find out more about CAP at www.capuk.org or call 0800 328 0006.

C of I parishes encouraged to tackle climate change

A Church and Society Commission seminar in Belfast has focused on how members of the Church of Ireland and other Churches can act, in a range of ways, to protect the environment and reduce the impact of climate change. Thirty delegates attended the event in Church of Ireland House, which followed on from a similar seminar held in Trinity College Dublin's Science Gallery in April.

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The seminar was opened in prayer by June Butler, a member of the Commission, who remarked on how the recent wildfires in California illustrated the impact of climate change. Mrs Butler shared how the Mothers' Union was taking part in discussions around sustainable development through the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and encouraged delegates to think about the environment through the word 'pray': **p**lant more trees; **r**educe, reuse, recycle; **a**sk what we can do for the environment; and "**y**ou can help our community work together to save our planet".

Stephen Trew, a member of General Synod and campaigner for fossil fuel divestment, outlined a biblical perspective on the environment and recalled how he was motivated to take action through the story of an 11-year old boy who lost his mother and sister when Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in November 2013.

"When I read his story, I realised that climate change is not simply an academic argument about the effect of carbon dioxide on global warming," he commented. "It is about people's lives." The Bible, he noted, began with creation and ends with a new creation with the first chapters of Genesis and the last chapters of Revelation complementing one another.

The General Synod this year voted for the Church of Ireland to remove all its investments from companies where more than 10 per cent of turnover is derived from fossil fuel extraction, by 2022, alongside a continued increase in investments in renewable sources of energy.



RCB Chief Officer David Ritchie

David Thomas, Christian Aid Ireland's Church and Community Manager, spoke from his experience of meeting people affected by climate change in the developing world and visiting projects that help people to adapt to its consequences. These include storms, flooding, disease and droughts – each happening with a greater intensity than before – and also its contribution to conflicts in areas such as Nigeria, Afghanistan and the Middle East. He pointed to a World Health Organisation estimate that global temperature increases of 2–3°C would increase the number of people at risk of malaria by around 3–5 per cent.

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The final speaker, RCB Chief Officer David Ritchie, encouraged parishes to think outside the box about how they could take action. Mr Ritchie suggested that parishioners could look at their resources (including their role in society, assets, relationships and faith), their individual impact on the environment, and the difference that a parish could make. Examples could include fêtes, hikes, cycling and farm trips, and harvest parties – all with a view to encouraging people to value creation.

Summing up the day, CASC member, the Revd Andrew Orr, said: “It was great to see so many interested people from a wide range of parishes coming together to tackle the issues of climate change and destruction of the environment. We left even more determined to protect God’s world by both taking practical action and encouraging government to make the environment a priority. We hope that those attending will feel inspired to get their Churches and parishes involved in this work, which can also be very enjoyable. There are lots of ideas about how to get started on the website of [Eco Congregation](#).”

South Sudan’s Primate prays for peace with President Kiir

Archbishop Justin Badi Arama has paid a visit to South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir to pray for peace in the country. During the visit, Archbishop Justin thanked President Kiir for his continued support for the country’s churches and for his support for the funeral of the late Bishop Peter Munde, who [died last month](#).



A peace process in the war-torn country continues and this week, President Kiir began a fresh round of talks with the opposition group the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. During this week's meeting, Archbishop Justin prayed for President Kiir and the government; and for "the sustainability of peace and stability in the country", a presidential spokesperson said.

British cardinal set to become a saint

A cardinal looks set to become the first British person to be declared a saint in modern times.

The canonisation of Cardinal John Henry Newman is progressing to the next stage after a second miracle - a requirement for sainthood - was attributed to him.

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The miracle, which concerned the healing of an American pregnant woman who prayed for Cardinal Newman's intercession, has been authenticated following an investigation by the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth Philip Egan wrote in a newsletter to church members: "It looks now as if Newman might be canonised, all being well, later next year."

Born in London in 1801, Cardinal Newman became a Roman Catholic priest in 1847 after converting from Anglicanism.

News briefs

Music for Advent in Derry

You are invited this Advent Sunday to a service of Choral Eucharist in St Columb's Cathedral, at 11.00am with music by Noel Rawsthorne (Festival Eucharist) and Michael Praetorius (A great and mighty wonder). Then at 7.30pm, it's the Advent Procession. Starting in total darkness, this spectacular service ends with the Cathedral fully lit by candles for the start of Advent. Our annual procession combines readings and Advent music sung by the boys and gentlemen of the choir.

Top picks for the Swift Festival

[TheJournal.ie](#) has selected their top picks for the Swift Festival this year, including a screening at [Irish Film Institute \(IFI\)](#) of Sullivan's Travels, Swift Laughs at [Smock Alley Theatre](#) and [New Dublin Voices](#) here at the Cathedral.

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<https://www.thejournal.ie/jonathan-swift-festival-4360140-.../>.

Check out [Jonathan Swift Festival](#) for more details on what's coming up!

Eco–Congregation Ireland newsletter

In the latest edition of its newsletter, which looks towards Christmas, Eco–Congregation Ireland features the *Caring for Creation* video (see below) which highlights the Church of Ireland's Environmental Charter and practical actions that parishes can take to help the environment. The video includes footage of White Park Bay, on Northern Ireland's North Coast, the Mourne Mountains and Carlow Parish Church's garden and grounds.

The Revd Andrew Orr also spoke on stewardship of God's creation at the Diocese of Limerick and Killaloe's recent ecumenical mission evening. In addition, the Revd Trevor Sargent shares his thoughts on celebrating Christmas with less consumption.

Eco–Congregation Ireland is an initiative of the Irish Inter Church Meeting, and includes members from the Roman Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and Religious Society of Friends.

Bohemian Rhapsody for Children's Ministry

You may have been to the cinema recently and seen *Bohemian Rhapsody* - everyone whose gone raving about it. Well we give this version of the Nativity the thumbs up. It

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may prove useful for an all age service or Messy Church
It is very cleverly done - enjoy !

To download this song, go to <http://www.puppetunes.com>
This delightful parody written by Mark Bradford and
directed by Darla Robinson (darla@ puppetunes.com) tells
the Christmas story in a new....and UNIQUE....way

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