

1 **Recognition and Affirmation of the Inherent Dignity of Transgender and Nonbinary Persons as**  
2 **Beloved Children of God**

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5 **RESOLVED**, that this 108<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Olympia affirms that all transgender and  
6 nonbinary people, and anyone whose gender identity and expression differs from that assigned at birth, are  
7 beloved children of God and are to be treated with equal rights and privileges as other human beings; and  
8 be it further

9 **RESOLVED**, that this 108<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Olympia opposes any legislation or public  
10 policy that defines sex and/or gender on the basis of physical appearance of external genitalia present at  
11 birth or presence of certain chromosomes within a person's DNA; and be it further

12 **RESOLVED**, that this 108<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Olympia encourages educational, pastoral,  
13 liturgical, and legislative efforts that seek to end systemic violence against transgender people, calling special  
14 attention to violence against transgender women of color; and be it further

15 **RESOLVED**, that the Secretary of Convention convey this resolution to appropriate state and federal  
16 legislative bodies.

17 **EXPLANATION/RATIONALE:** On October 21, 2018, *The New York Times* reported on a US  
18 Department of Health and Human Services memo they had received which outlined a plan to strip  
19 transgender people of any legal recognition in the US. According to the article:

20 The department argued in its memo that key government agencies needed to adopt an explicit and  
21 uniform definition of gender as determined "on a biological basis that is clear, grounded in science,  
22 objective and administrable." The agency's proposed definition would define sex as either male or  
23 female, unchangeable, and determined by the genitals that a person is born with. Any dispute about  
24 one's sex would have to be clarified using genetic testing. "Sex means a person's status as male or female  
25 based on immutable biological traits identifiable by or before birth," the department proposed in the  
26 memo, which was drafted and has been circulating since last spring. "The sex listed on a person's birth  
27 certificate, as originally issued, shall constitute definitive proof of a person's sex unless rebutted by  
28 reliable genetic evidence."<sup>i</sup>

29 The article states that this proposed definition would affect approximately 1.4 million Americans who  
30 identify as a gender other than that assigned at birth. Trans advocates and allies have reacted swiftly and  
31 negatively. Within hours, the hashtag #WontBeErased began trending on social media and rallies were held  
32 around the country. Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, said,  
33 "What this feels like to transgender people is trying to make us invisible, trying to say that we don't exist,  
34 trying to say that we are nothing."<sup>ii</sup>

35 The Episcopal Church has a history of taking action to affirm that trans and nonbinary people as beloved  
36 children of God, and of taking material action to ensure their safety and full inclusion in society and the  
37 church. In addition, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies the Rev. Gay  
38 Clark Jennings have spoken against discrimination against trans people, and in June 2016, the Executive  
39 Council of The Episcopal Church passed a resolution "decrying the wave of anti-trans bills that have been  
40 sweeping the country." Links to General Convention legislation, statements by the Presiding Bishop and  
41 PHOD, and the Executive Council resolution can be found at the TransEpiscopal website (see endnote for  
42 URL)<sup>iii</sup>

43 A swift and public response to public attempts to erase trans people or enshrine discrimination against them  
44 in legislation or public policy is essential. According to a 2015 survey of over 28,000 trans people (funded by  
45 the National Center for Transgender Equality), 46% of respondents said they were verbally harassed and 9%  
46 physically attacked for being trans within the past year. Over half reported being physically attacked during  
47 K-12 school, and 17% said they stopped attending school due to harassment. Trans women of color  
48 experienced violence at nearly twice the rate of white trans men. Nearly 40% were living in poverty. In most  
49 states, including Michigan, it is legal to discriminate in employment matters because someone is trans or  
50 perceived to be. As a result of this pervasive violence and discrimination, 39% of respondents said they had  
51 experienced severe mental distress *during the past month*, and 40% have attempted suicide within their lifetime  
52 (which is nine times the national average – and keep in mind that those who have died by suicide are not  
53 included in these figures).<sup>iv</sup>

54 The good news is that support from families, friends, and allies can improve quality of life and reduce the  
55 likelihood of death by suicide for trans people. Based on survey responses, having supportive family  
56 members reduced the risk of suicide attempts by 32%. Risk of homelessness was cut almost in half. And  
57 reported incidence of severe mental distress was 40% lower.

58 As Christians, we are called to love and to put our love into action. We are called by our baptismal covenant  
59 to respect the dignity of every human being. Further, Jesus gave us the great commandment: “Love the  
60 Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest  
61 commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37) Romans tells us  
62 that “love does no harm to its neighbor.” (Romans 13:10) More discussion of how scripture affirms  
63 transgender individuals and their experience can be found in *The Bible and the Transgender Experience: How  
64 Scripture Supports Gender Variance* by Linda Tatro Herzer.

65 For those unfamiliar with the terms, transgender or nonbinary, the National Center for Transgender  
66 Equality offers this definition: “Transgender people are people whose gender identity is different from the  
67 gender they were thought to be at birth. ‘Trans’ is often used as shorthand for transgender.”<sup>v</sup>

68 These are not the only definitions and ways to think about being trans or nonbinary. The right of individuals  
69 to define themselves and their identity, like other rights of self-determination, is given by God, inherent, and  
70 unalienable. We are all “created equal” and are “endowed” by our “Creator with certain unalienable rights,  
71 that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” so reads the Declaration of Independence  
72 (1776). The National Center for Transgender Equality has resources for being a good ally, which goes into  
73 more detail about these issues and many others. In particular, these resources focus on effectively  
74 supporting trans people, both on an interpersonal level and through public policy and advocacy (see  
75 endnote for URL)<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> “‘Transgender’ Could Be Defined Out of Existence Under Trump Administration,” New York Times, October 21, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/21/us/politics/transgender-trump-administration-sex-definition.html>

<sup>ii</sup> “At Rallies and Online, Transgender People Say They #WontBeErased,” New York Times, October 22, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/us/transgender-reaction-rally.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.transepiscopal.org/policies--legislation.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Executive-Summary-Dec17.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/supporting-the-transgender-people-in-your-life-a-guide-to-being-a-good-ally>