



QUAKERS
Canadian Friends
Service Committee

This resource is for Quaker communities seeking to actively foster the inclusion of trans and gender-diverse Friends.



Trans and gender-diverse inclusion amongst Friends

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Letter to CYM regarding the experiences of trans and gender-diverse Friends

Dear Canadian Friends,

Taking an active and overt role in support for trans and gender-diverse Friends is an extremely timely issue to address. CFSC has been approached by a group of trans and gender-diverse Friends/Attendees of CYM to start a process of education and advocacy on their behalf. This letter is a testimony of what they have shared with us, after more than a year of gathering and discerning together.

The terms "trans and gender-diverse" include transgender, nonbinary, a-gender, and gender-queer folks. Each sub-term has its own definition; however, the word transgender means people whose gender identity is different from their gender as assigned at birth. Cisgender means those who are aligned with their gender as assigned at birth. We understand that some gender-diverse folks don't always feel comfortable identifying themselves under the 'trans' umbrella. We are choosing to use the word to align our advocacy and education with current medical, academic, and social terminology. Like all equity-seeking groups, trans and gender-diverse people are not a monolith and you will find individual preferences/identities throughout. We embrace each other in all our uniqueness, even when trying to find appropriate umbrella terms to use.

Transgender folks are among the most vulnerable individuals in today's world. Additionally, gender-diverse folks are generally not well understood, even by our assumed allies within the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ community. While all members of the rainbow community are (and have long been) targets for hate speech and gender-based violence; trans-men and trans-women experience more than twice the violence found within the general population.

For many trans and gender-diverse folks among us, it is unclear where and when they can be themselves with other Friends, or even if they are safe to 'come out'. Many trans and gender-diverse Friends are inundated with comments, questions, condescending remarks, or obtuse behaviours that, often reflect the questioner's curiosity or ignorance. These can also, at times, negatively affect the livelihoods or mental health of trans and gender-diverse Friends. When we say

safety is important, it sounds trivial among Quakers (we like to think of ourselves as being excellent allies) and yet for trans and gender-diverse folks, there are no guarantees, even among Friends, without conscious and mindful efforts on the part of our Meetings to signal safety.

Seeking meaningful inclusion

Support for trans and gender-diverse people has many different dimensions, and is not an "easy ask." We are not just asking for statements such as "I support trans and gender-diverse folks" although those might have their place as well. There are three primary types of support we are seeking from Friends.

1) Recognition: Overt acts of acknowledgement

In many parts of the world, even acknowledging the existence of trans and gender-diverse folks is a problem, let alone them having a legitimate place in society. We also know of global Quaker groups where basic recognition is still an issue. The practice of sharing personal pronouns/preferences during introductions and when meeting someone new is one of the most direct forms of support for this. It tells the person/people in-front of you that you know that personal pronouns are not something you can necessarily guess by looking at a person's outward appearance. Displaying trans and gender-diverse symbols and writing/posting explicitly affirming statements are also valuable tools for helping trans and gender-diverse folks know that they are seen and included.

2) Mindfulness, and meaningful engagement

Active and engaged support involves making mindful efforts towards understanding what it means to be trans and gender-diverse, and how that identity relates to being cisgendered. Gender is not a binary, and is more reminiscent of a spectrum or prism. There are many different ways of being trans and gender-diverse, and in order to be supportive of these participants, Meetings need to be knowledgeable about the most common differences. Microaggressions and unintended harm occur in most social contexts and across many aspects of the human experience.

Educating ourselves on the experiences and terminology used by the trans and gender-diverse community helps reduce the occurrence of unintended harm and increase their perceived safety in Quaker communities.

Safety, in general, is an ongoing issue for many trans and gender-diverse folks. Most are typically questioned, treated with disrespect, and perceive public spaces as sometimes dangerous for their mental and physical well-being. The ability for Meetings to correct misconceptions, present the joys, and share the burdens of their trans and gender-diverse members/attenders is part of the support a Quaker Meeting can offer. We believe that trans and gender-diverse people are as much part of the divine as other Friends and community members.

3) Being an inclusive "ally"

An especially powerful form of support that Quaker Meetings and their membership could undertake would be to take an active part in supporting trans and gender-diverse folks within the Meeting and protecting their rights in our broader community. Like many humans, trans and gender-diverse folks often are struggling with complex health, mental health, or other social issues due to their identities. However, they are also an especially resilient community. Trans and gender-diverse Friends should be invited to take on leadership roles, committee assignments, work with children, etc. We feel that we especially need to hear the voice of the Spirit speaking through trans and gender-diverse people. Again, educating the Meeting about issues facing the trans and gender-diverse community is a tangible part of allyship in action. Consider inviting a speaker from a local 2SLGBTQIA+ organization, and ask if anyone in your meeting is willing to share from their own experience (and be ready when some trans and gender-diverse friends may not yet be ready for that step). Always be patient with yourselves, your Meeting, and trans and gender-diverse Friends as you commit to working toward greater inclusivity.

How to get started

Many of these practices might be encouraged and stewarded into being by alert Ministry and Counsel Committees. CFSC has developed a resource toolkit and some queries to help Meetings going through this process. Meetings that are only beginning the process

need to start with prioritizing the education of their members, to ensure that everyone is able to 'speak the same language' and avoid more obvious harms. However, there needs to be a lot of tolerance for error. It is not necessary to get things perfect—learning new things is hard on our brains, especially when it involves new language. What is necessary is to make an effort. It will take time for the Meeting to learn to be supportive in the many ways that are possible. Even Meetings that have high participation of trans and gender-diverse folks are still learning how to be more present for these participants.

"It doesn't have to be perfect, but it has to be really trying... and we have to pause and say, 'Are there voices we're not hearing?'"—*Quaker Speak* podcast episode *Welcoming versus inclusive*

Queries for reflection

1. Do I recognize the presence of trans and gender-diverse friends in our Meetings, community, and histories?
2. How am I learning about the experiences and histories of trans and gender-diverse people in a way that builds my understanding and compassion?
3. In what ways do I recognize that I have been harmed by assumptions of gender-identity and expression? Can I also see how these assumptions have harmed others?
4. In my learning and listening, are there actions I could be taking in my community to build solidarity and belonging for trans and gender-diverse folks?
5. When I am unable to understand or affirm the experience of someone from the trans and gender-diverse community, am I willing to still respect their place in our midst?
6. Do I/we celebrate the lives and contributions of trans and gender-diverse friends in a way that creates a welcoming environment for future seekers?
7. Am I willing to be vulnerable enough with our community to be held accountable when my words or actions harm friends (even if that harm was unintended)?



Minute on the inclusion of trans and gender-diverse people in our Meetings

Introduction

As Friends engage in the work of upholding human rights and pursuing the full inclusion of all people in our communities, we are aware of growing opposition among some in Canadian society to the rights of trans and gender-diverse individuals.

Trans and gender-diverse includes transgender, nonbinary, a-gender, and gender-queer Friends, recognizing that each person holds their own identity and that no umbrella term can fully define us. We are committed to grounding our actions in our spiritual practices, in the conviction that there is that of God in every person, and in our Quaker testimonies.

This concern reaches beyond the social-justice work of Canadian Friends Service Committee and runs deeper than we may wish to admit within our own Meetings. We honour the trans and gender-diverse Friends who, over more than a year of gathering and discerning together, have shared their experiences and trusted us with their testimonies. In light of how vulnerable trans and gender-diverse people remain in today's world, this journey of listening, learning, and building safety and belonging will continue for years to come. We offer this resource, and the accompanying letter, as a 'calling in' of our own beloved community—an invitation to reflect on our beliefs, practices, and assumptions about gender identity and expression. Alongside them we offer a few queries for Friends. Overall, they ask: how can we follow the leadings of the Spirit, both individually and in our Meetings, to recognize, affirm, and meaningfully include trans and gender-diverse Friends as full members of our beloved community, answering that of God in every person?

These queries are an invitation to challenge and inspire Friends individually and corporately as a faith body. The work need not be perfect; what matters is that we are truly trying, and that we pause to ask whether there are voices we are not yet hearing.

Template minute

“We celebrate the lives and contributions of trans and gender-diverse individuals within our community. We are united by our desire to affirm their full inclusion in every aspect of our communities, and we are inspired by their testimonies in our history. We hold tenderly the ways that we have caused harm, and been harmed, by assumptions around gender-identity and expression. We recommit ourselves to the work of answering that of Go(o)d within every individual. We commit to taking tangible actions toward inclusion, and to the ongoing education of ourselves more fully about how to embody inclusive practices within our Meetings.”



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