

A CALENDAR OF CELEBRATIONS FOR DIGNITY AND INCLUSION

Affirming the human rights
of LGBTIQ people in Christian liturgy



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Foreword

Religion is commonly understood as a set of beliefs, practices and traditions through which human beings relate to the Divine. Religious traditions are deeply embedded in the social and cultural lives of individuals and societies, shaping norms and values for how people relate to themselves and one another.

The etymology of the term *religion* is traditionally derived from the Latin *religare*: *re* – again; *ligare* – to bind or connect. This word includes two dimensions: the relationship with the Divine, and the relationships among humans.

Although religious traditions primarily focus on seeking and responding to the Divine, the language found in sacred texts and teaching materials, expressed through worship and pastoral practice, and shared in public and digital communications, has a direct impact on society as a whole.

Throughout history, many religious traditions have been marked by an ongoing tension between dynamics of inclusion, ostracisation, or othering. This tension is often reflected in religious language.

Even when not intended as such, certain forms of religious expression may contribute to exclusion or stigmatisation. Consistent with international human rights standards, all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as “race”¹, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation can be considered hate speech².

¹ Since all human beings belong to the same species, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe rejects, as does the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), theories based on the existence of different “races”. However, in this document, the term “race” is used in order to ensure that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as “belonging to another race” are not excluded from the protection provided for by the legislation and the implementation of policies to prevent and combat hate speech.

² Council of Europe CM/Rec(2022)16 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech - <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a67955>

At the same time, religious language carries significant potential for promoting human dignity and social cohesion. Words of faith can convey care, reconciliation and healing for people who have experienced stigmatisation and discrimination, as well as for communities at large. Religious language often articulates narratives of respect and hospitality. It can encourage communities to embody values of equality and inclusion that are fully compatible with human rights principles.

In this framework, the SOGIESC Unit of the Council of Europe, together with the European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups, is undertaking a focused exploration of the relationship between religious language and the narrative of human rights. The initiative aims to strengthen the capacity of religious actors and communities to engage actively with their own traditions, while contributing to the prevention of hate speech and the promotion of inclusive discourse.

This guide, developed within the framework of the EU/CoE joint project on ["Combating anti-LGBTIQ violence and hate speech and strengthening awareness raising and fact-based narratives about LGBTIQ persons"](#), responds to the urgent need to address exclusionary and harmful narratives affecting LGBTIQ individuals and communities. It recognises that faith communities are not merely spectators in this struggle but are also powerful agents of dignity and social cohesion.

→ Context and purpose

This resource is aimed at Christian communities of faith, religious actors, and human rights defenders, who wish to affirm diversity and foster inclusion of all, including LGBTIQ people, in church and society.

This tool follows the rhythm of the Christian liturgical year, identifying moments where biblical themes, feasts and seasons naturally resonate with international commemorations dedicated to human rights. Rather than creating new commemorations, it identifies existing dates that can be observed jointly, by building thematic bridges.

These connections are not intended to replace the theological meaning of the liturgical calendar, but to illuminate how Christian worship already contains rich resources for reflecting on the equal worth of every person.

→ Scope and methodology

The scope of this calendar is limited. It addresses Christian traditions represented within this project and does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of all denominational or cultural contexts. The suggested dates follow the Western Christian (Gregorian) liturgical calendar; Orthodox Christian communities may need to adjust the corresponding liturgical observances according to the calendars observed by their church. The practices presented should therefore be understood as context-specific examples and invitations for reflection and dialogue, rather than prescriptive models.

Each entry in the calendar includes:

- A brief analysis explaining how the specific date, and the related feasts and commemorations, serves as an opportunity for fostering inclusion.
- A concrete, adaptable practice that can be implemented in local church contexts.
- Real-world examples of lived practices, included wherever possible to illustrate application.

The focus on LGBTIQ people throughout this calendar is intended solely to provide dedicated guidance on issues that are still little known within Christian liturgical life. At the same time, meaningful inclusion cannot be pursued in isolation. The full recognition and participation of LGBTIQ people are inseparable from broader inclusion of all those who experience marginalisation.

Likewise, LGBTIQ inclusion is not primarily about creating identity-specific rituals, but about ensuring that LGBTIQ Christians can participate fully and authentically in the shared worship, sacramental life and communal practices of their church. This calendar is therefore offered as a complementary resource. It does not claim to be an exhaustive guide to LGBTIQ inclusion, nor does it seek to represent the diverse experiences, theological perspectives and spiritual expressions of all LGBTIQ Christians.

Instead, this calendar deliberately curates and platforms existing grassroots and institutional initiatives already thriving within Christian communities, offering them as tangible entry points for fostering inclusion through liturgy.

→ Building bridges between discourses

This calendar builds bridges between human rights language and liturgical language.

- Human rights discourse often articulates concepts such as *equality, dignity, non-discrimination* and *bodily integrity* through legal and normative frameworks.
- Religious language, by contrast, frequently speaks through concepts such as *blessing, justice, compassion, hospitality, reconciliation, and community*.

The practices presented in this calendar demonstrate that, when approached with contextual sensitivity, both of these languages can enrich one another. Each carries powerful narratives of seeking justice and caring for the marginalised. They pursue common goals but express them through different terminologies. Tailoring the language according to the audience that is being targeted, while understanding each other's narratives and their underlying values is an essential step for building these bridges. This synergy is vital for LGBTIQ people, whose lives and access to fundamental human rights are deeply impacted by religious discourse. This tool proposes user-friendly and immediate ways to ensure that the call for inclusion resonates in all areas of society.

→ A call to action

Ultimately, this calendar seeks to support religious communities in finding words and opportunities for affirming the human dignity of LGBTIQ people.

It highlights the capacity of communities to engage with their own traditions in ways that:

- Affirm the human rights of LGBTIQ people;
- Contribute to preventing hate speech;
- Strengthen social cohesion across Europe.

The true value of this calendar lies not just in the selected dates, but in *how* it is brought to life. Inclusion requires the active participation of those whose dignity is affirmed; without their direct involvement, initiatives risk perpetuating the very patterns of exclusion they seek to overcome. Implementing this calendar therefore must be grounded in genuine partnership between LGBTIQ people of faith and their wider church communities. It is essentially a calendar of opportunities for being in community.

Celebrations for dignity and inclusion

JANUARY



Human Rights Day of importance:

[International Day of Peaceful Coexistence](#) (January 28)

Christian celebration:

[Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#) (Mid-January)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

On the International Day of Peaceful Coexistence, communities and individuals are invited to deepen their ability to live together amid their differences. This resonates with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, where Christians commit to recognising differences among churches, and meeting others where they are. In this context, the common pursuit of care and justice for society's most vulnerable, such as trans people or LGBTIQ youth, can be a unifying mission for churches.

By engaging in this dialogue, churches bear witness to a vital truth: while theological differences may not always be resolved, they can always be met with mutual respect and a deliberate commitment to peaceful coexistence. This ecumenical model offers a profound lesson on inclusion: if diverse faith communities can come together in prayer despite their differences, then perceived differences between individuals should not be seen as grounds for exclusion or discrimination.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

In some contexts, Christians traditionally mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity through ecumenical services. Such service offers an opportunity to invite trusted members of the community to contribute intercessions, also known as prayers of the people. These intercessions may be prayers for a renewed capacity to embrace difference, trusting that, in God, all are reconciled. They may also provide an opportunity to name groups of people who experience marginalisation because of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics; or express gratitude for LGBTIQ people's contribution to society or faith communities.

MAY



Human Rights Day of importance:

[International Day Against Lesbophobia, Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Intersexphobia](#) (May 17)

Christian celebration:

[Pentecost](#) (celebrated 50 days after Easter, usually end of May)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

Every year on the 17th of May, LGBTIQ organisations, public authorities, and European institutions mark the International Day Against Lesbophobia, Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Intersexphobia by reflecting on progress made in advancing the human rights of LGBTIQ people, while also drawing attention to the discrimination, violence, and exclusion that many continue to experience. The day serves both as a recognition of positive developments in advancing inclusion and as a reminder of the continuing responsibility to uphold the dignity, equality, and safety of every person.

For Christians, the celebration of Pentecost offers a complementary reflection on courage and public witness. Following Jesus' death as an outcast, his disciples remained hidden out of fear of persecution and association with him. Yet, at Pentecost, God sends his Spirit, enabling them to leave their places of fear and bear witness to the message they have received. In this story, Christians may find an invitation to speak publicly against injustice, exclusion, and violence, and to bear witness to the God-given dignity of every human being. The theme of courageous witness resonates with the experiences of many LGBTIQ people who continue to face hostility or discrimination, as well as with all those who choose to stand in solidarity with them.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

The Feast of Pentecost provides an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of courageous witness in contemporary society. Where appropriate, and in partnership with those concerned, church communities may invite LGBTIQ people and allies to share personal testimonies on themes such as acceptance, inclusion, justice and courage.

In this context, 'allies' are defined as those who witness discrimination, actively support those who are affected, and work alongside them to challenge exclusion

and promote equal participation. Notable examples include Christian leaders and anti-apartheid activists Desmond Tutu and Michael Lapsley, who have publicly stood as allies to LGBTIQ people. Similarly, family members may also share their experiences of learning about LGBTIQ lived realities and supporting their LGBTIQ loved ones. This concert of voices is invaluable, as long as it upholds the dignity of LGBTIQ people by recognising them as the primary experts on their own faith and personal journeys.

Dr. Kerstin Söderblom is a pastor in the Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau, Germany. In a blog post, she recounts that, in November 2013, during the closing service of the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC)³ in Busan, South Korea, father Michael Lapsley expressed his support for LGBTIQ people.⁴ He apologised, as a religious leader, for the injustice and suffering that LGBTIQ people worldwide are forced to endure as a result of religiously legitimised exclusion and condemnation. He called on all believers to stand firm against homophobia and transphobia. This, Kerstin Söderblom writes, was an act of bravery, encouraged by the strength of the Spirit.

In June 2007, Kairos, a group of LGBTIQ Roman Catholics, held a vigil against homophobia in Florence. This was the first step towards the creation of The Gionata Project. This project gathers testimonies, translations, reflections, and news related to LGBTIQ Christians, their family members, as well as priests, nuns, and pastors who walk with them. These numerous and diverse testimonies are shared publicly at vigils and prayer meetings, and later published on their website. The Gionata Project honours the nuances and complexities of being an LGBTIQ Roman Catholic. It demonstrates how storytelling and public witness can be transformative tools for combating hate speech and affirming the full participation of all in the church. In May 2026, the Ecumenical Vigil of Prayer for the Overcoming of Homophobia and Transphobia, held in Naples, was a space for testimonies from various LGBTIQ people, one saying: "There is violence in declaring that: 'you do not exist'".⁵

³ The [World Council of Churches](https://www.wcc-council.org/) (WCC) is a fellowship of 356 churches from more than 120 countries worldwide - including dozens of Orthodox and Protestant churches based in Europe.

⁴ <https://www.evangelisch.de/blogs/kreuz-queer/121520/13-05-2015>

⁵ <https://www.gionata.org/vegliare-non-e-solo-restare-svegli-e-restare-umani-dalla-veglia-di-napoli/>

JUNE



Human Rights Day of importance:

[Pride month](#) (June)

Christian celebration (Orthodox):

[All Saints Day](#) (early June)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

During Pride Month, LGBTIQ communities worldwide make themselves visible in order to demand the same legal protections as other citizens in their countries. Visibility, however, comes with higher risks of suffering violence and discrimination. Therefore, churches might choose to make the presence of LGBTIQ Christians in their midst known, while limiting exposure and securing safety for everyone involved. This can be done by honouring the life and legacy of Saints, including those whose lives did not strictly conform to the gender norms and expectations of their time.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

On the day dedicated to honouring all Saints, known and unknown, churches share the stories of friends of God; people of faith whose lives have been transformed by divine grace. Their deeply humane faith journeys show that Saints are not exceptional individuals whose efforts earned them the admiration of their peers. Instead, they are just as limited as anyone else - yet, they have lived in close relationship with God. Some of these Saints have also, later, been acknowledged by LGBTIQ Christians as 'queer'. Naming them, along others, on All Saints Day, affirms that in God's eyes, human dignity is universal. Indeed, closeness with the divine transcends sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics.

Saints Sergius and Bacchus are two of the most ancient Christian martyrs. Their close relationship and military companionship have been understood as an example of *adelphopoiesis* (brother-making). In the 1994 historical study Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe, American professor and historian John Boswell argued that the relationship between Sergius and Bacchus was romantic, and represents a type of early Christian same-sex union.⁶ Though this claim is still debated, the two Saints stand as valuable gay Christian figures to many LGBTIQ Christians.

⁶ John Boswell, Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 28/08/2013

JUNE



Human Rights Day of importance:

[Pride month](#) (June)

Christian celebration (Protestant, Roman Catholic, Ecumenical):

Pride services (June)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

Dedicated 'Pride services' are liturgical spaces where Christians can explicitly affirm their commitment to the fundamental rights of all people: full inclusion, inherent dignity, and the enjoyment of human rights free from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics. Typically organised in partnership between LGBTIQ people of faith and clergy, these services remain deeply rooted in the denomination's traditional liturgy and theology. To mark Pride, liturgists intentionally adapt specific elements to highlight God's love for LGBTIQ individuals on the one hand, and to empower their full participation on the other hand. These gatherings are essential in affirming the worth of every person, placing the human rights and dignity of LGBTIQ people at the very heart of the community's worship.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Liturgical services represent one of the most significant opportunities for visible inclusion within and through churches. Yet, it is worth noting that there are numerous other meaningful ways to foster community and walk in solidarity with LGBTIQ Christians during Pride month, including pilgrimages, blessing ceremonies, and shared communal meals. Christian traditions possess a rich heritage of practices dedicated to care, justice, and liberation. By embracing this diversity of approaches, faith communities can create multiple entry points for full participation, ensuring that all are indeed welcomed and valued.

Based at the Saint Guillaume Lutheran Parish in Strasbourg, the ecumenical group Antenne Inclusive organises an annual Pride service that welcomes parishioners, allies from all denominations, LGBTIQ people of faith, and their loved ones⁷.

While the liturgy follows the traditional structure of a Sunday service, it is intentionally designed to preach the Good News to LGBTIQ people. This

⁷ https://linktr.ee/antenneinclusive?utm_source=linktree_profile_share&tsid=e731f196-602e-4fe6-a834-a6901e508b98

gathering serves a dual purpose: it affirms the inherent dignity of LGBTIQ people, and it invites allies to experience hospitality and inclusion. The main creative highlight of the service is a ritual of blessing. Participants receive a word of Scripture, while the officiant draws a cross with glitter on their wrist. This act reimagines the tradition of Ash Wednesday: the glitter cross acknowledges human limitation and mortality, traditionally symbolised by ash, while also affirming the beauty of a life lived with God. This blessing can resonate with all Christians, and specifically fosters full participation and recognition for LGBTIQ members of the community.

AUGUST



Human Rights Day of importance:

[International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief](#) (August 22)

Christian celebration:

Beheading of Saint John the Baptist (August 29)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

A growing number of churches have officially acknowledged the historical and ongoing harm done to LGBTIQ communities in the name of religion. While approaches vary, these institutions have engaged in rigorous processes to identify abusive practices and discriminatory narratives, publicly name them, and, in many cases, offer formal apologies and commit to transformative change in their attitudes and policies. On the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, Christian communities have an opportunity to deliver powerful messages of care and accountability.

The commemoration of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist, observed in several Christian traditions, offers a biblical bridge for reflecting on violence, abuse of power, and the cost of speaking truth in the face of injustice. For Christian communities, this connection creates an opportunity to reaffirm that freedom of religion or belief must always be exercised in ways that uphold the dignity, safety, and equal worth of every person. It also invites reflection on the spiritual, psychological, relational, and, in some cases, physical harm experienced by LGBTIQ individuals within religious settings. By acknowledging harmful practices and discriminatory narratives, rejecting so-called 'conversion practices', and committing to forms of pastoral care rooted in dignity and non-violence, churches can help ensure that faith is lived without coercion, abuse, or fear.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Diverse formats offer communities the opportunity to reflect on practical steps that go beyond simply "moving on" from the past; instead, enabling the creation of safe, sustainable pathways for LGBTIQ people of faith to fully participate in the life of the church. Initiatives such as conferences on spiritual harm and healing, the publication of official letters of apology, services of reconciliation, and liturgical workshops serve as vital mechanisms for repairing relationships and rebuilding trust.

In 2023, the Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau (EKHN) held a landmark service of repentance, formally apologising to God and to those impacted by exclusionary attitudes towards LGBTIQ people.⁸ This significant step was the result of profound theological reflection which affirmed that human diversity is an intrinsic part of divine creation that must be celebrated, not suppressed. The church committed to making structural changes, promoting equality, non-discrimination and mutual respect among their members, as well as towards LGBTIQ people in society at large. Demonstrating a commitment to transparency and accountability, the EKHN holds an annual service, where updates on the implementation of these measures are shared.⁹

In 2016, the Church of Sweden undertook a comprehensive revision of its 2006 Handbook, reflecting on the power of language to foster inclusion or exclusion. In an official commentary, the authors of the Handbook reflect on various strategies to make language inclusive, for all who may become marginalised because of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics.¹⁰ A first strategy is to use language that proclaims liberation, in a biblical sense. "It involves liturgical language that breaks patterns which render people invisible or diminish them, and instead invites change, including from a gender perspective." Another strategy is to choose gender-neutral expressions to refer to God and human beings. This however needs to be done very intentionally, in order to preserve the integrity of fundamental Christian beliefs, such as the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology.

⁸<https://www.ekhn.de/themen/queer-leben/lgbt-iq-news/hessen-nassau-bittet-queere-menschen-um-vergebung>

⁹<https://www.ekhn.de/themen/queer-leben/lgbt-iq-news/ekhn-bekraeftigt-schuldbekenntnis-gegenueber-queeren-menschen>

¹⁰ <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/1818433/kommentar%202016.pdf>

NOVEMBER



Human Rights Day of importance:

[Intersex Day of Remembrance](#) (November 8)

[Trans Day of Remembrance](#) (November 20)

Christian celebration:

[All Souls' Day](#) and other commemorations of the departed
(November 2 and onwards)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

Christian communities have a rich tradition of remembering the deceased, and providing compassionate support to those in mourning. Opening a space for prayer and reflection around Intersex Day of Remembrance and Trans Day of Remembrance is an act of hospitality, as well as solidarity, with communities that continue to experience discrimination, exclusion, violence and, in some contexts, legal persecutions. Although these commemorations arise from different traditions, they share a commitment to honouring the memory of those who have died, acknowledging grief, and affirming the dignity of every human life.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Where appropriate, intersex and transgender Christians have often taken the initiative to organise memorial services honouring those who have died under the burden of targeted hatred. Opening church buildings to LGBTIQ community members to mourn their loved ones in a safe and dignified environment is a profound act of care. By living out the biblical call to “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15) alongside LGBTIQ people, churches can testify to the inherent worth of every person. This practice not only provides spiritual comfort but also publicly affirms the church’s commitment to remembering victims of hate crimes and standing against the exclusion that leads to such tragedy.

Lewis Reay is a published liturgist. He is a member of Metropolitan Community Church and he attends Augustine United Church in Edinburgh Scotland. In 2024, he wrote a prayer to be read on Transgender Day of Remembrance:

One: You show us the path of life.

Many: In your presence there is fullness of joy.

Holy One, you made us all in our frailty, in our strength and in our diversity. You call us out into a journey of faith and spirit. You are at the heart of our gender journeys. These journeys are precious, and we are made in all your beauty. We know you as the three in one God: Creator, Spirit and Liberator, we know that you are beyond gender and hold all genders to yourself. Let us know your calling to express our true identities and that they are a gift from you.

One: You show us the path of life.

Many: In your presence there is fullness of joy.

We think of our transgender siblings throughout the world. Many are facing unspeakable fear due to anti-transgender legislation that says we should not exist. Let us remember that perfect love casts out all fear and we thank you for that perfect love.

We acknowledge the lives so brutally cut short due to transphobic hate crimes and murder. We acknowledge the lives lost to suicide. We know that numbers do not tell the whole story, and we recall those who are lost without anyone naming their passing.

One: You show us the path of life.

Many: In your presence there is fullness of joy.

We think of young transgender and non-binary folk who face hostile worlds as they come out and seek gender-affirming care. We know much of the NHS is stretched and parts of it are broken. We ask your presence for those on waiting lists, for whom a medical transition and surgery seem so far away.

One: You show us the path of life.

Many: In your presence there is fullness of joy.

We thank you for the transgender people in this community, may we know your love and acceptance. We think that the wider transgender community may find safe spaces to follow you. We seek to discover the gifts and wisdom of the wider trans community. Let us celebrate these journeys. Let us mark the renaming, and the coming out. Let us honour these lives as they bring joy to our church life.

One: You show us the path of life.

Many: In your presence there is fullness of joy.

Give us courage to move on as we respond to negative media and political contexts. Help the activists gain strength and continue to plead their cause. Help those who care that they might know your renewal. Help us know that the smallest of actions makes a real difference as we show hospitality in our communities.

Heal our hearts when we are broken, give us rest when we are tired. Enable us to share your love by your example.

We come to you, for we know that you listen to us. We ask all this in and through the Holy One, the Liberating One and the Spirit that brings us life.

Amen.

On the 20th of November 2025, the Church of Sweden published a short prayer for transgender people on their social media.¹¹ This initiative forms part of the church's broader commitment to combating transphobia and answering its calling to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable members of society. By sharing this resource digitally, the church extends its pastoral presence to both believers and others, seeking spiritual support online, particularly those who may feel hesitant or unsafe visiting physical places of worship due to fear of discrimination. The language of the prayer serves a vital function: it provides a liturgical voice to experiences that are often silenced or rendered invisible, thereby affirming the dignity and belonging of transgender individuals within the faith community.

"God, today we remember all transgender people who have been hated, harmed or murdered.

We pray for all those who will never be called by their true names.

Help us to find ways to a better world, where we do not discriminate against people and everyone is allowed to flourish in their own way.

Amen."

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/svenskakyrkan/posts/1233093002184864/>

DECEMBER



Human Rights Day of importance:

[World AIDS Day](#) (December 1)

Christian celebration:

[Start of Advent](#) (Late November - Early December)

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

During Advent, Christians remember the wait and preparations preceding the birth of Jesus. The Incarnation -God entering the human condition as a vulnerable newborn- invites profound reflection on the dignity of those who are physically weak due to age, disability, or illness. By embracing human frailty, God affirms the inherent worth of everybody, particularly those whose survival and flourishing depend on the solidarity and care of others.

Consequently, Advent is an opportunity to address the stigmatisation faced by individuals due to their health status. It calls believers to ensure that religious beliefs are never used to restrict access to essential healthcare, accurate information, or community support. Specifically, World AIDS Day, which often falls within Advent, offers a dedicated moment to express solidarity with those affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In this light, the season's journey can include a process of removing barriers to healing, and affirming that every person, regardless of their status, deserves God's love and society's full protection.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

On occasion, both Roman Catholic and Protestant parishes have held, and continue to hold, ecumenical services on December 1st to commemorate the deceased, share experiences, and pray. This sometimes includes fundraising for the fight against HIV/AIDS. Additionally, Christian communities may organise panel discussions or public lectures, providing spaces to acknowledge the complex role that church leaders and Christians of all denominations have historically played in shaping the response to the epidemic. From contributing to stigma and increasing people's vulnerability to HIV, to advocating for the dignity of all and actively participating in grassroots efforts to improve access to healthcare, churches have held, and continue to hold, a responsibility towards those affected by HIV/AIDS. In this context, invited scholars can help raise awareness about persistent inequalities in access to healthcare and information, both between and within countries, as well as the significant reduction in international financial resources allocated to the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

Théo Hagenmuller is a scholar at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) and the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (France). He studies the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church, Roman Catholic communities and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s-1990s. In an article focused on the case of homosexual Christians in France, he shows how the HIV/AIDS epidemic transformed the association David & Jonathan (D&J) during the 1980s and 1990s. Within this ecumenical organisation, members experienced the same fear and grief as other LGBTIQ people. However, they developed a specific culture of activism, drawing resources from both Christian traditions and homosexual networks. In this article, published on the 1st of December 2025, he writes: "This study shows that the HIV/AIDS epidemic marked a turning point in the redefinition of the relationship between faith, sexuality and activism, and reveals how, in the face of the ambiguity and limitations of the churches' institutional responses, D&J became a space for the reinvention of practices centred on faith, activism and solidarity."¹².

On World AIDS Day 2025, the World Council of Churches (WCC) held special prayers and participated in a panel discussion under the theme "Overcoming Disruption: Transforming the AIDS Response". This was an opportunity to join other organisations, such as UNAIDS, the World Health Organization and the Global Fund to end AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, in reaffirming commitment and unity to fight for the right to health and for a sustainable HIV response. Gracia Violeta Ross, WCC programme executive for HIV, Reproductive Health, and Pandemics, noted that: "This year has been a challenging year in the AIDS response with funding cuts from international donors and a well-coordinated and dangerous backlash on the human rights of women and girls, on people living with and affected by HIV and on the LGBTIQ community."¹³

¹² Théo Hagenmuller, « Homosexuels chrétiens au temps du sida. Expérience de l'épidémie et ressources militantes et spirituelles au sein de l'association David et Jonathan (1982-1997) », *Genre & Histoire*, 36 | 2025, published online on 01/12/25. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/11418>

¹³ <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/on-world-aids-day-wcc-shares-prayers-and-insights>

YEAR ROUND



Christian celebration:
Liturgies for blessing trans persons

BRIDGE BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CHRISTIAN LITURGY

The Bible is full of stories of people who received a new name upon starting a new path in life. For transgender people of faith, choosing a new name and living being recognised in their gender identity can be a profound experience of finally experiencing authenticity in relation to self, others, and God. In a context where transgender people often face hate speech and discrimination, blessing liturgies serve as a powerful counter-narrative. They affirm that human dignity is God-given and that the journey towards self-discovery is accompanied by divine love. By blessing a person's new name and identity, the church upholds the right to personal identity and signals that every member belongs fully in the community of faith.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Liturgies for blessing transgender people upon coming out or changing their names have become common in many Protestant churches. There are examples of such liturgies in Sweden, France, Switzerland, the UK, and more. Other denominations have sometimes offered blessings to people who change their names, without specifying the context of gender transition.

"Segen Sein" the blessing liturgy by the Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau (EKHN), Germany, published in 2020, showcases the importance of such liturgies. The title "Segen Sein" holds a dual meaning: it signifies both "to be blessed" and "to be a blessing." This duality shapes the entire ritual:

- It acknowledges the person's need for God's support and the community's care.
- It affirms their calling to contribute their unique gifts to others.

Thus, the blessing is not granted to a marginalised outsider, but to an equal member of the community. It fosters reciprocal relationships, recognising that transgender people bring essential value to the community and deserve to live in dignity and equality.

Conclusions and Further Reflections

While the Christian liturgical calendar itself is fixed, its ancient rhythm already holds ample space for blessing, reflection, care, grief and courage. Within this framework, the present tool is meant to be a living, evolving, resource for actively realising the Gospel's call to inclusion and participation.

It stands as an invitation to recognise the power of words to uplift and sustain life, urging communities to take seriously the liturgies that proclaim to every person, without exception, that they are worthy members of Church and society.

This calendar reflects the creativity and resilience of LGBTIQ Christians and their allies. It introduces some of the most striking grassroots and institutional initiatives to affirm the human rights and dignity of LGBTIQ people through liturgy. Such initiatives can serve as bridges for all who wish to defend freedom of religion and belief, as well as freedom from fear of violence and discrimination.

This tool is designed to evolve through both its use and the constructive dialogue it inspires. Currently, it captures only a fraction of the rich tapestry of LGBTIQ faith expressions. Many LGBTIQ Christians do not engage with dedicated communities, yet their private prayers, personal devotions, or pilgrimages remain essential, though unrecorded here. The diversity of LGBTIQ Christians is vast, encompassing a wide range of needs and spiritual approaches that this calendar does not claim to encapsulate. Therefore, this document should be viewed not as a definitive catalogue, but as a foundation upon which to build. It invites communities to adapt these examples to create context-appropriate liturgies that resonate with their specific local realities.

Future initiatives could explore similar resonances between human rights and the traditions of other world religions, recognising that the quest for dignity and belonging is a universal human endeavour. Ultimately, this calendar is a testament to what is possible: a faith community where there is already room for all.

