

Welcoming Diversity and Gender-Inclusive Church Facilities

In proclaiming a welcome to all in the Body of Christ, many congregations have increased the accessibility of their church facilities with offerings such as:

- Large-print hymnals and screen projections for those with visual impairments
- Hearing loops for people with hearing aids
- Gluten-free Communion options to address dietary concerns
- Accommodations for walkers, wheelchairs, and other mobility equipment

Over the years, restroom facilities throughout the country have continually shifted to accommodate more people, such as those with mobility equipment, parents with children at various developmental stages, and gender-diverse people.

When the church proclaims that all are welcome, people who have been historically excluded by the church may wonder if they can safely access all church facilities. People marginalized for their gender identity, such as transgender or non-binary people, may have experienced harassment and even violence in the everyday act of using the restroom. **Gendered restrooms labeled for men and women without other options can—even unintentionally—represent an unwelcoming message to some who worship with you or visit your building.**

The 223rd General Assembly (2018) approved **Overture 11-12**, *Affirming And Celebrating The Full Dignity And Humanity Of People Of All Gender Identities*, with unanimous consent. Overture 11-12 opens:

“Standing in the conviction that all people are created in the image of God and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people, the 223rd General Assembly (2018) affirms its commitment to the full welcome, acceptance, and inclusion of transgender people, people who identify as gender non-binary, and people of all gender identities within the full life of the church and the world. The assembly affirms the full dignity and the full humanity of transgender people, their full inclusion in all human rights, and their giftedness for service.”

The resolution goes on to call church leaders to “support the right of transgender individuals to full access to public accommodations, including gender inclusive restrooms.”¹

¹https://covnetpres.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/2023/02/Overture-11-12-From-New-Castle-Presbytery_-Affirming-And-Celebrating-The-Full-Dignity-And-Humanity-Of-People-Of-All-Gender-Identities.pdf

Other visitors and church members benefitting from gender neutral restrooms in public spaces may include parents and caregivers caring for anyone of a gender other than their own. Signs designating gender neutral spaces can be found [here](#).

Not all gender minorities share the same preferences or needs. One non-binary person may be looking for a gender-neutral bathroom space, while a transgender woman should feel welcome to use the women's restrooms. Consider the church's existing structures and how they can be adapted:

- Churches with two bathrooms and no funds to build more facilities can consider steps to broadening the inclusivity of existing facilities, such as signs inviting all people to use the bathroom that is right for them.
- Where there is a single-occupancy or family bathroom available, a sign labeling the bathroom as "all gender" or "gender neutral" may also alleviate the anxiety of wondering where one can use the restroom. Such signs can also be used on bathrooms with multiple stalls, perhaps coupled with locks on the outer doors of those bathrooms and some additional education or explanation around gender inclusion.

Churches may also consider adopting policies that formally protect all members' accessibility in bathroom facilities that correspond to their gender identity. Displaying such policies on the church website (and in the building) can offer a great relief and visible welcome to those with concerns for their safety and dignity.

Continued education and compassionate, ongoing dialogue can grow understanding among those new to the idea of gender-neutral restrooms. By taking primary responsibility for listening to members' concerns, allies can show solidarity and love to their gender-nonconforming neighbors. Studies have found no evidence that gender-neutral bathrooms are less safe, and by providing more safety to gender minorities, they are actually the safest option for all people.

Welcoming people to the restroom of their gender identity, along with the designation of gender-neutral church facilities, increases accessibility for transgender, non-binary and gender-nonconforming people, creating a more welcoming church for all of God's children.



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