

ENCUENTROS LATINX

Transvisibility Toolkit

LGBTQ+ Welcoming in our Faith Communities
in the United Church of Christ



Justice and Local Church Ministries
Health and Wholeness Advocacy

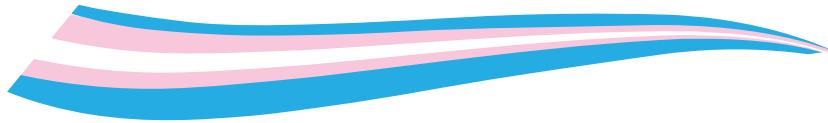


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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



**Founded through a generous grant from
The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation**

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INTRODUCTION

"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!"

This refrain is often heard at the commencement of Sunday worship in United Church of Christ congregations, especially those that have a covenant that is understanding of their role as Open and Affirming congregations. But what does it mean? Who are we welcoming? And who might still be feeling left out?

Even if the LGBTQI+ rainbow make an attempt at inclusion, the transgender community is often ignored and their rights left out of the conversation. Our trans siblings are at forefront of discrimination and societal violence. They are punished for pushing against the norms of heteronormative, patriarchal society. They are a visible statement of a God who is wider than our imagination, and because of this, they carry the cross of marginalization.

Many states are trying to pass laws that will further curtail the basic human rights of the trans community. Texas has attempted to pass legislation criminalizing self-affirming health care for trans youth. Simply living their lives in freedom has become an everyday battle for our trans siblings.

The testimonies in this toolkit are designed as a starting point for conversation in your faith communities. Listen with your hearts and remember that, God's divinity resides in every one of us. Let your compassion welcome and affirm anyone in their gender expression.

For many who identify as "other," the idea of being welcome in a church as fully human; and beloved by their Creator feels like an unreal comedy of errors. If they are welcomed as Latine, they might be excluded because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity or gender expression. If they are welcomed; despite or because of who they love, their ethnic, racial and cultural identities might become grounds for their exclusion. And so, they are left wondering what to do with the languages of their hearts, their music, and their theological understanding. Where is God amidst the "almost welcome"?

“ e ”

The letter "e" is commonly used in writings in Spanish to denote gender inclusion. We use this symbol for more clarity in reading the Spanish text, but we recognize the efforts of the Latinx community in the U.S. that are trying to make use of the "X" to be more radially inclusive.

The following testimonies are intended to spark conversation in our faith communities.
We ask that you engage this material in love, humility, curiosity and respect.

To keep in mind when using this information:



Remember, the mission of the United Church of Christ states,
...we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.

Tips for Facilitators

If your group is more than 10 people, you may want to break the group into smaller teams of 4-5 participants.

Read each testimony, and take time to understand their depth.

After each reading, take the time to pause, reflect, and learn.

Suggested Time for discussion: 90 minutes



Materials



Easel paper



Markers

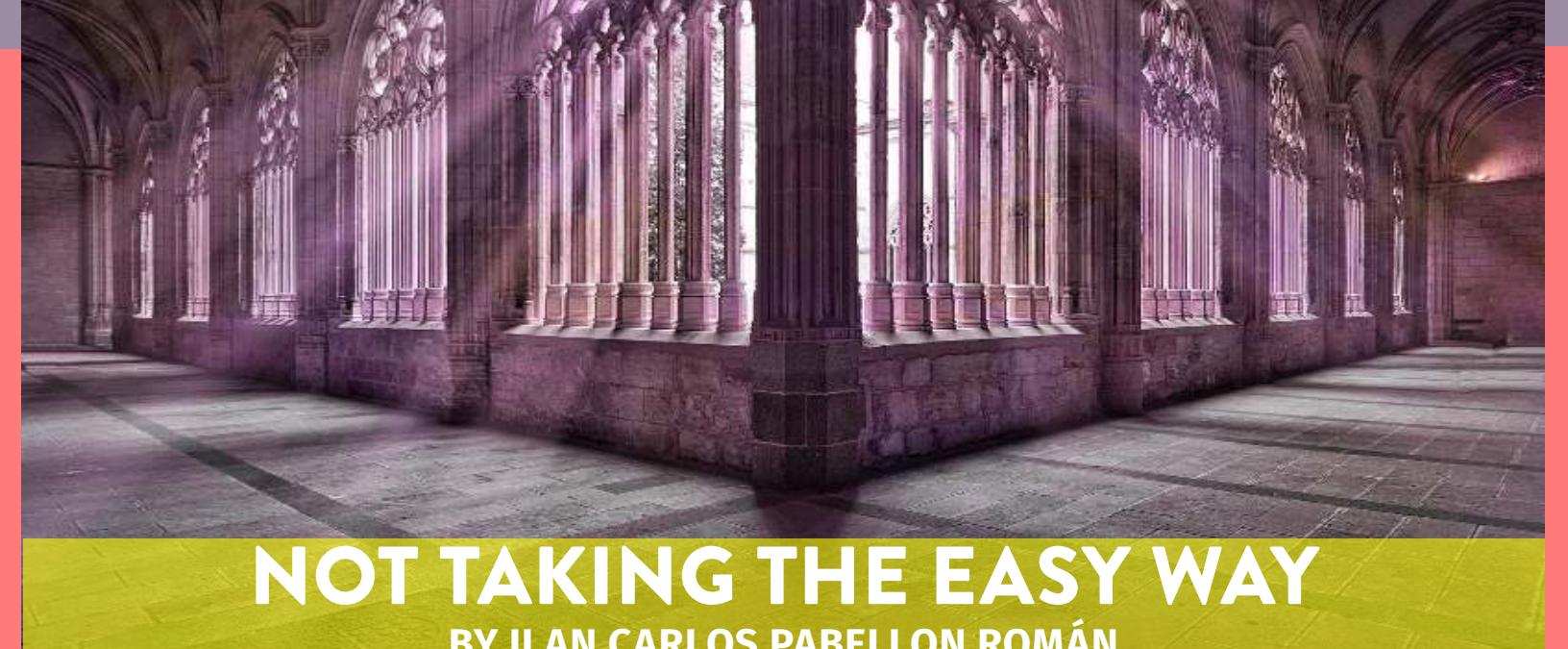


Sticky Notes



Pens





NOT TAKING THE EASY WAY

BY ILAN CARLOS PABELLON ROMÁN

My upbringing in a religious family with relatives as being ordained ministers imprinted in me; an embrace of faith, the importance of having a relationship with God and the significance of doing God's work. As a child, I felt a sense of calling to ordained ministry. I have expressed this through music: as a singer, musician, and composer. I had found a way to communicate the Word of the Lord and God's Plan of Salvation through my music, yet I still felt God wanted me to do more. I felt a yearning for a deeper connection, a closer relationship with God. Yet, it was subdued by an inner voice that told me that something was wrong with who I am as a person that would make it impossible for me to follow God's calling.

In school I was the perfect student; in church, the baby of a model Christian family; in my family, the baby girl who was the apple of everyone's eye. Yet I didn't feel like myself. I was playing a role. I would see other girls and I knew I was different from them. Even in high school, I never experienced attraction toward men and felt I would be what we call in Puerto Rico *jamona* (a colloquial term for a woman who is single her whole life).

As I entered my college days, I saw diversity that I had never been exposed to before. Living a life only spending time in church, in the church's school, in a family deeply involved in church life, had created a bubble around me. Going to campus everyday started breaking the blinders I had on myself. Yet at home I still couldn't talk about what I was feeling. I still did not have a name for what I felt. Then one day after school when I was nineteen years old, my parents sat me down and told me they were worried about me, because they had never seen me with a boyfriend. The words came fumbling out of my mouth: "If you are waiting for me to have a boyfriend, keep waiting. I like women." Just like that I had divulged to them part of my identity by accident.

After years of not knowing what it was about me as a person that made me feel a disconnect between who I truly am and the person I thought the church and society wanted me to be, a health crisis brought me to my knees. For two years I battled, and in the darkest moment when I had given up hope, God stretched out God's Hand and saved me from myself. God used my best friend to stop me from ending my life by suicide. God used music, which affirmed for me that God knows who I am and how I connect with music. It was a song that told me "You are loved." I researched and read the Bible cover to cover, thinking I would find a passage that would condemn what I was feeling, my memories as a child of hiding my long hair inside my shirt, watching my cousins and uncles act, how they sit, how they sing, and wanting to be just like them. I pushed down that feeling when I noticed how my

parents would react if I played dress-up with my father's clothes, sit like I saw my uncle sit with his legs wide and open, or try to sing like my favorite male singers. Yet, when I got home and looked in the mirror I had a flashback from my childhood, standing in front of the same mirror, knowing I would face judgment and criticism. At that moment, I accepted what I knew since I was a child. Knowing the Bible says that we are made in God's image brought me to accept who I am and to proclaim the Word by my own experiences in life. I am a transgender man, but more importantly, I am God's creation with a purpose, talents, and blessings from the Heavenly Father. At that moment I kneeled and said: "Here I am, Lord. Your will be done unto me and with me." That moment sparked a fire in me to preach God's Word and God's message of salvation. That moment gave me the courage to be unapologetically me, even in spaces where I would not be treated with respect, like the church.

I would hear the whispers, but I would go back to that Bible passage that talks about the tree that bears good fruit and how we know if the tree is good or bad by its fruit. It is like when we can see how our actions are positive or negative depending on the result. Whenever doubt crossed my mind after hearing church members say they think I should not be able to be a member of the church, I would think of that passage and of all the blessings I've received after fully accepting myself.

"Knowing the Bible says that we are made in God's image brought me to accept who I am and to proclaim the Word by my own experiences in life.

I am a transgender man, but more importantly, I am God's creation with a purpose, talents, and blessings from the Heavenly Father."

Searching for a seminary where I could grow in my knowledge of God's Word, I wasn't surprised when the first thing spiritual leaders told me was: "Either fight to go to seminary here in Puerto Rico knowing they still have trouble with openly LGBTQ+ members and that you might break down the wall for others but risk being humiliated, hurt, scrutinized, and

judged publicly even more every moment of every day, or start looking abroad for seminaries that are more inclusive." Talking to my religious mentors would give me great peace. They accepted, protected, and stood by me as my transition became more visible and congregants started having issues with seeing someone they did not understand. I threw away the mask and revealed Ilán Carlos, a man who lives an authentic life, has a voice of his own and an even deeper connection to the Almighty. Even now, if I were to lie and hide who I am, I would have more of a chance at pre-ministerial studies and seminary studies than if I go as who God made me.

How could it be that, though I seek to live a genuine life and follow the model of Jesus Christ, the church still sees me as unworthy of serving God? Why is it that hypocrisy opens more doors in the religious community than honesty and transparency?



After reading this testimony, we suggest that the group facilitator lead the discussion of the topic as follows:

- Lead the group in a brief breathing exercise (inhaling and exhaling at least three times).
- Ask the participants to write down their initial thoughts and questions.

Then, have them discuss the following questions in groups of two or three:

- ⌚ What moment represented the turning point that enabled for Ilán Carlos to accept his calling and himself?
- ⌚ Is Ilán Carlos's decision to be genuine and visible seen as unwelcome by the religious community, and how should the church support members like him in their ministry journey?

JOURNAL AREA

The journal area is designed to be a place where you can note your thoughts.



WONDERFULLY MADE AND MADE WONDERFUL

BY ADORA XANNIFER YSAGUIRRE

How does one live their truth?

Does it come from dressing the way they want, speaking the words they wish to share, walking paths they long to take? My name is Ador; I picked it out myself. When I was younger, I used to hide old VHS recorded copies of She-Ra and watch them after dark with the volume turned all the way down so as to not wake anyone in the house. I watched a woman named Adora dedicated to protection wield a sword and transform into a woman of power.

She was everything I wanted to be; a strong powerful woman who stood up to those who put others down and; whose love was not a weakness, but rather a source of power. I sat in amazement, longing to be what I saw on the screen.



When the screen turned off, however, I was faced with my reality. I was born a boy into a religious family in a town where religion permeated every nook and cranny of our lives. I felt trapped, I felt alone, and worst of all, I felt wrong. For many people, faith can be a difficult thing. As a trans woman, though, I used to think that faith and my truth were like water and oil. Throughout my childhood, I suppressed the feelings that I thought were unnatural. The attractions, the emotions, and the dysphoria—all of these things were just symptoms of “the world” to me and filled me with a guilt that made me only run deeper into the dogma that made me feel wrong in the first place. Messages like “homosexuality is a sin” and “the LGBT community was blasphemous against God” terrified me. I didn’t want to go to hell, but if I continued down the path that my heart was pulling me, I was convinced I would.

When I entered into my adult years I for the first time, felt like I could explore who I was on the inside. It started small with the odd earrings or colorful shirt, and little by little I could almost feel the years of pressure and guilt give way to joy. This process of finding myself also led me to distance myself from the church. I felt like I could never be truly welcomed there, as if being myself, would mean forcing them to compromise what they believed for me.

I felt sad, but I focused on myself and what I needed, and eventually I gained the confidence and joy I needed to come out to myself and to come out to others. For the first time in my life, I was living my truth and was proud, but that moment would not last forever. In my darkest moments, though, I found my true faith community, a small but growing community of faith and love who without question and without any price stood up and carried me though. I was made to feel welcome, made to feel beautiful, led not to feel wrong because of how I lived my truth, but rather right for living my truth. I found a new family in my pastors, my choir peers, the many people who reminded me that God made me to live MY truth, not one that others had decided for me.

How does one live their truth? Does it come from dressing the way they want, speaking the words they wish to share, walking paths they long to take? I live my truth in two major ways: Standing up and standing out. Standing out is easy for me. Everywhere I go I get stares. They used to make me feel scared, but now I know that when I walk outside, I am showing the world that it's not only okay, but beautiful to live as you feel because we are wonderfully made. And maybe I can inspire some people to be themselves in a world where they feel like they cannot. Standing up can be a challenge.

Sometimes standing up means standing against those who are more powerful than we are or resisting systemic issues that plague our world. But when we have powerful faith behind us and powerful people of faith beside us, then we truly are a force to be reckoned with that can make the world a better place for people of all kinds.



Discussion Questions



After reading this testimony, we suggest that the group facilitator lead the discussion of the topic as follows:

- 🕒 Lead the group in a brief breathing exercise (inhaling and exhaling at least three times).
- 🕒 Ask the participants to write down their initial thoughts and questions.

Then, have them discuss the following questions in groups of two or three:

- 🕒 Do you live your truth(s), or one that others have decided for you?
- 🕒 Who is your community? Who are the people you turn to for support?
- 🕒 Are you someone who can be turned to?
- 🕒 How do you stand up for those who may not be able to stand up on their own?

JOURNAL AREA

The journal area is designed to be a place where you can note your thoughts.

OTHERWISE GENDERED

BY REV. YADI MARTÍNEZ REYNA

"For there are Eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are Eunuchs who have been made Eunuchs by others, and there are Eunuchs who have made themselves Eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

Matthew 19:12



Some non-binary people might feel, be, or dress in the binaries of feminine and masculine. Some otherwise gendered people might want to have surgery, might want to be more masculine, or more feminine, or both. The point of all this is to be free to dress, be, and exist in a world that is not always open to liberating, new ways of thinking. As a person of faith, I had found it liberating to live my life authentically. I found my story in Matthew 19:12 and heard Jesus talk about the Eunuch in an affirming manner. As a pastor, I worked in a church where the members were mainly part of the LGBTQ+ community, so I was safe to be me.

That idea of live and let live changed one midday that I was spending with my son. On this particular day, we had gone to the movies to watch a matinee. I remember being dragged to the restroom by a five-year-old yelling "I have to go, I have to go!" I did not think about how I looked or that my masculine presentation would be a problem when I ran into the female restroom.

1. Termed coined by author of OtherWise Christian: A Guidebook for Transgender Liberation - Mx.Chris Paige

I grew up in the borderland that exists between Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Mexico. I grew up knowing what it was to exist between two worlds. I am a non-binary pastor, an otherwise-gendered person. I am "ni de aqui, ni de alla" which translates from Spanish to English to "not from here or there".

"OtherWise-gendered" means "any gender identity or expression that transcends the simplistic Western settler-colonist narrative of two and only two mutually exclusive and unchangeable genders, defined strictly and easily based on biology at birth."¹

But what does it mean to exist between the two? As a borderlander, I can try to explain to you from the perspective of being between two countries. Picture yourself in a boat on the ocean of the Rio Grande, the Gulf of Mexico. You are in this boat in the middle of two countries where the waves can take you from the United States waters of South Padre Island, or the water of La Playa Bagdad, in Mexico City. Being non-binary is like that boat flowing in the water—one can steer it one way or the other.



What I do remember is that when I came out of the restroom I was thrown against the wall and a man was yelling at me. I do not remember what he was saying, because all I could hear was my son yelling “leave my mommy alone!” Everything happened very fast and my concern was for my son, not the punch; not the slam against the wall, not the man in my face, but my son. Somehow this man stopped and said, “Stay away from girls restrooms you pervert!” As I sat on the carpet, my boy ran to hug me. I realized that day that I could be out and proud as much as I wanted to but I also had to be safe. Live and let live has to have a clause added it to it: educate, warn, teach, share, advocate.

Who knew that something as simple as going to the restroom could be a challenge? I am thankful for places that help with these issues. But what if the government were to target transgender people with a bathroom bill? What if the odds were stacked against us? I ask our allies, friends, and siblings; will you stand with us? Will you go with us?

There is a movement that started as a hashtag #IllGoWithYou. This became a campaign asking those in our community and our allies to be our bathroom buddy, our watch-your-back person, and our stand-up-for-you person. #IllGoWithYou says ***I will have your back. I will be your witness.***² Society might not always understand OtherWise-Gender people or those who might not fit a particular category.



But I know that as people of faith we believe in equity, respect, and the safety of all people. Will you stand with us? Will you go with us?



Discussion Questions



After reading this testimony, we suggest that the group facilitator lead the discussion of the topic as follows:

- ➊ Lead the group in a brief breathing exercise (inhaling and exhaling at least three times).
- ➋ Ask the participants to write down their initial thoughts and questions.

3. www.illgowithyou.org

Then, have them discuss the following questions in groups of two or three:

“OtherWise-gendered” means any gender identity or expression that transcends the definition of genders defined strictly and easily based on biology at birth.

- 🕒 In what ways does “OtherWise-gendered” seem like or different from other kinds of modern identity language?
- 🕒 What kinds of gender diversity do you notice in the communities that you frequent?
- 🕒 How hard is it for our society to break free from the idea of two and only two gender options?

JOURNAL AREA

The journal area is designed to be a place where you can note your thoughts.

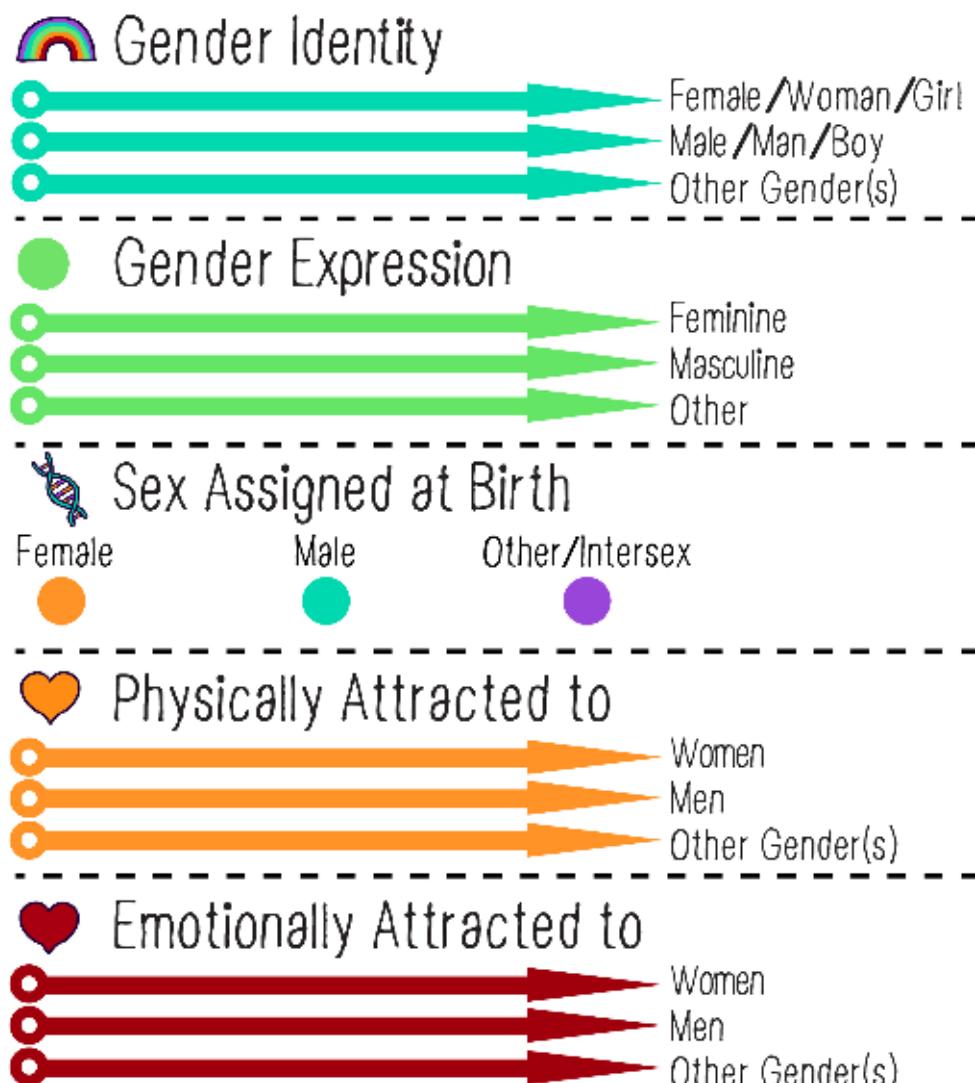


Transgender-Nonbinary Resources for Solidarity and Action

#TransJustice #UCCMovement

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Let's put a stop to transphobia:

- ▶ **Avoid asking personal questions about a person's genitals, surgeries or sexual activity.**
- ▶ **If you don't know a person's pronouns, ask!**
- ▶ **Don't encourage or promote stereotypes about transgender people.**
- ▶ **Educate yourself about the struggles of the trans community.**
- ▶ **Respect the pronouns and names used by a trans person, and use them to refer to them.**



/revistatodes

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Encuentros Latinx Toolkits



Transgender-Nonbinary
Resources for Solidarity
and Action



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST
a just world for all





Gender and Sexual Orientation Terminology

androgyny: the mixing of masculine and feminine gender expression, or the lack of gender identification.

asexual: a person who is not sexually attracted to others. Someone might be asexual for a short time (such as after the end of a relationship) or for their whole life. People who identify as asexual may engage in loving relationships with other people, but sexual activity is not a central part of the relationship.

bisexual: attracted both to people of their own gender and to people of another gender. Two common misconceptions are that bisexual people are attracted to everyone and anyone and that they just haven't decided what gender they are really attracted to.

cisgender: identifying as the gender and sex one was assigned at birth.

gay: generally used to describe a man who is attracted to men. Sometimes refers to all people who are attracted to people of the same sex; sometimes "homosexual" is used for this also, although this label is seen by many today as a medical term that should be retired from common use.

gender binary: a system of classifying sex and gender into two distinct and disconnected forms, so that bodies, identities, roles, and attributes are seen as all entirely male/masculine or female/feminine.

genderqueer, gender fluid, gender variant: identifying as being between or other than man and woman. People who identify as one of these may feel they are neither or that they are a little bit of both, or they may simply feel restricted by gender labels.

homophobia: negative attitudes toward and feelings about people with non-heterosexual sexualities, or dislike of or discomfort with expressions of sexuality that do not conform to heterosexual norms. Homophobia can incline people to avoid, discriminate against, and use violence against people they know or perceive to be non-heterosexual, transgender, or gender nonconforming.

intersex: born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. This is a general term used to describe a variety of genetic, hormonal, or anatomical conditions. Some intersex individuals identify as transgender or gender variant; others do not. (The term hermaphrodite is obsolete and offensive.)

lesbian: a woman who is attracted to other women. The term lesbian is derived from the Greek island of Lesbos and can be considered a Eurocentric word that does not necessarily represent the identities of African Americans and other non-European ethnic groups; however, individual women of any ethnicity may embrace the term. Woman-loving-woman and same-gender loving woman may also be used.

man: a person who identifies as a man.

pansexual: attracted to people regardless of gender. Other words for pansexual include polysexual and omnisexual.

queer: a self-identity label for people who feel they do not fit cultural norms for sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This word can also mean transgressive and challenging of the status quo. It is sometimes used as an umbrella term for all people with non-heterosexual sexual orientations. The word queer is historically a pejorative term; today some people dislike it, while others proudly use it for themselves.

straight: attracted to people of a different gender. This term is also sometimes generally used to refer to people whose sexualities are societally normative, alternately referred to as heterosexual.

transgender: in popular usage, all people who transgress dominant conceptions of gender, or at least all who identify themselves as doing so. The definition continues to evolve.

transition: the complex process of authentically living into one's gender identity. It may include changing the physical appearance to be more congruent with the gender or sex a person feels themselves to be, or to be in harmony with their gender expression. Some people who have transitioned no longer consider themselves to be transsexual or transgender and rather identify only as a man or a woman. Others identify as a trans man or a trans woman.

transsexual: in historical usage, having medically and legally changed one's sex, or wishing to do so. Most transsexual people feel a conflict between their gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth. Other labels used by this group are MtF (male-to-female) or trans woman, and FtM (female-to-male) or trans man.

transphobia: negative attitudes toward, and feelings about, transgender individuals or gender variance more broadly; dislike of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to traditional or stereotypic gender roles. Transphobia can incline people to avoid, discriminate against, and use violence against people they know or perceive to be transgender or gender nonconforming. Many transgender people also experience homophobia from people who associate their gender expression with homosexuality.

woman: a person who identifies as a woman.

*Most of these definitions come from "Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity 101,"
a page on the UUA website at www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity.*

A horizontal row of diverse individuals' profiles, from various ethnicities and hair types, set against a background that transitions from a light blue at the top to a vibrant red at the bottom.

IMAGES EDITED AND ILLUSTRATED BY REV. YADI MARTÍNEZ-REYNA