



TRANScending into Liberation

Rachael Ward

Minister and Team Leader, Gender & Sexuality Justice Ministries

“When I say trans, I also mean escape. I mean choice. I mean autonomy. I mean wanting something greater than what you told me. Wanting more possibilities than the one you forced on me.” – Travis Alabanza.

The liberation of trans people would improve the lives of everyone in society. It may seem like a bold statement to make, but when you unearth or lean into the lives of trans siblings and the overlapping intersections of injustice, you will see why Trans justice is justice for all.

The prefix “trans-” means “across” or “beyond,” and across time, trans siblings have existed throughout the world. For example, in North America, many Indigenous nations recognize Two Spirit individuals, such as the aranútiq of the Alutiiq people. Beyond North America, gender expansive siblings include the Fa’afafine of Samoa, the hirjra of India, the sekrata of Madagascar, and the muxes of Mexico. The presence of gender beyond what society considers gender to be (male or female) spans centuries and encompasses ancient Biblical times.

It’s important to start with history, as often our stories and presence in the world can be erased through oppressive force. It is why when I read the book of Daniel, I remain in awe, as the scribes tried to preserve Biblical Hebrew while being forced to write in Aramaic due to who was ruling in that era.

Our stories, our bodies, and our expansiveness = freedom.

So, how does this relate to our collective liberation?

Trans siblings’ personhood spans across every -ism through which societies of power attempt to control and oppress. Gender is omnipresent and is intertwined with many facets of our identities and lives. So, we cannot talk about gender without talking about race, sex, or class.

Trans siblings' personhood spans across every -ism through which societies of power attempt to control and oppress. Gender is omnipresent and is intertwined with many facets of our identities and lives. So, we cannot talk about gender without talking about race, sex, or class.

Because trans siblings' existence across these intersections threatens the power of the oppressor, the attack on trans siblings has been and continues to be unrelenting. And if God created each of us uniquely and wonderfully with desire for our flourishing, then the oppressors' tactics to disembody us through constructs of gender roles, binary control, and all -isms constitutes a direct attack on the Imago Dei that lives and breathes within each of us.

If that reads very bluntly, I mean it.

When we pause to consider this above truth of oppression on our personhoods, then it isn't as widely surprising that in 2023 we saw the highest amount of anti-trans legislation in American history. And it should cause ache that we also continue to see an increase in the loss of trans lives to violence stemming from hateful rhetoric.

This year, [25 trans siblings](#) have lost their lives to violence, and it is critical to note that 88% were people of color and 52% were Black trans women. The reality of the intersection of gender, sex, and race cannot be ignored. Similarly, those who have suffered the most fatal risks caused by the removal of reproductive healthcare access are Black women.

Trans liberation is liberation for all bodies. "Liberation and healing begin with restoring the oppressed's image of themselves as being knit in the image and likeness of God," as Dr. Chaneque Walker-Barnes writes in her book [I Bring The Voices of My People](#).

A way we can begin this work of healing and restoration is by committing to collaboration with trans siblings in the work of justice. And if you are asking questions about where to begin, we ([Gender & Sexuality Justice Ministries](#)) have a tool kit specifically for this journey. It will be published on our [ministry page](#) on November 20th, which is Trans Day of Remembrance. On the 20th, we will host a [TDOR vigil service online and will live-stream it via the UCC YouTube channel](#). We will honor and remember trans saints lost this year—names we know and may never know. I invite you to join us—healing also begins with presence.

May we stay tender enough to listen deeply, act justly, and seek liberation for all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachael Ward (they/them) is the Team Lead & Minister for Gender & Sexuality Justice Ministries for the United Church of Christ. In addition, Rachael Ward is the Executive Director for UCC HIV & AIDS Network (UCAN).

LEARN ucc.org/justice

DONATE ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE bit.ly/witness4justice



The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.