



Guest Opinion: Scripture Teaches Us Identity is Not Static

By The Rev. Dr. Kristopher D. Schondelmeyer

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Dear Representatives Mike Vondran and Ken Croken,

I write to you today as a person of faith deeply concerned about House Study Bill 242 and its harmful implications for transgender individuals in our state. I am a constituent who lives in Rev. Vondran's district, and the church I serve is in Rev. Croken's district. As a Christian and leader of the largest Presbyterian church in the Quad-Cities, and the moderator of the Presbytery of East Iowa, I believe that this bill fails to reflect the justice, love and dignity that God calls us to extend to all people. I urge you to oppose this bill and instead work toward policies that affirm the full humanity and worth of transgender Iowans.

Scripture teaches us that identity is not static; rather, God is in the business of transformation. One of the clearest examples of this is the story of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel after wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22-32). The name and identity given to him at birth was not the name that would ultimately define his identity and destiny. Instead, through struggle, faith, and divine blessing, God revealed a new name and a new soul-identity that more fully reflected who Israel was created to be.

This is not an isolated case in scripture. Time and again, we see God renaming and re-identifying individuals — Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Simon to Peter, Saul to Paul — revealing that the names and identities we are given at birth do not always encompass the fullness of who God is creating us to be. Just as God gave Jacob a new name that better reflected his truth, many transgender people recognize that the name and gender they were assigned at birth do not fully reflect the person God is creating them to be. To deny them the ability to live into their true soul-identity is to reject the sacred and mysterious ways in which God continues to call us into fullness of life.

Furthermore, scripture tells us that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) which does not define gender identity, just the sacredness of each person. And, if

that isn't clear enough, we look to the Apostle Paul who teaches that in Christ, our human categories and divisions do not define us: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NRSVUE). This does not mean that our identities cease to matter, but rather that they are no longer barriers to belonging in God's family. When we affirm and celebrate the true soul-identities of transgender individuals, we participate in God's work of justice, love and inclusion.

House Study Bill 242, by contrast, seeks to exclude, erase and delegitimize the existence of transgender people. Such legislation is not in keeping with the teachings of Christ, who consistently stood with the marginalized, called out legalism that harmed others (Matthew 23:23-24), and commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). To support this bill would be to deny the sacred truth that God sometimes has a different and deeper name and identity for us than the one we were given at birth.

As a person of faith and leader in the community you represent, I urge you to oppose House Study Bill 242 and instead advocate for laws that reflect the inclusive, transformative and liberating love of God. Iowa should be a place where all people — especially those who are most vulnerable — are protected, affirmed, and treated with dignity. I pray that you will consider the theological and moral implications of this bill and choose to stand on the side of justice, compassion, and love.

Please know that I would be happy to speak with you via phone or in person at any time. My concerns are not partisan, they are rooted in my faith. In previous communities where I have served as a pastor, I have worked with leaders across the political divide to support the people that we all serve. And I stand ready to work with you to support the fundamental rights of all people.

The Rev. Dr. Kris Schondelmeyer is a pastor/head of staff of First Presbyterian Church of Davenport holds a doctorate in contextual leadership with a focus in religion and public policy.