

# **A Divine Reflection: Remembering Our Siblings**

**Written for Trans Day of Remembrance, November 20th 2026**

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[1] Beloved siblings in Christ, peace be with you.

[2] We gather tonight in a sanctuary of memory, a space carved out from the noise of the world to honor those whose voices were silenced by the shadows of hate. We are here because love demands we remember. We are here because justice requires we speak.

[3] Transgender kindred are no mere modern innovation. Throughout history, diverse gender expressions have been honored and integrated into the spiritual and social fabric of many ancient and indigenous cultures, even in remote island societies. This is not an abstract concept, but a globally documented reality. In Indigenous North American traditions, Two-Spirit individuals, such as the Navajo *Nádleehí* (naht-lee-hee) or Lakota *Winkte* (WEENK-tay), held revered roles as spiritual leaders, healers, teachers, and mediators long before colonization. In the Pacific, Samoan *fa'afafine* (fah-ah-fah-FEE-neh) have historically been, and continue to be, essential to

their communities, caring for elders and frequently serving as deeply relied-upon leaders within their modern church denominations. Native Hawaiian culture honors the *māhū* (MAH-hoo), individuals of dual male and female spirit who were traditionally valued as healers, namers of children, and keepers of sacred genealogies and hula. Their profound healing legacy is forever etched into the Kapaemāhū (KAH-pah-ay-MAH-hoo) stones on Waikīkī Beach.

[4] Further south in Mexico, the Zapotec revere the *muxe* (MOO-shay), a third gender playing a socially-valued, indispensable role in preserving traditional culture, language, and providing care for their families. In South Asia, the *hijra* (hij-ruh) trace their sacred lineage back thousands of years through Hindu texts, traditionally holding the exclusive spiritual authority to bestow blessings of prosperity at weddings and births. And among the Bugis (BOO-gees) people of Indonesia, society recognizes five distinct genders, relying absolutely on the *bissu* (BEE-soo)—a gender-transcendent class of traditional priests—who possess the unique spiritual capacity to intercede with the divine. This enduring legacy serves as a testament that the diversity of human experience is a profound and ancient part of our global heritage.

[5] Every November 20th, we observe this holy day of mourning, a day etched into the collective soul of those who see their reflection in the names we honor tonight. To be transgender is to know the weight of a world that often refuses to see you.

[6] We know the statistics: the staggering violence, the pervasive systemic exclusion, and the specific, agonizing wounds that come from the house of faith. I know that for many, the

hesitation to stand with our transgender siblings comes from a place of deep, sincere reverence for Scripture. You may ask, "What about Leviticus? What about Romans? Does the Bible not define gender as a rigid, binary gift from God?"

[7] Some read Genesis 1:27 as a fence, creating only two categories. But Hebrew poetry is not a fence; it is an opening. It uses merism—naming two poles to encompass the boundless whole, like "heavens and earth" or "day and night". Just as "day and night" does not reject the existence of dawn and dusk, "male and female" does not reject the holy diversity God wove into the fabric of creation.

[8] When we look at Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, we are looking at the Holiness Code—a body of law designed to separate Israel's cultic life from the surrounding nations. Scholar Saul Olyan has shown us that the Hebrew phrasing here is likely an idiom for specific cultic acts, not a universal moral condemnation of the person. And we must be honest: if we enforce these verses as absolute, eternal law, we must also stone the cattle ranchers who cross-breed their herds, picket Red Lobster for serving shellfish, and enforce the Jubilee debt cancellation every fifty years.

[9] Similarly, Deuteronomy 22:5—the prohibition against wearing the clothes of another gender—is often wielded as a blunt instrument. Yet, historical scholarship reveals this law was likely directed at specific, ritualistic cross-dressing in pagan cults of the ancient Near East, intended to maintain the distinct identity of Israel's worship.

[10] In a modern context, gender-affirming clothing is not a pagan ritual; it is a tool of truth-telling. It is an act of alignment with the spirit God has placed within the vessel of the body. In Deuteronomy 23:1, the law explicitly excludes the eunuch from the assembly of the Lord. But God does not leave them there. In Isaiah 56:3–5, the prophet announces a stunning reversal: "Do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.' For thus says the LORD... I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters." God reverses God's own exclusion. Jesus picks up this thread in Matthew 19:12, honoring those who are "eunuchs from birth."

[11] And in Acts 8:26–40, the Holy Spirit dispatches Philip to the wilderness road to meet a high-ranking Ethiopian court official—a foreigner, a person of color, and a eunuch. The eunuch asks the question that defines our faith: "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" The answer is nothing. Philip baptizes them on the spot. The Spirit tore down the fence Deuteronomy had built, and the church's first Gentile baptism was of a gender-non-conforming African foreigner.

[12] As St. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." When we encounter Romans 1:26-27, we must read it through the lens of first-century Rome, not twenty-first-century identity. Paul's concern here is not the expression of a sincere gender identity or a loving, consensual relationship; rather, he is critiquing the exploitation and excess found within the context of ancient idolatry and Roman cultic patterns. He is speaking of people acting against their own established nature for the sake of lustful

indulgence—a far cry from the courageous journey of transitioning toward one's true self. To use this text to condemn transgender siblings is to ignore the cultural chasm between Paul's world and our own.

[13] Finally, in 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul reminds us that the Body of Christ is not a monolith. He emphasizes that the parts of the body that seem weaker or are treated with less honor are, in fact, "indispensable." The ancient cultures of the world understood this deeply, recognizing that those who transcend the binary often possess a unique, elevated spiritual capacity to bridge human divides and heal their communities.

[14] When the church excludes transgender people, it is not simply a "disagreement" or a "policy choice"—it is a direct, self-inflicted injury to the Body of Christ itself. We are amputating our own members. Without the unique perspective, the hard-won wisdom, and the holy resilience of our trans siblings, the Body is incomplete, scarred, and unable to function as the full presence of Christ in the world.

[15] As Martin Luther taught, the "brilliant light" of the Gospel distinguishes the law from the promise. Christ Himself summarized the whole Law in two commandments: Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. Any reading of Scripture that produces "bad fruit"—that drives our trans children to despair, homelessness, or early graves—is a misreading. We test every verse by the canon within the canon: the radical, sacrificial love of Christ.

[16] When we look at the names we lose each year, we are looking at the desecration of the divine. Every life lost was a unique expression of God's creativity. Tonight, we mourn them with the ferocity they deserved in life. But we must do more than pray. Prayer without action is a silent bell. To truly honor the fallen, we must protect the living. We must flip the tables of discrimination just as Jesus flipped the tables in the temple—not with silent prayers, but with holy outrage and transformative action.

[17] This is the liturgy—the work of the people. It is the arduous task of "repairing the temple." Repairing the temple means advocating for policy changes that protect the vulnerable, and standing as a bulwark for trans people of all ages who are being targeted by unprecedented legislative cruelty. In 2025, over 1,000 anti-transgender bills were considered nationwide, a record-breaking surge that has continued into 2026 with more than 800 bills introduced across 43 states, seeking to block basic healthcare, education, and legal recognition. Today, thousands of transgender youth live in states with laws actively restricting their access to gender-affirming care, sports, and public facilities. This legislation inflicts severe harm, adversely affecting not just transgender individuals, but their families and care providers. We must fearlessly confront this cruelty, alongside the systemic transphobia that has lived in our pews for too long.

[18] If we say we love God, whom we cannot see, while failing to protect our siblings whom we can see, we are not yet walking the path of the Cross. This is not a struggle for the transgender community to bear alone. Their allies, their siblings, need to stand in the gap.

[19] It demands a commitment to radical dignity, intervention against microaggressions, and a persistent defense of transgender humanity in every room you enter. Allies must take concrete, daily actions to ensure trans people can truly *thrive*, not merely survive. This means actively learning and respecting someone's terminology and pronouns, and swiftly intervening when you witness harassment or misgendering. It means continuously educating yourself without expecting transgender people to bear the burden of explaining their existence. To foster a world where trans people flourish, allies must help create change in their workplaces and broader communities, advocating for inclusive policies, safe housing, and equitable healthcare. Remember that being an ally is a sustained and persistent pattern of action; we must back up our visibility with tangible work.

[20] We are Easter people, yet we cannot claim the resurrection while standing idle in the shadow of the tomb. The names we read tonight represent a systemic failure of our collective conscience. Mourning alone is a hollow ritual if it does not fuel a holy resistance. Our responsibility is not merely to witness this injustice, but to actively dismantle the structures of hatred that demand these sacrifices. We are called to a concrete mobilization of faith—to be the hands that physically roll away the stones of legislative cruelty and social exclusion.

[21] Let us leave this sanctuary not with passive sorrow, but with the urgent fire of the Spirit. Do not wait for the list of names to shorten on its own; go forth and force the world to be safer through your unrelenting advocacy and protective presence. We must occupy the spaces of power, confront the architects of discrimination, and build a world where the ferocity of our love

makes hatred impossible. The time for silent prayer has passed; the hour for holy action is here. Let us live so that every trans child of God is not just held in our hearts, but protected by our very lives.

[22] For we are all—each and every one of us—created Imago Dei (ih-MAH-goh day-ee). In the image of God.

[23] Amen.