

Thank you for considering this important topic of conversion therapy.

I write from three significant perspectives:

- father of a trans son
- an author whose book tour last year brought him to 35 cities in Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada and the United States meeting and learning from many individuals, families, and activists.
- A person of faith who has been in church ministry and chaplaincy.

1. Adam

I introduce Adam in a memoir, *Soar, Adam, Soar* (Dundurn Press, 2019). His mother told me he was a boy when she carried Adam in the womb, given how the pregnancy, his position in the womb, was so like her son and not like her two daughters. She and I were surprised but happy to hear the doctor announce we were parents to a “beautiful baby girl”. We named the child Rebecca Adam Prashaw as we had called him, Adam, in the womb. When he was two, the mother was asked how many children she had. She said: “Four. Two girls, a boy, and a wannabee.... A girl who wants to be a boy”. Even at that age, she knew.

Think of Scout in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, or the Tatum O’Neal character, a pitcher in *Bad News Bears*. Adam was a tomboy. He would begin a serious gender journey home to the “boy in the mirror” in his mid-teens. He announced that “I am Adam” when he was 16. He was always Adam. He wanted to align his body to who he was. However, while beginning hormonal treatment, he did not get to gender reassignment surgery because of the epilepsy condition and surgeries that dominated the later teens and early 20s.

Adam taught me, reminded me, of core values. Be who we are. Love who we love. This is what I wanted in my life, what most I know want. What we desire for ourselves, we gift to others. At no time did we as parents impose any other treatment or therapy other than listening, learning and loving. We appreciated the international tests, social workers, and doctors that were integral partners on his gender journey. It is a serious and lengthy process.

2. Author

Transgender is a label but there are the extraordinary individual human beings in the trans community. I met so many on my 2019 tour. Some reminded me very much of my Adam while others had their quite different stories. Some were seeking surgery, some not. Some were quite public in their journey. Some were not. Some changed their names. Some had not decided. I came to appreciate the diversity in this community, the rainbow within the larger Rainbow Pride community. And I heard about the hurts and hate they had endured in their journey home to themselves. And I also witnessed the stereotypes, myths, and ignorance in the general public.

I met separately in two cities two 85-year-old women who told me identical stories of knowing they were in the wrong line at 5 years old when a teacher was dividing the students into boys and girls.

I heard on tour for the trans youth the alarming number of suicides, self-harm, homelessness, and other forms of injury and discrimination.

Every transgender person has their story to tell.

3. Faith

I was a Roman Catholic priest for 11 years. I still am a believer, a man of faith, someone who prays and reads the Bible. I have a great respect for the teaching of Jesus as the exclamation mark on the revelation of God. Jesus did not judge, other than the Pharisees and hypocrites. The Old Testament verses often used to condemn those in the transgender community need to be read in the context of Jesus.

Too many choose to play God and judge, in this case wrongly. Faith is never a license to hate.

I have never once in my heterosexual orientation or marriage and family felt threatened by the differences in others' gender identity or orientation. I have though felt threatened by those who hate and hurt others for religious or political reasons.

It is encouraging to see in some but certainly not all faith communities a welcome for all God's People. When I appeared on CBC Radio Ontario Today, four of the callers with personal or family transgender experiences told stories on positive experiences with faith communities.

I urge you to ban conversion therapy. It is a violation of human rights, an act of violence against all LGBTQ youth. Please speak out explicitly against its use for trans youth who too often are without any protections and in great danger.