



Little Girl, Arise: A Transgender Christian Manifesto

Order of Franciscan Clareans

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By Sister Abigail Hester, OFC

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This book was written as a work of spiritual reflection and theological witness. It incorporates both personal testimony and scholarly interpretation rooted in liberation theology, queer theology, and the Franciscan tradition.

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Preamble

We, the transgender children of God—fearfully and wonderfully made—lift our voices in sacred defiance. In the face of erasure, violence, and religious condemnation, we proclaim: our lives are holy, our identities are God-breathed, and our existence is not a problem to be solved but a revelation to be celebrated.

Rooted in the gospel of radical love, guided by the path of justice walked by Jesus of Nazareth, inspired by the saints and mystics who embraced divine mystery, and standing in the lineage of queer prophets throughout history, we declare this Transgender Christian Manifesto.

Article I: The Image of God Includes Us

We are created *Imago Dei*—in the image of God—not in spite of our transgender identities but through them. The divine is not confined to binary boundaries or biological essentialism. The God who hovered over the waters, who birthed galaxies, who broke every mold to become incarnate in flesh, also delights in our transitions, our transformations, and our truths.

We reject all theologies that weaponize scripture to erase our dignity. We embrace a God who is nonbinary in love, queer in mystery, and liberating in action.

Article II: Jesus Walks with the Marginalized

The Jesus we follow was born among the poor, fled as a refugee, challenged religious elites, healed outsiders, and ate with those the world shunned. This Jesus is our Jesus.

When we are misgendered in pulpits, disowned by families, targeted by politicians, and silenced in sanctuaries, Jesus weeps with us and fights for us. Jesus is found not in the places of comfort, but in the margins—and we are the sacred margins.

We are not outside salvation. We are signs of it.

Article III: Scripture Must Be Interpreted Through Love

We affirm the authority of scripture when it is interpreted through the lens of compassion, justice, and liberation. The so-called "clobber passages" have been used to shame and erase us, but we stand with the Jesus Seminar, Marcus Borg, John Shelby Spong, and the long cloud of witnesses who remind us: context matters, history matters, love matters most.

Let the fruits of the Spirit—not fear, control, or conformity—be the test of true doctrine.

Article IV: The Church Must Repent

The institutional church has participated in the sin of transphobia. Through exclusion, spiritual abuse, and silence in the face of violence, it has betrayed the Gospel. We call the Church to repent, to reform, and to reimagine itself as a refuge for the oppressed.

This is not a request for pity. This is a demand for justice.

We will no longer accept tolerance. We proclaim belonging.

Article V: Our Bodies Are Sacred Sites of Revelation

Our bodies—changing, beautiful, surviving—are testimonies. Whether we bind or tuck, take hormones or don't, change names or reclaim our given ones—every step we take toward authenticity is a step toward resurrection.

Like Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, we too are transfigured, revealing God's glory in unexpected and powerful ways.

Transgender embodiment is a holy liturgy of becoming.

Article VI: Liberation Is Collective

Trans liberation is not separate from the liberation of all people. We stand with Black Lives Matter, Indigenous sovereignty movements, queer youth, sex workers, the undocumented, the disabled, the neurodivergent, the poor, and all who resist empire.

In the spirit of liberation theology and the example of saints like Oscar Romero and Dorothy Day, we declare that there is no salvation without social justice. Our faith must not merely comfort—it must confront.

Article VII: Heaven Has No Gatekeepers

We reject any theology that claims heaven is reserved for the cisgender, the straight, or the "biblically correct." God's grace is abundant, free, and universal. Salvation is not a narrow gate fenced off by patriarchy or purity codes.

In Christ, all are made new. And "all" means *all*.

Article VIII: We Speak with Prophetic Authority

We are not theological mistakes. We are prophets, preachers, healers, and mystics. We are theologians of the in-between, midwives of God's new creation. Like Joseph with his coat of many colors, like the eunuchs who found welcome in Isaiah's vision, like the disciple the world forgets—we are here, and we are not going away.

We demand pulpits, platforms, protections, and power—not in spite of our faith, but because of it.

Conclusion: Rise Up, Beloved

To every transgender Christian who feels unworthy, unseen, or unloved: *you are a miracle*. Your journey is not shameful—it is sanctified. You are not alone. We walk this road together, barefoot like Francis, fierce like Clare, filled with fire like Pentecost.

This is our Gospel. This is our resurrection. Little girl, arise.

PART ONE: The Call to Arise

Chapter One: I Am a Christian, and I Am Transgender

I'm Sister Abigail Hester, and today I come bearing truth, not only about myself, but about the God who calls each of us beloved.

This is my coming out story, yes—but more than that, it's a sacred declaration. I am a Christian, and I am transgender.

There was a time I only whispered those words in small circles—among friends, on Facebook, in private prayer. But now, I speak them boldly, in the pulpit and on the page. I proclaim them not just for myself, but for every transgender soul searching for spiritual shelter in a storm of condemnation. This is not just my story. It's *our* story.

And today, we're going to explore what I believe is the *Christian* perspective on being transgender—not what some fearful preachers shout into microphones, but what the Gospel of Jesus Christ actually teaches us about love, identity, embodiment, and belonging.

Let me be clear from the outset: the Bible does **not** directly address transgender people. That's right—nowhere in its 31,102 verses does the Bible mention transgender identity. And yet, so many have wielded it like a sword against us.

As 2 Timothy 2:15 exhorts, we are to "rightly divide the word of truth." And Richard Hooker, that great Anglican theologian, reminds us: "*Scriptures only settle matters about which it speaks plainly.*"

So what do we do when people build entire doctrines out of silence? Out of misinterpretation? Out of a single verse in Deuteronomy taken wildly out of context?

Let's talk about that verse.

Chapter Two: The Abomination Argument and What It Really Means

Deuteronomy 22:5. It's the one the critics always seem to know by heart:

"A woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all who do so are an abomination unto the Lord your God."

There it is: the word "abomination." Weaponized. Misused. Flung like a theological grenade. But pause with me. Let's take a breath. Let's examine.

Context is everything. We must ask: *Why* was this commandment given?

The Israelite people, newly freed from Egyptian bondage, were forming a society distinct from the pagan nations around them. This verse wasn't written in a vacuum. Scholars—including those from the Westar Institute and Jewish theologians like Tikva Frymer-Kensky—note that the surrounding chapters deal with **idol worship, shrine prostitution**, and purity codes tied to ritual cleanliness.

In Canaanite fertility rituals, cross-gender dressing was sometimes practiced as part of the cult of Ishtar. This verse, then, wasn't about transgender people. It was about preventing Israelites from *imitating pagan religious rites*.

That's not just speculation. Theologians from progressive Christian and Jewish traditions agree: Deuteronomy 22:5 isn't a blanket condemnation of transgender identity. It's a prohibition on ritual cross-dressing for idolatry.

And here's the deeper irony: most of those who cite this verse ignore everything else in that very same chapter—like not wearing mixed fabrics (v.11), stoning a woman for not being a virgin on her wedding night (v.20-21), or returning your neighbor's lost ox (v.1). Why are *those* verses ignored, but *this one* elevated?

Jesus himself gives us the interpretive key.

Chapter Three: What Jesus Actually Said

In **Mark 7:14–15, 18–19**, Jesus says:

“Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

The Gospel even adds:

“In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.”

Now think about that. If what we eat doesn't affect our spiritual state, then why would what we wear?

In **1 Samuel 16:7**, God says to the prophet Samuel:

“The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

God does not care about fabric. God cares about the soul.

And what do we know about transgender people? We are not trying to deceive. We are trying to live truthfully. We are aligning our inner lives with our outer expression. We are choosing authenticity over survival. And sometimes, that choice saves our lives.

Jesus never once condemned gender diversity. He did, however, condemn hypocrisy. He condemned those who used religion to exclude others from the table.

Chapter Four: The Soul Over the Shell

Now let's talk about the soul.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 reminds us:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you...? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

As a transgender woman, I glorify God not in spite of my transition, but *through* it.

You see, the transgender journey is fundamentally spiritual. It's about discerning the truth of our being—who God created us to be—and then aligning our lives with that sacred reality.

In **Matthew 5:29–30**, Jesus says:

“If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off... for it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

Harsh? Maybe. But the message is clear: don't let the temporary get in the way of the eternal.

Trans people face a sacred dilemma: body versus soul. But Scripture tells us again and again—when in conflict, we save the soul. The body will pass away. The soul endures.

So yes, I transitioned. Because my soul was suffocating. And I believe, with every fiber of my being, that God met me in that place—not with condemnation, but with a *name*.

Chapter Five: God Gave Me a New Name

I'll never forget the night it came to me.

I was in tears, alone in my room, pleading with God. “Am I sinning? Am I deceiving myself? Is there any place for me in your kingdom?”

And then I dreamed. A dream so vivid I still feel it in my bones.

I heard the name: *Abigail*.

I didn't know what it meant. I had to look it up later. And when I did, I wept.

Abigail means “The Father is rejoicing.”

In a moment when I felt rejected, I received a name of joy. When I felt condemned, I received a name of blessing. When I felt unworthy, I received a name of *belovedness*.

This is the kind of God we serve. A God who renames. A God who reclaims. A God who restores.

Chapter Six: Reading Scripture with Trans Eyes

To read the Bible as a transgender Christian is to know both exile and exodus. It is to carry wounds that sting when scripture is used as a weapon—and yet, to still come close to the fire of God's Word, longing for warmth and truth.

Many of us know what it's like to open the Bible, trembling, wondering: "Will this book condemn me—or will it save me?"

The good news is: *Scripture can become a liberating companion, not a jailer.*

Let me introduce a liberating way of reading the Bible—through what Marcus Borg called "**historical-metaphorical interpretation.**" Instead of obsessing over literalism, we ask: What did this text mean then? And what does it mean now for those on the margins?

Queer theologians like Patrick Cheng, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Peterson Toscano remind us that the Bible is full of *gender-bending, boundary-breaking* stories when we open our eyes. Consider:

- **Joseph** of Genesis, adorned in a "princess dress" (the Hebrew term *ketonet passim* implies a long tunic, a garment of femininity and royalty).
- The **eunuchs**, gender-nonconforming people, in Isaiah 56 and Acts 8, who are explicitly welcomed by God and baptized into the faith.
- **Jesus** himself, breaking gender norms by weeping in public, washing feet, and offering maternal imagery: "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..." (Luke 13:34).

We must begin to read *queerly*. To read with questions. To read with yearning. To ask not, "What rules must I follow?" but "Where is God in the margins? Who is the outsider that God is calling beloved?"

The Bible does not need to be thrown out. It needs to be *read again*—with the eyes of those who've been crushed by it.

The Word became flesh, and the flesh it became was scandalous.

Chapter Seven: The Gospel of Tabitha—Little Girl, Arise

There's a moment in the Gospels that undoes me every time I read it.

Mark 5:41:

"Taking her by the hand, Jesus said to her, 'Talitha cumi,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'"

This, to me, is the transgender gospel. It is the divine call to live again after the world has declared us dead.

Let me tell you about my own "Talitha cumi" moment.

There was a season when the Church told me I could not be both trans and Christian. That I had to choose. But in the quiet, after all the noise had faded, I heard the voice of Christ—not thundering from the heavens, but whispering through my soul:

"Little girl, arise."

Jesus didn't just raise Tabitha from the dead. He called her *daughter*. He affirmed her identity. And he *spoke it aloud*.

You see, when Christ calls us by name—when God names us "Abigail"—we are resurrected into our truest selves.

Francis of Assisi, too, had a Talitha moment. He renounced his father's expectations, stripped himself of the garments of wealth and masculinity, and stepped naked into the embrace of Lady Poverty. He was reborn—not as Giovanni the merchant's son—but as *Francis*, lover of God and brother to all creation.

This is the heart of trans faith. Death to false self. Rebirth to true self. The tomb becomes a womb.

Talitha cumi. Arise.

Chapter Eight: Transgender Theology and the Franciscan Spirit

The Order of Franciscan Clareans exists to carry a radical gospel: one of humility, joy, simplicity, and solidarity with the marginalized. Our spirituality is incarnational—embodied, earthy, and rooted in the belief that all creation sings God's glory, from the leper to the lamb.

And so, it is no accident that transgender Christians find a home here.

The Franciscan spirit is inherently *transgressive*—it crosses boundaries. Francis crossed class lines to kiss the leper. Clare crossed gender norms to lead a monastic movement. Both rejected the violent masculinity of empire in favor of vulnerable love.

Transgender theology, too, is boundary-breaking.

It declares that *spirit can take precedence over flesh*, that *the soul has a voice*, and that *God is not limited to binaries*.

Richard Rohr, OFM, reminds us that “the naked now”—the place of contemplative awareness—is where we encounter God beyond dualism. Gender variance, then, is not a problem to solve but a gift to honor. Trans people live outside the lie of “either/or,” revealing the deeper “both/and” of divine mystery.

Our transitions are sacred acts. They are *incarnational*. Like Jesus taking on flesh, we too embody truth in form. And when the Church joins us, not in condemnation, but in celebration, the Body of Christ becomes whole.

Let us remember the words of Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And let us say, with Saint Francis: “*What we are before God, that we are and nothing more.*”

Chapter Nine: Responding to the Clobber Passages

They’re known in queer Christian circles as the *clobber passages*—those handful of Bible verses used time and again to justify rejection, shame, and exclusion.

But Scripture is not a weapon. It is a witness to love, liberation, and the God who welcomes the outcast.

In this chapter, we’ll examine each of the most common verses cited against LGBTQIA+ people—especially transgender individuals—and offer not only theological clarity but a breath of fresh spiritual air.

Let’s rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), with the help of queer theologians, liberation scholars, and the wisdom of the Franciscan Clarean tradition.

1. Deuteronomy 22:5 – The Clothes and the Condemnation?

“A woman shall not wear a man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.”

This is the only verse some try to stretch to apply to transgender identity. But as we explored earlier, this law addresses **pagan ritual practices**, not gender identity. Scholars such as Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and resources from the Westar Institute, note that this verse sits among dozens of ancient purity codes—many of which we no longer observe (such as wearing mixed fabrics or stoning rebellious children).

Also note: **transgender people aren't cross-dressing**. We are dressing in accordance with our gender identity. We are not deceiving—we are living truthfully. God sees the heart, not the hemline.

2. Genesis 1:27 – Male and Female, Period?

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Conservatives use this verse to argue that there are only two genders. But Genesis isn't a science textbook—it's a **poetic creation myth**. Just as God created “day and night,” but we know dawn and dusk exist too, “male and female” are not limits—they're **poles of a spectrum**.

Moreover, the Hebrew term *adam* is non-gendered until later in the story. God breathes into *adam*, the earthling, a living soul. The first human being is *beyond binary*.

Trans people, intersex people, nonbinary people—we are not mistakes. We are part of the *imago Dei*, the image of God, beautifully diverse.

3. Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13 – An Abomination?

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

This law, part of the ancient Holiness Code, has often been misapplied to LGBTQIA+ people. But “abomination” (*to'ebah*) was a term used for ritual impurity—often related to **pagan worship** or **temple practices**, not universal ethics.

As John Shelby Spong and others have noted, this was never meant to be a permanent moral law for all time. It appears alongside other prohibitions we no longer keep: no eating shellfish, no mixing fabrics, no trimming beards.

Moreover, these verses don't apply to transgender people or same-gender *relationships*—only a specific act in a specific cultural context. The Bible is **silent** on loving, committed queer partnerships.

And Jesus? Never said a word about it.

4. Romans 1:26–27 – “Against Nature”?

“Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones... Men committed shameful acts with other men...”

This passage, often cited by anti-LGBTQIA+ voices, describes a cultural critique of **idolatry and exploitation**. Paul is railing against excesses in Roman society—not consenting same-sex relationships or transgender identity.

Queer theologians like Mona West and Beverly Harrison remind us: what’s “natural” depends on how one was created. For a transgender woman, loving a man *is* natural. For a nonbinary person, wearing makeup or trousers isn’t “against” their nature—it’s *faithful* to it.

Paul also uses the term “unnatural” (*para physin*) elsewhere to describe **God’s actions**—like grafting Gentiles into the covenant (Romans 11:24). Clearly, “unnatural” isn’t always bad.

5. 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 – Will Homosexuals Not Inherit the Kingdom?

“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral... nor men who have sex with men... will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Let’s look at the Greek. The words translated here are “**malakoi**” (soft, effeminate) and “**arsenokoitai**” (a compound word Paul likely coined). These terms are *not* clear modern equivalents for LGBTQIA+ people.

Many scholars, including those in the Jesus Seminar, argue that these terms may refer to abusive practices—such as pederasty or exploitative sex—not mutual relationships or gender identity.

And remember, the point of the passage is about **injustice**, not identity. The kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit—not to those who get every term on a purity checklist “right.”

6. 1 Timothy 1:9–10 – Sound Doctrine?

“...the law is for the lawless... for those who kill their parents, for the sexually immoral, for practicing homosexuality...”

Again, we find the word *arsenokoitai*. And again, its exact meaning is debated. It does not refer to transgender people. And it certainly does not refer to loving, consensual queer relationships.

The broader passage critiques exploitation, abuse, and lawlessness—not people seeking love and truth.

Let Us Be Clear:

The Bible does **not** condemn transgender people.

The Bible does **not** condemn LGBTQIA+ people.

The Bible condemns **injustice**—oppression, exploitation, and the misuse of religion to harm others.

To my trans siblings reading this: *You are not an abomination. You are beloved.*

And to our cisgender allies: *Join us in reclaiming the Word from those who've used it to harm.*

Chapter Ten: Your Questions, My Heart

In my ministry, I receive questions from transgender Christians—and from their parents, their pastors, their partners. Here are just a few. And with each, my heart responds as a sister, a nun, a theologian, and a friend.

“Can I be transgender and still be Christian?”

Yes. You are *already* made in the image of God. Transitioning is not a betrayal of that image—it’s a fulfillment of it. God honors our journey toward wholeness.

“What if my church rejects me?”

Jesus was rejected too. You are in good company. But know this: there are churches, orders, and communities—like the Franciscan Clareans—that will embrace you as you are. Find your people. They are out there.

“Is transitioning a sin?”

No. Living authentically is *not* sinful. Living in denial of who God created you to be—that’s what kills the soul. Transitioning, when rooted in prayer and truth, can be a sacred act of discipleship.

“Why did God make me like this?”

Because the world needs your light. Because gender diversity reflects divine creativity. Because your testimony will set others free.

PART TWO: Living Boldly as Transgender Christians

Chapter Eleven: The Gift of Trans Embodiment

To be transgender is not a curse.

It is not a flaw.

It is not a punishment.

It is a *gift*—a rare and holy gift of embodiment, vulnerability, and revelation.

Trans embodiment reveals the truth that our bodies are not static. They are alive. They are becoming. They are not prisons for the soul—they are **partners in transformation**.

Francis of Assisi called his own body *Brother Ass*. He recognized the body's burdens but also its capacity for devotion. Clare of Assisi, on the other hand, sought to live so closely with Christ's suffering that her body bore witness to divine love through fasting, prayer, and simplicity. For both saints, the body was neither idolized nor despised—it was *consecrated*.

In a similar way, transgender people live intimately with the tension between flesh and spirit. Hormones, surgeries, voice lessons, changing wardrobes—all these are forms of liturgy. Each choice becomes a **prayer for authenticity**, a hope for congruence between inner truth and outer life.

To live in a trans body is to live *awake*—to know that the body is never just a shell, but a sacred text in motion.

Chapter Twelve: Trans Saints and Hidden Stories in the Bible

Transgender people have always existed. We just haven't always been *named*.

Let's recover a few sacred stories from the Scriptures and Christian history that speak to gender-expansive lives:

1. The Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:26–40

A gender-nonconforming person from Africa is the **first Gentile convert to Christianity** in the Book of Acts. Philip baptizes this seeker without hesitation. There are no questions about genitals, identity, or roles. There is just the Spirit, saying, “Go, join this chariot.”

This is one of the clearest affirmations of transgender inclusion in the early church.

2. Sarah the Eunuch Martyr – 4th Century

In the *Acts of St. Eugenia*, Sarah is described as a devout Christian who lived in gendered ambiguity while serving the Church and resisting sexual violence. While apocryphal, this story was preserved in the Christian imagination as a testament to God's love for gender-diverse people.

3. Jesus Himself

Think about this: Jesus was born of a woman, but not from sexual intercourse with a man. His body, his birth, his resurrection—**none of them conform to biological norms**. In fact, some mystics saw Jesus as bearing both masculine and feminine qualities. Julian of Norwich even called Christ our *Mother*.

Jesus subverted gender expectations at every turn. He wept, nursed the wounded, washed feet, told stories, and invited intimacy and softness into a patriarchal world.

4. Galatians 3:28

“There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This is not a flattening of identity—it’s a lifting of all into sacred equality. In the Body of Christ, gender is not erased—it is **transfigured**.

Chapter Thirteen: Spiritual Disciplines for Transgender Believers

How do we cultivate a deep and abiding spiritual life as transgender Christians?

Let me offer some practices I’ve found life-giving:

1. Daily Affirmation Prayer

“I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
My identity is a reflection of divine creativity.
My body is a temple. My soul is eternal.
I walk in love, because God is love.”

Begin your day not with fear, but with affirmation. Say it aloud. Say it until it becomes the soundtrack of your life.

2. Gender-Affirming Liturgy

Try rewriting traditional prayers in a way that reflects your journey. For example:

“Our Parent, who art beyond gender,
Hallowed be thy names—Healer, Mother, Brother, Spirit...”

Make room in your worship for your pronouns, your becoming, your tears, your defiance, your joy.

3. Trans Body Blessing

Stand before a mirror—naked, or clothed as you wish—and speak words of blessing:

“This chest, beloved. These hands, sacred.
This voice, evolving. This face, divine.
I bless this body and all it carries.”

4. Community and Communion

Find queer spiritual community. Share Eucharist with other exiles. Gather around truth and bread and wine.

As the Rule of St. Clare teaches: *“Let us gaze upon the mirror of the Cross, and see ourselves transformed.”*

Chapter Fourteen: Founding the Franciscan Clareans – A Community of Belonging

Out of my own exile and resurrection, I felt called to create a **spiritual home**. That vision became the **Order of Franciscan Clareans (OFC)**.

We are a community rooted in:

- The radical hospitality of Francis
- The contemplative resistance of Clare
- The liberating Gospel of Christ
- The fierce beauty of queer embodiment

Our vows are simple, but profound:

- **Live Simply** – resisting consumerism and empire
- **Love Boldly** – affirming all bodies, all genders, all people
- **Belong Deeply** – creating a home for the exiled and rejected

We pray with our feet. We worship with our laughter. We preach in eyeliner and sandals and scars.

The OFC exists for everyone the Church left behind. You are welcome here. You are safe here. You are seen here.

Chapter Fifteen: Liturgies, Prayers, and Rituals for Trans Life

Let us end this section with some sacred words for sacred moments:

A Prayer for the Beginning of Transition

Holy Spirit, Midwife of New Life,
Walk with me as I begin this sacred journey.
May each step I take toward authenticity
Be a step into your love.

A Prayer After Gender-Affirming Surgery

Christ, Wounded Healer,
I thank you for this resurrection.
As I heal, may I remember that
You, too, bore scars—and still rose.
I am becoming. I am beloved.

A Litany for Transgender Day of Remembrance

For every name erased,
We speak them aloud.
For every body brutalized,
We hold vigil.
For every soul rejected,
We proclaim: You are holy.
God of justice, make us dangerous in our love.

PART THREE: A Church for All Genders

Chapter Sixteen: A New Pentecost—Welcoming the Spirit of Gender Diversity

The day of Pentecost was not about conformity. It was about **diversity**.

Acts 2 tells us the Spirit came as wind and fire, resting on **all** people, enabling them to speak in every language and be understood. It was chaos to some, miracle to others. But most of all, it was **liberation**.

In the same way, the Church must embrace a new Pentecost—a fresh outpouring of the Spirit that honors the many tongues, pronouns, names, bodies, and identities of God's beloved people.

God is not threatened by gender diversity.
God *created* it.

To welcome transgender Christians isn't "compromise." It is Pentecost. It is the Church returning to its roots as a movement of radical inclusion.

Let the wind blow. Let the fire fall. Let the Church be born again.

Chapter Seventeen: Becoming the Church We Need

The Church has long failed transgender people. But the Church can be *reborn*.

Here are concrete ways congregations can move toward affirming trans inclusion:

1. Do the theological work.

Study queer theology, liberation theology, and transgender experiences. Host workshops. Read books like *Transforming* by Austen Hartke or *Outside the Lines* by Mihee Kim-Kort.

2. Use affirming language.

Update liturgies and sermons to reflect inclusive theology. Use gender-neutral or expanded God-language. Avoid binary assumptions in language about family, roles, or identity.

3. Honor chosen names and pronouns.

Treat someone's name and pronouns as sacred. They are acts of spiritual becoming. To affirm them is to affirm the presence of God in that person.

4. Create rituals for trans experiences.

Bless transitions. Mourn name changes. Celebrate new birthdays. Anoint healing scars. The Church should show up for trans bodies *in love*.

5. Be public about your welcome.

Don't be quietly affirming. Be visibly welcoming. Add signage, statements, websites, and banners. Be a refuge in the storm.

Chapter Eighteen: A Franciscan Clarean Church for the Margins

The Order of Franciscan Clareans envisions a **church without walls**—a place where:

- Poverty of spirit meets richness of love
- Simplicity meets sacred complexity
- Wounds become altars

- The leper, the eunuch, the outcast, the exiled—all *find home*

We do not build empires. We build *communities of joy and justice*.

We do not ask people to fit in. We ask: *How can we celebrate who you truly are?*

We do not fear the body. We *bless* it.

Let our churches be filled with drag queens and denim, with hormones and hallelujahs, with queer joy and Franciscan humility.

Let the stones the builders rejected become the cornerstone.

STUDY GUIDE: Discussion and Reflection

This guide is designed for individuals or groups reading *Little Girl, Arise* together.

Week 1: Naming the Truth

- Read Chapters 1–5
- Discussion: When did you first encounter trans identity in a spiritual context?
- Reflection: What does it mean to be called by a new name?

Week 2: Reclaiming the Bible

- Read Chapters 6–10
- Discussion: Which clobber passage had the biggest impact on your faith?
- Practice: Rewrite one of those passages in your own words with new understanding.

Week 3: Embodied Faith

- Read Chapters 11–13
- Discussion: How do you relate to your own body as a site of holiness?
- Practice: Try one of the “trans body blessings” this week.

Week 4: Building Beloved Community

- Read Chapters 14–18
- Discussion: What does a church for all genders look like in your context?
- Practice: Create a welcome statement or prayer for transgender inclusion at your church.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

- **Transgender** – A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Nonbinary** – A gender identity outside the male/female binary.
- **Queer Theology** – A theological approach centering LGBTQIA+ lives and sacredness.
- **Franciscan Clarean Spirituality** – A way of following Christ through the lens of Saint Francis and Saint Clare: simplicity, joy, embodiment, and radical love.
- **Deadname** – A birth name no longer in use by a transgender person. Using it can be harmful.
- **Chosen Family** – A network of support and love often formed in place of or alongside biological families.

Appendix B: Recommended Reading

Theology & Scripture

- *The Bible With and Without Jesus* – John Dominic Crossan & Amy-Jill Levine
- *Resurrecting Jesus* – Dale C. Allison Jr.
- *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* – Austen Hartke
- *UnClopper* – Colby Martin
- *God and the Gay Christian* – Matthew Vines

Franciscan & Spirituality

- *The Essential Writings of St. Francis* – ed. Jon Sweeney
- *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love* – Ilia Delio
- *The Universal Christ* – Richard Rohr

Trans Lives

- *Transgender History* – Susan Stryker
- *Redefining Realness* – Janet Mock

- *Gender Outlaw* – Kate Bornstein

Appendix C: Transgender-Affirming Ministries & Resources

- Q Christian Fellowship (qchristian.org)
- The Trevor Project (thetrevorproject.org)
- Westar Institute (westarinstitute.org)
- Transmission Ministry Collective (transmissionministry.com)
- The Order of Franciscan Clareans (franciscanclareans.blogspot.com)

CLOSING BENEDICTION AND CALL TO ACTION

Beloved, Arise.

Arise from shame.

Arise from exile.

Arise from every lie that said you were not made in the image of God.

The Christ who called Tabitha back to life speaks your name today.

Little girl, arise. Little boy, arise. Beloved sibling, arise.

You are not an abomination.

You are not too late.

You are not too much.

You are the glory of God walking in skin.

You are a sermon in eyeliner.

You are a cathedral in transition.

So go, and preach good news.

Go, and create communities of welcome.

Go, and take back the Bible from those who twisted it.

And if the church doors close—

Then *build a monastery in the margins*.

For the kin-dom of God belongs to such as these.

Amen.

About the Author

Sister Abigail Hester, OFC is a transgender Christian nun, theologian, and founder of the **Order of Franciscan Clareans**—a new monastic community devoted to love, justice, and belonging. Rooted in queer theology, liberation theology, and Franciscan spirituality, her ministry affirms the sacred worth of all gender-diverse people. She writes and preaches to reclaim the Gospel as radically inclusive, joyfully embodied, and fiercely liberating. Find more at franciscanclareans.blogspot.com.

