

Lutheran Family Service presents

Male And Female He Created Them

Creation And Identity

Purpose:

Lutheran Family Service walks with the hurting, confused, discouraged, and broken. Through their counseling, teaching, caring, and advocacy, LFS teachers and caregivers confess Christ as they bring Scripture to bear in all things. In this series – Male and Female He Created Them: Creation and Identity – Pastor Jonathan Conner and Mrs. Cassie Beltz (LMHC) address the issue of identity from a Lutheran perspective (incorporating the simple and profound truths confessed in the catechism), giving special attention to the question of gender identity (its provenance, prevalence, and promulgation), as they equip hearers to respond to its false claims and then to appreciate and celebrate God’s gift of identity in creation.

Problem:

- Our culture offers a rival story/liturgy to the story/liturgy of identity recorded in Scripture.
- Many Christians don’t understand the cultural ideas that are leading many to struggle with (gender) identity nor the rival liturgies the culture uses to (mis)order man’s loves and desires.
- These rival liturgies (that are largely sexualized in nature) are leading adolescents and adults into increasing rates of gender confusion.
- Parents are largely unaware of these rival liturgies (pushed in academia, social media, popular culture, and more) and are often caught unaware when their child expresses gender confused ideas.
- In such situations, parents lack a place of care and support that is grounded in Scripture and the created order that will help them align their thinking and words with God’s good, created reality.
- Pastors struggle to appreciate the ideas leading to gender confusion and to offer a positive confession of God’s good created order.

- Pastors may be uncertain about how to address (gender) identity with congregation members in a way that is simple, Biblical, and clear.
- Congregations may have difficulty understanding parents of the gender confused or individuals who struggle with gender confusion.
- Lutheran School staff (teachers, principals) are faced with many of these same challenges as they seek to teach children clear, Biblical, truths contained in the scriptures.
- Individuals who struggle with gender identity often struggle to find mental health counseling that is not “gender-affirming,” but rather offers compassionate care rooted in the Gospel of Christ.
- Christian parents and family members of individuals who struggle with their gender identity often suffer great shame and hurt. They have difficulty with understanding why this is happening to their child and how they can show their child Christ’s love and forgiveness during their struggles.

Project Goals:

- Equip pastors to better understand (gender) identity to better confess Christ and His good creation (and new creation in Baptism!) to their congregation.
- Help lay people grow in their knowledge and understanding of God’s good words about their identity (in creation and Baptism) so that they are firmly grounded in truth and their identity as male or female in Christ and ready to confess it to neighbors, friends, and family.
- Provide direction for congregations so that they may become places and people where God’s truth (as revealed in creation and Scripture) is spoken in love to the gender confused so that they might be meaningfully connected to the body of Christ and joyfully receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation with His church.
- Help equip educators/administrators in our Lutheran schools to better understand (gender) identity in order to confess to their students the liberating truth of our creation as male and female and new creation in Baptism.
- Educate and equip parents with Biblical and catechetical language as they seek to cultivate in their children a Christian identity that is rooted in creation and their Baptism into Christ.
- Offer creation-affirming care and support to parents with children who struggle with gender confusion.
- Offer creation-affirming clinical care to individuals and families who are affected by transgender ideology.

Project Tools:

- Webinars
- Educational Presentations (see attached list for topics)
- Conferences (see attached list for topics)
- On-line parent support groups

- Specialized clinical team of mental health counselors for individuals & families
- Consultation for pastors and/or church workers
- Consultation for principals and educators.

Presenters:

- Pastor Jonathan Conner
 - Pastor Conner graduated from Concordia Seminary St. Louis in 2004. After spending 6 years in northwest Iowa, he was called to Zion Lutheran in Manning, Iowa, in 2010. He and his wife Rebecca have six children. Along with the vocations of husband, father, and pastor, Pastor Conner is a contributor and speaker for Lutheran Family Service in the areas of mental health, godly living, and parenting. He is a regular guest on the podcast Issues, Etc., currently in the multi-part series Kids Have Questions.
- Cassie Beltz, LMHC
 - Cassie is a master's-level prepared and experienced mental health counselor. She serves clients in-person in Oskaloosa, Iowa, and throughout the state of Iowa via telehealth/distance counseling. She started her counseling career in Missouri in 2007, working with children and adolescents. She began working with Lutheran Family Service in Iowa in 2011. Cassie works primarily with individuals that are struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma, and gender identity concerns.

Project Format Options:

- One day conference format
 - Includes a pastoral presentation time, student, and parent presentation with option of teacher presentation as well
- Church presentations
 - Offered on a Sunday with viewing of Pastor Conner's presentations via webinar recording prior to the Sunday presentation
- School presentations
 - Includes educator presentations as well as assembly presentation for students
- District-wide services
 - Includes educational presentations that focus on furthering pastoral formation regarding the topic of Christian identity as well as mental health presentations that help pastors better understand the mental health struggles of gender confused individuals
 - Access to specialized team of mental health providers that are trained in gender identity confusion
 - Access to free consultation with mental health professionals trained in gender identity confusion
 - Access to free online parent support group for parents who have children that struggle with their gender identity
 - Access to free online trainings pertaining to the topic of gender identity confusion

All presentations can be formatted to best fit the needs of the host(s).

Presentation Topics:

The Gift Of Identity with Pastor Jonathan Conner

Identity: Is it something we invent, something we discover deep within ourselves, or is it something God gifts to us? The world, in neglecting God's created order (what God has called good), places the crushing burden of identity on us – we must define ourselves, a definition that has been hemmed in by the sexualized alphabet (LGBTQ+) of our day. Scripture, in celebrating what God has called good in creation and what He has redeemed through the waters of Baptism, liberates us from the burden of self-definition and frees us to embrace who God has made us and redeemed us to be. We get to celebrate the gift of identity! In this session, Pastor Conner enables hearers to appreciate and celebrate what God has called good, the gift of identity, and the liberty such extra nos (from outside us) identity brings. (Audience: pastors, educators, parents, parishioners)

Cultivating The Christian Identity with Pastor Jonathan Conner

What is the human creature? The world claims (through its liturgies in media, curricula, literature, and more) that humans are sexual beings, i.e. that expressing our sexual desires and identities is the key to human flourishing. Scripture teaches that our desires have been disordered by sin and that humans are not sexual beings, but worshiping creatures, creatures who will worship an ultimate. Sex/sexuality is not and cannot be that ultimate. Jesus is. In this session Pastor Conner helps us see the subtle (and not so subtle) liturgies of the world that try to (mis)order our desires as he then helps us appreciate and treasure liturgy in Christian worship that rightly orders our desires toward our true ultimate (what he calls our "true north") thereby beginning the process of cultivating the Christian identity. (Audience: pastors, educators, parents, parishioners)

Rescuing Identity From Sexuality with Pastor Jonathan Conner

Incarcerated and with little to do, Christopher Yuan started to read the Bible... a lot. He was looking for support for his sexualized identity as a man who identified as gay. He didn't find it. Neither did He find the lightning-flinging God some had made God out to be. What he found was Jesus, the God who died for his sins and rose for his life... and called him to a life of holiness. This holy call liberated Christopher from the sexualized identity he had so firmly embraced (and from the belief that God demanded desire change to be saved). Through his story, along with others, Pastor Conner offers a message of rescue and hope for those who have believed the lie of the sexualized self being pedaled by our culture as he helps hearers find their identity not in any of the sexualized labels of our age (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, or heterosexual), but in their Baptism as male or female into Christ, a God-gifted identity that transcends them all. (Audience: pastors, educators, parents, parishioners)

Culture And Identity with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

Culture tries to tell us much about our identity. In this presentation, you will be able to understand the history of the gender identity movement and its current impact on the cultural idea of gender identity. This presentation will also examine the current conceptualization of gender identity and the factors that have led to a significant increase in the number of individuals that struggle with gender identity confusion. (Audience: pastors, educators, parents, parishioners)

Mental Health Treatment Of The Gender Confused Individual with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

Treatment for those who struggle with their gender identity can be a confusing topic. Parents, caregivers, pastors, and educators may not know the best course for helping those who struggle with this issue. This presentation seeks to offer some helpful guidance as we seek to offer Christian love and mental health treatment to those who struggle with gender identity confusion. (Audience: pastors, educators, parents, parishioners)

Listening For Understanding with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

Being able to effectively communicate our care and concern for our neighbor is an important part of our life together as Christians, however, this does not come easy to some (dare I say all) of us. This presentation will help us to understand communication and give us a framework to better communicate with others, particularly those who struggle with mental health concerns. (Audience: pastors, educators, parents, parishioners)

Gender Identity And Developmental Stages with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

This presentation will focus on understanding children's development of their identity as they progress through each stage of psychosocial development. Attention will also be given to various identity problems that can arise as children progress through these stages of development. (Audience: educators, parents)

Implementing A Christian Identity Curriculum in The Younger Years with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

How do we effectively talk to our younger children about topics that seem so deep and complicated for them? We may be afraid to say the wrong thing, so remain silent on topics that are hugely impactful on all our lives. This presentation seeks to offer tools and guidance to help educators and parents begin these important discussions with children. A Lutheran Family Service curriculum will be shared as well as strategies for implementation. (Audience: teachers, parents)

Parenting Adult Children Who Struggle With Gender Identity with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

Specific attention will be given to parents that have an adult child who struggles with gender identity confusion. Parents will begin to learn how to establish a relationship with their children that allows for connection with their children yet maintains healthy boundaries. Parents will hear about some of the struggles they may encounter as they seek to maintain a relationship with their adult children. (Audience: parents of gender confused children)

Families And The Gender Confused with Cassie Beltz, LMHC

Families that have a member who is gender confused often struggle to understand what is happening with the gender confused individual and within their families. They struggle through a variety of emotions and often feel alone and ashamed. This presentation seeks to help families maintain their familial bonds and connections and meet the needs of the individuals in the family as they navigate this new dynamic in the familial system. Attention will also be given to some ways the church can support families of the gender confused. (Audience: pastors, families of gender confused children)