

June 20, 2021

Hello all,

After conversation with church leaders, my husband, and my God, among others, I have decided that now is the time to announce that I am a transgender person. My name is Emily Catherine Cooke. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I identify as being female.

I am sure this comes as a surprise, and this is the first step in a journey we will have to take together. I also understand that you will have many questions. I am willing to answer some of them, while remaining respectful of the boundaries between minister and congregant. To be clear, I will not disclose personal medical information, discuss matters relating to any specific part of the body, or discuss anything that would violate another person's privacy (for instance, what my husband thinks of this). I will answer questions about being transgender in a general way, for the sake of education and understanding and I am always willing to talk about being transgender as it relates to our faith, spirituality, and theology.

In short, I believe that the God who has searched me and known me, who made me in my mother's womb, loves me this way and lifts up this part of myself. I will admit I don't fully understand it myself, so I can't expect you to, but all I know is what I feel, and I feel this is right. This is who I am, I cannot deny it, and I cannot imagine faithfully serving God while being untrue to my own self. So here I stand; I can do no other.

What I am asking from you is simply to refer to me by my name and to use feminine pronouns (she/her/hers) when referring to me in the third person, and to avoid referring to me as male or with masculine pronouns or my previous name. You have my permission to inform those who you think might need or want to know this information. If you have any questions as to how to do so respectfully, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Ultimately, what I want to say is this: God asks us to love, first and foremost. Even if we don't understand, our job as Christians is to love. I intend to continue preaching that simple message, proclaiming the simple gospel that God is love, no matter our gender identity, sexuality, race, age, religion, class, or ability. I intend to proclaim the same gospel of justice and of Christ's radical inclusion as I always have. I intend to do so while being true to myself so that you can be true to yourselves.

"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)

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Cooke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline.

Rev. Emily C. Cooke