



March 6, 2017

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of inclusion and equity in our community. I am glad to join with colleagues from many Hamilton faith communities to express support for the Protocol for Gender Identity and Gender Expression; Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons.

I support the protocol as a resident of Hamilton, where I want to see human rights enacted for all of my neighbours. I want to see us lift up the rights of those who have been most vulnerable to society's misunderstandings. My trans and gender non-conforming neighbours and friends are too often misunderstood, too often harassed for being true to who they are, and too often victims of violence, including high rates of suicide.

I support the protocol as a Christian who believes that the world was created in rich diversity and that our Creator celebrates when humanity learns how to overcome dividing walls between ourselves. I believe that Jesus calls me to love my neighbour, and it's as simple and as challenging as that.

I support the protocol as the pastor of Hamilton Mennonite Church. Our congregation has committed to this statement: "As followers of Jesus in the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition, we believe that all people have been created in the image of God. We are called around one table in celebration of our unity in Christ within our diversity of age, race, ethnicity, ability, marital status, economic status, religious background, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression." As a community, we are seeking to live this out as an expression of our vision of sharing God's grace and living Christ's peace.

I support the protocol as a person who is always learning, and I am grateful that my city is also open to being on that learning journey, listening to the voices of those who have been marginalized, and seeking to be transformed into an even stronger and more compassionate community.

Thank you.

Reverend Alissa Bender

To be presented as part of a delegation at the March 6 meeting of the Audit, Finance & Administration Committee