Meeting Report Lab 3: Engaging with Conversations about Gender Identity - October 8, 2026

Overview

Jo Haaijer gave church leaders a 20–25 minute talk, followed by a panel discussion with six participants, on how to respond faithfully when gender questions become personal. The core claim: following Jesus means bringing the whole self under his lordship, and the church's task is to listen well and walk alongside people, not only to hold the right position.

Key messages

The talk followed one movement: created by God, embodied by design, living with brokenness, surrendered to Jesus, walking together in discipleship.

- **Created and embodied.** Every person bears God's image (Genesis 1:27), and bodies are part of the good creation, not disposable packaging.
- **Real brokenness.** Creation groans (Romans 8), so distress and struggle are real and never to be mocked or dismissed.
- **Surrender is universal.** Romans 12:1–2 applies to every Christian, who surrenders feelings, desires and ambitions to Jesus. It is not a special rule for transgender young people.
- **The goal is Christlikeness.** Not stereotypical masculinity or femininity, as the single fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 shows.

Guidance for leaders and parents

Leaders were asked to get curious before answering, because the first statement a young person makes often hides a more manageable conversation.

- **Separate experience from interpretation.** Take the experience seriously without automatically accepting every interpretation of it.
- **Ask, don't react.** For example: "When you say you don't feel like a girl, can you help me understand what being a girl means to you?"
- **Help parents slow down.** Fear creates urgency. Four first responses: thank them, reassure them, get curious, slow down. No labels yet.
- **Parents need to surrender too.** That means fear, the urge to control the outcome, and the need to fix everything in one evening.

What kind of church are we becoming?

The talk used the picture of a wide-open door and a narrow road. The door welcomes complicated lives and unfinished stories; the road is surrender to Jesus, which none of us

defines on our own terms. The aspiration is a church where truth is clear, conversations are safe, and everyone is invited into surrendered discipleship.

Leaders were urged to prepare before a crisis arrives: confidentiality and parents, pronouns, groups, camps, baptism, membership, leadership and safeguarding.

Panel discussion and next steps

Six participants agreed on listening first and holding conviction and love together. Points raised in the discussion on 8 October 2026:

- **Questions for a disclosing child:** when did this start, what happened, what did you feel. Explore influences such as abuse, puberty, bullying and social media stereotypes, and avoid instant affirmation or irreversible medical steps.
- **Labels:** point people to the Creator rather than a label. Support non-stereotypical interests (boys dancing, girls playing football) without identity overreach.
- **Language:** "sin" is hard to use because people do not experience their feelings as sin. Use sensitive wording and the four first responses: thank, reassure, get curious, slow down.
- **Context matters:** intersex conditions add nuance, and shame-based or pastor-centric cultures (Bulgaria, Albania) complicate openness.