

# *Blessed Be Their Name*

A roleplaying game about rituals to celebrate new names written by Aer van de Water

## **Introduction**

Imagine being celebrated by your religion, rather than judged and ignored. Imagine being blessed rather than cursed. Imagine your community affirming and supporting your transition, the changing of your name, the revelation of your gender, rather than having to go it alone. Ceremonies and rituals to bless and celebrate new names are a growing phenomenon in inclusive religious communities. In *Blessed Be Their Name*, a group collaborates to create such a ritual for themselves. Players of all genders are welcome.

## **Game information**

Size – 5-12 players, 1-3 GMs (organisers) included.

Duration – in one 3-4 hour sitting or in 5 short sessions. The time that passes in-story is 4 weeks.

Location – meetings as a group over video chat, e.g. Zoom, or in a meeting room, individual reflection away from screen or spread around the room.

Tone – discuss if this game will be dark and serious or lighthearted.

Recommended safety techniques - open door, lines and veils.

Check for consent -

- May cisgender players be transgender or nonbinary characters?
- What level of transphobia and other discrimination may be present and addressed in game, especially if the optional “skeptical elder” NPC is present?

## **Setting the scene**

Choose, adapt or create a scenario.

**A. Therapy** - You are a transgender and nonbinary support group that spends a month preparing to celebrate your names, facilitated by a guesting religious leader (the GM).

**B. Training** - You signed up for 5-part (inter)national online training on naming ceremonies and rituals, hosted by an (inter)faith organisation, led by a trainer who may have a more or less religious background (the GM).

**C. Queer theology** - You are members of the same church or temple, you meet 4 times with your religious leader (the GM) in preparation for the naming ceremony you are organising together. See Appendix A for a sample script for the ritual.

**D. Spiritual care** - You are candidates for the interfaith name celebration organised by your gender-affirming healthcare center or LGBTQ+ center, with a guesting chaplain, of any religion, as a discussion leader (the GM).

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### *Before the game*

Each player chooses one or more character prompts. Multiple characters can choose the same prompt. Everyone answers the following questions individually. The GM checks with transgender and nonbinary players whether cisgender players can play transgender characters - invite them to reply by private message.

### *Character prompts:*

**(GM)** Affirming religious leader or trainer: you recently did an LGBTQ+ awareness training. You got excited when you heard there's religious rituals for transgender people when they change their name! You'd like to make this happen but this is new to you, so the meetings are set up so that you mostly facilitate and hopefully everyone can learn together.

**(co-GM, optional NPC)** You're a skeptical elder who knows little about LGBTQ+ issues and hasn't really met a transgender person before, and you will ask critical questions during meetings. Discuss with the group beforehand whether this person is transphobic, "gender-critical", just-reads-urban-legends-online, comfortably ignorant, politely tolerant or curious.

**(co-GM, optional NPC)** You're a veteran LGBTQ+ activist or ally. You remember Stonewall, you remember the AIDS crisis, you remember fighting for same-sex marriage. You'll gather these fuzzy, brave little chicks under your grey-speckled (gay) wings.

#### *1. Transgender or nonbinary characters:*

- (a) You went to court to change your name legally. Time for a party.
- (b) You've secretly chosen a name and plan to invite and tell everyone at once. Gender reveal!
- (c) After using your current name with friends for a few months, you're now making it as official as you can without changing your legal papers.
- (d) You're keeping your name, actually, but you have transitioned, maybe changed your gender marker on your papers, and would like to celebrate and bless that.
- (e) You have chosen additional name(s) to honour the fullness of your gender (expression), as e.g. bigender or genderfluid person. You would like to celebrate and bless that.
- (f) You transitioned and changed your name many years ago and have successfully stealthed as just another man or woman. Now that the world seems a little kinder, you'd like to come out as transgender.

#### *2. Characters of any gender:*

- (g) You're freshly divorced and you've taken up your original family name.
- (h) You've recently changed your name to reflect your dedication to your (new) religion.
- (i) You have shed your English name and seek to celebrate and bless the name that celebrates your heritage.
- (j) This name came to you in a dream and you feel led to adopt it.
- (k) You hate the name your parents or guardians gave you, so you changed it.
- (l) You can't marry into your polycule, but you've changed your name as a sign that you belong together.
- (m) You never went through your religion's coming-of-age ritual with your current name.
- (n) To mark a dramatic shift in identity or a letting go of fitting into society, you are changing your name.
- (o) You and your best friend adopted matching names to mark that you're adopting each other as family-of-choice.

### *Character creation questions:*

You are playing in a fictional scenario. You are encouraged to use your imagination when you create your character's background. Do not share personal facts unless you are comfortable doing so. Treat any character information you receive during the game as background. After the game, share your own character's story as you wish and treat others' stories as private unless you receive explicit consent to discuss it outside of the game.

- What are your name(s) and pronouns?
- Who in your life already knows about your name change that you will invite to the ritual?
- To whom or to what community will you be coming out? What is your personal audience?
- What is your religion, if any, and your relationship with that religion?
  - Does a name-blessing ritual exist within your religion? Is it gender affirming?
  - Does a coming-of-age ritual exist that serve as inspiration for your naming ceremony? Do you wish to combine your name-blessing with that ritual?
- Do you have a story, text, quote, poem or other text that makes you feel good or that inspired or encouraged you regarding your name or gender? Do you wish to share it?
- Do you have a song, hymn, melody, symbol, object that inspired or reflects your name? Do you wish to use it?
- What is, for you, the purpose of the naming ceremony or ritual – changing your name as a member of an organisation; celebrating your name with a community; an occasion to come out to one or more people; marking a milestone; sanctifying your name; asking for a god(dess)' or higher power's blessing of your transition or life change?
- Do you have a particular poem, wish or prayer in mind for your dedication or blessing?
- What is your 'hell yeah!' moment, your victory in this name change? How does your name make you feel at peace, balanced or in harmony with yourself, others or the world? How does your name contribute to your gender congruence? How does your name give you (gender) euphoria?
- What annoys you the most when it comes to your name, e.g. it gets mispronounced, having to call the customer services of many organisations, etc. Will this ritual help with that?
- What is still hard or risky about your name change? What is the shame or doubt that might make you say no to seeking to go public with your name? Who gives you a hard time? What are you still working on in therapy?

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## *During the game*

After players settle on their character, the game consists of 5 “meetings” on a video chat platform such as Zoom or in-person meetings. In-between, players step away from their screens or spread out in the meeting room for in-character midnight reflections. You all have some trouble sleeping. The game can be played in 5 weekly meetings or in one afternoon with a break between meetings 3 and 4.

## *Your overall agenda:*

In scenario A or B, the purpose of the meeting is to support each person to formulate a satisfying basic outline for their naming ritual, which they share in the last meeting. In scenario C or D, the group chooses 1-2 ideas shared in meetings 2-4 and you make a basic outline for the ritual in meeting 5.

- (1) *Meeting (20–30 min)* : The group comes together to introduce themselves to each other or to the guest speaker, and shares the story behind the new name they wish to celebrate and what religious or spiritual background they are coming from, if any.  
*Reflection at midnight (10–15 min)*: After the meeting, you can’t sleep... in chat or on paper, you write a private encouraging note to 2 group members who made an impression on you.
- (2) *Meeting (20–30 min)* : Everyone brings the encouraging text (story, quote, poem) that inspired or reflects their name or that they have in mind for their naming ritual to the group meeting and shares how they wish to celebrate their new name, considering their religious background.  
*Reflection at midnight (10–15 min)*: After the meeting, you can’t sleep... re-read the text you just shared. Look at or handle the symbol you will share next, or listen to the song you will share. Thus encouraged, remember the name-related annoyance you may be able to remedy by coming out with your name to your community.
- (3) *Meeting (20–30 min)* : Share the music and symbols you would like to feature in their naming ceremony. Discuss the annoyance you hope will seem easier after your naming ceremony.  
*Reflection at midnight (10–15 min)*: After the meeting, you can’t sleep... Take a walk or do some stretches. Shake the annoyance from your body. Be still for a moment to remember what doubt or shame or negative person might stop you from celebrating your new name.
- (4) *Meeting (20–30 min)* : When asked what blessing they seek, everyone shares what doubt or shame they wrestle with, for which they seek community support and spiritual support through this ritual. Based on that, choose or write a personal or communal blessing.  
*Reflection at midnight (10–15 min)*: After the meeting, you can’t sleep... Open your underwear drawer. Find the pretty bra, brand-new binder, lucky superman boxers or other items you will secretly wear during the ritual that will help you feel good about yourself. Do it mentally and make a note if you’re not at home.
- (5) *Meeting and epilogue (20–30 min)* : Put it all together! In scenario A or B, you’re organising the naming ritual together. Put the texts, symbols or music and blessing(s) in a shared document. The leader will narrate the ritual, cheer or boo as it unfolds. Afterwards, each player introduces themselves by their player name and character name and shares their character’s reaction. In scenario C or D, each of you has your own naming ritual. Take turns to share your player name, character name and narrate how the ritual went for you!

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## *Conclusion*

Much of this material exists by the grace of transgender and cisgender friends and acquaintances who generously shared the stories behind their new names. The premise of this game is inspired by the writing and advocating of transgender and nonbinary advocates in the United States and Holland, who fight every day for acceptance and visibility within their religions. As I write this, I hope and pray that I will soon be allowed to legally change my name and gender marker on my own recognisance.

## *Appendix A: sample script for a naming ritual*

Many of the transgender people and other people who performed a ritual to celebrate and confirm their change of name designed their own religious or spiritual ritual. Some religions use their coming-of-age ritual as the basis for celebrating a transgender person coming out or transitioning legally. For example, a reformed Jewish transgender woman may go through her Bat Mitzva. Some affirming - i.e. queer-friendly - organised religions, such as liturgical protestant christians, have a naming ceremony based on and considered a sequel to their coming-of age ritual: baptism or confirmation. As a member of this last category, I wish to offer you the liturgy - the script - written for members of my denomination, the Episcopal church, who wish to celebrate their name change, as an example of how such a ritual looks.

### **A Service of Renaming, from the Book of Occasional Services:**

*When an event or experience leads a baptized person to take or to be given a new name, the following may be used to mark this transition in the parish community. It is expected that the presider or someone appointed by the presider has prepared the candidate for this rite through spiritual conversation and theological reflection.*

*This new beginning is distinct from the new life begun in Holy Baptism, which conveys regeneration and the responsibilities of Christian discipleship. The rite can be used on its own or in place of the Word of God during a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is particularly commended for use on a major feast day or any of the following occasions: Advent 3 (Gaudete); Holy Name (Jan. 1); Presentation in the Temple (Feb. 2); The Last Sunday After the Epiphany (Transfiguration Sunday); The Feast of the Transfiguration (Aug. 6).*

*Throughout the rite, the pronouns “they,” “their,” and “them” are used, with corresponding verb forms. These pronouns should be adapted to the preference of the person receiving or claiming the new name, with appropriate adjustment to the accompanying verbs.*

### **Opening Acclamation**

Presider: Blessed be the God of Sarai revealed as Sarah, Jacob who became Israel, and Simon called Peter.

People: Blessed be the God who comes among us, reconciles us, and sets us free.

### **Song of Praise**

*A song of praise or the Gloria in excelsis is sung; in Advent and Lent, the Kyrie or Trisagion is used instead.*

### **Collect (a type of prayer)**

*The Collect of the Day, or the following*

Presider: Blessed are you, God of growth and discovery; yours is the inspiration that has altered and changed our lives; yours is the power that has brought us to new dangers and opportunities. Set us, your new creation, to walk through this new world, watching and learning, loving and trusting, until your kingdom comes. Amen.

### **Readings (from the holy book)**

*The service continues with the readings appointed for the day, readings from the list below, or other scriptural passages suitable to the occasion. If the rite takes place in the context of the Eucharist, a reading from the gospel is always included.*

- *Genesis 17:1-7, 15-17 - God changes the name of Sarai to Sarah*
- *Genesis 32: 22-31 - Jacob wrestles at Peniel, becomes Israel*
- *Exodus 3:1-15 - Moses is called to serve the God named I AM*
- *Isaiah 42:1-9 - "Here is my servant whom I uphold"*
- *Isaiah 43:1-7 - "I have called you by name, you are mine"*
- *Isaiah 56: 1-8 - "I will give them an everlasting name"*
- *Psalms 8 - How majestic is God's name*
- *Psalms 23 - The Lord is my Shepherd*
- *Psalms 40 - "[God] put a new song in my mouth"*
- *Psalms 96 - "Sing to the Lord a new song"*
- *2 Corinthians 3:17-18 - We are transformed from glory to glory*
- *2 Corinthians 5:14-21 - In Christ, there is a new creation*
- *Galatians 3:27-28 - In Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek...*
- *Philippians 2:9-13 - Christ's name above all names*
- *1 John 3:1-2 -What we will be has not yet been revealed*
- *Revelation 21:1-6 - 'See, I am making all things new'*
- *Matthew 16:13-19 - "You are Peter"*
- *Matthew 17:1-9 - The Transfiguration*
- *Luke 2:15-21 - The naming of Jesus*
- *John 20:11-18 - The risen Lord calls Mary by name*
- *John 20: 19-29 - blessed are those who have not seen but believe*

### **Reflections (if a regular person speaks) or Sermon (if clergy leads)**

*The candidate may be prepared to offer brief reflections here in place of a Sermon. Depending on the occasion, it may be appropriate to invite others to speak.*

*On Sundays and other Major Feasts, the Nicene Creed follows the sermon, all standing.*

### **Prayers of the People (anything you want to say to God)**

*Prayers of the People or a Litany created for the occasion are offered, according to the directions at page 359 in the Book of Common Prayer.*

### **Rite of Renaming (the actual ritual)**

Presider: Hear the invitation of God: From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh; even though we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:16-20)

*The Presider turns to the candidate, asking,*

How do you respond to God's invitation?

Candidate: I am a new creation, grateful to embody Christ's image.

Presider: We are here to affirm the name of N. This name expresses who N. is and who they are becoming, through the grace of God. We honor the name given to them by their parents and acknowledge that the time has come to declare a new name. We honor the name they have chosen, and acknowledge those loved ones who have made holy space for a new name to be spoken. This new name is the culmination of a journey of discovery and, at the same time, a new beginning.

*Turning to the gathered community, the Presider asks,*

Will you do all in your power to assist N. to embody Christ's message of reconciliation?

People: We will.

Presider: Will you honor N. in name and in spirit as they continue on their path?

People: We will.

Presider: Dynamic and holy God, we remember how you changed the names of Abraham and Sarah, as they set out to follow you. We marvel that you changed the name of Jacob, after a long night of wrestling with you. We recall our ancestors in the faith who were given new names as their vocations to serve you were revealed. We now declare publicly and affirm the name you have bestowed upon N.

*All lay hands upon the head of the candidate, or upon the shoulders of those around the candidate.*

N., receive the blessing of God, the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Walk in the Spirit, this day and always, knowing that God has made an everlasting covenant with you that shall never be cut off. Amen.

Presider: Jesus said, 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' (Luke 10:20)

People: Amen. Alleluia.

*The Presider concludes with one of the following collects:*

Holy One of blessing, you created us in your image and pronounced us good. We give you thanks for the gift of life itself. We thank you for our individual names, which connect us to the One who spoke all creation into being. We rejoice in our shared calling to the ministry of reconciliation.

God of transformations, you set us free to change and grow, even while you hold us close in love and grace. Send us forth to love and serve you, in Christ's holy Name. Amen.

### **Sources Consulted and/or Adapted for the Service of Renaming**

Justin Tanis, *Trans-gendered: Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 189-193.

Changes: *Prayers and Services Honoring Rites of Passage* (Church Publishing, 2007), 47-49.

A New Zealand Prayer Book (Harper One, 4th edition, 1997), 475