

Good Morning.

I think most of you know me. I'm Marci Bowers, MD. I addressed this group once previously, speaking then on vegetarianism. I had one member come to me after I spoke, very inspired by what I had to say, only to tell me several months later, that he had tried vegetarianism and had gained 30 pounds. Given that I am talking about the hospital work that I do, I hope this time around no one tries transsexualism.

As you know, I accepted the reins from Dr. Biber in July 2003. I had the honor of working side by side with Dr. Biber for 6 months prior to that....and in so doing, learned a great deal from Doc. That said, I was quite accomplished myself prior to coming to Trinidad, though in a more low key manner, working as a gyn surgeon and obstetrician in Seattle for some 17 years. I was well known there but not to the degree that I am now or anywhere near the legacy that Dr. Biber had established. Many people have asked me over the years, why I have remained in Trinidad?....In fact, it is almost a question asked more often than anything regarding my surgeries. The answer to that question though is a series of answers really and they all begin with Dr. Biber. Maybe I am a bit nostalgic. The fact that transsexual surgery is here at all is a tribute to the trust he was able to establish with the community here....if Doc said this was right....when he'd operated on half the town.... (and it is), then it must be so. It is also a tribute to the foresight that he possessed as well. That may take time for all to see as the message slowly trickles out....resisted by many but obvious to those of us who provide this care. You might remember Mr. Keith from a few years ago, quoting scripture in sounding Ezekiel's trumpet to call for the 'coalition of the willing' to drive me and transsexual surgery from Trinidad. But, as I understand it, Mr. Keith was an outsider, had little respect for the history of this town and the respect that Dr. Biber had gained and, most importantly, had never set foot in the hospital, spoken to the patients or even to the staff who cared for these patients.

One of the most surprising aspects of my own professional career and personal life is that my spiritual life and relationship with God are hugely important to me. Without boring you, I'll share just a couple of my insights into the how's and why's of what we do here. Many people think of medicine as strictly science but, anyone who has practiced obstetrics will tell you, there is something inherently spiritual about birth and those who provide that care, if you can allow yourself to be guided by what lies above,

will find an exhilarating connection to humanity, God and what life is all about. It isn't something that can be proven, it just is.....and, in a way, that defines Faith. IN 1997, I delivered the first baby in the US western time zone; exactly as the clock struck midnight.....was that chance? I don't believe so. And without question, it guides me. You'll remember that Dr. Biber was actually studying to be a Rabbi before going into medicine. One of my many regrets about him passing prematurely was that we never had a discussion about faith.....mostly it was, "Ah, just relax, kid". And in a way, with those simple words, maybe he and I connected more than can be explained or reasoned. I passed around a composite of he and my father who share an uncanny resemblance.....and he and my mother share a birthday, May 4. But for someone who has delivered 2-something thousand babies, performed nearly 500 male-to-female gender operations, seen more naked bottoms than any porn star ever borne, wow, what a perspective on life!

So anyway, back to Mr. Keith and those who, not listening to God or to Faith, use scripture to judge and extend their own bigotry, I love to refer to the Bible and quote, "there but for the Grace of God go I". Because, before all of us judge, imagine yourself to be in the place of a person who says, "I have felt myself to be different all of my life, not to be male but to feel myself to be female" secretly hiding, knowing how difficult, how horrifying and lonely, gender transition can be, how almost everything one knows can be lost or taken away, through no fault of their own, by a decision to live as the sex society says I am not".

One day, shortly after I had taken over from Dr. Biber, a very, very well-dressed woman came into my office, obviously an out-of-towner, came in with her androgynous-looking son and explained that her son was transgendered and would need my help someday. I explained the process of transition, that it is not something she or her husband had done as a parent, that a person cannot 'catch' gender dysphoria, that it is clearly something biological but that psychological support is used because the transition process can be so damaging to a person's self of assurance and that support is needed. Later in the conversation, she informed me that her husband was a very, very conservative Republican congressman from Colorado Springs. He couldn't be at the meeting but believes he would have wanted to have been there because...as difficult as it has been for him to understand what the son was going

through.....he dearly loved his son and only wanted him to be happy.....and thank God you are here. I think it was at that moment that I truly knew that I was truly doing God's work.

I'll just say one more thing about transsexualism in perhaps offering another way to understand why it is a part of the human genome and why, as a maturing world, that it is important that we offer this service as the world catches up with Trinidad. By the way, I say that because we had a TV producer and director out here a month ago, looking at Trinidad as a TV venue.....who said in unison, we come from LA and, LA is progressive, but Trinidad is 20 years ahead of us in terms of tolerance....and I thought that to be a very nice compliment. I've often said, "if not Trinidad, where? For we are a bit of a world microcosm, a societal experiment and template for the future....of tolerance and universal acceptance of everyone and anyone....and that is very, very hopeful if the world is to ever find peace. Anyway, my point was, imagine as young adults, we lined up for gender assignment (gender, by the way, is what our internal makeup says we are....above the shoulders) versus sex, which is genitalia only....imagine that, instead of assigning gender based upon genitalia, we assigned gender based upon another measure, arbitrary, let's say height.....so if you say, anyone above 5'8", you're a man and anyone below 5'8", you're a woman.....that is the way gender feels to transsexuals. Basing gender upon genitalia ignores the internal feelings of females who believe themselves to be male-gendered and males who believe themselves to be female-gendered....and it's been there for these people, almost variably, since birth and the numbers are almost equal. What exactly does that say about us as human beings? We are complex, just like the rest of nature.

One more thought in looking at the world....and this one brings me to the edge a bit. I think leaders of the past and present truly believe that they are guided to do the right thing....some invoke God as inspiration, in fact. But in looking at the world, I think there are two fundamentally opposite positions that leaders continue to take. The first, and sadly most common, is a view of the world as imperfect but that manifest destiny can determine which elements are imperfect, and eliminate those. Hitlerian thought, I call it. Hitler saw the disabled, the handicapped, the frail, as imperfect and his answer was genocide. The problem is that whose judgment reigns supreme because Hitler also judged that gays, transsexuals, slaves, gypsies and Jews were also

imperfect and that pretty much summarizes WWII. So either we put up fences and borders to keep undesirable people out....or we kill them in their own backyard. The opposite view, the view that Jesus held, God's view, I believe, was that there is no one perfect, that we are all sinners, that all people hold value to world, however minimal, that good and evil are often largely a function of societal privilege and circumstance, and that unconditional love is the only view that God sustains, understanding of one another rather than mistrust of one another. It is a very easy position to take, that all people have value, and let God pass judgment. And *that* is what is called *Faith*.

And finally....I appeared on The Tyra Banks Show last month. The show will air in May. They are holding the shows as one of their best of the year, for Sweeps week. There is a website, Tyrashow.com that will post the date of the airing in late April. I think all of you know the national reputation that Trinidad has earned and I hope that you see this as positively as the media does. Yes, at first, it was a bit of gawking and amazement.....I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been 20 years ago, for Trinidad to accept....but I think it is a very good thing. As other small towns, less unique, struggle to survive, vulnerable to the winds of change and the decline of natural resources (compare to Raton or Walsenburg) or whims of society.....Trinidad, meanwhile is prospering once again. Kim Pacheco told me the other day that the money that comes into town here makes approximately 9 turns....so that is a good thing, I think. And, as someone else told me here in town....."Trinidad has always been a frontier town....it is cutting edge, as it was during the 1880's when this town was carved by determination, out of rock and stone, by some incredibly brave people, many of whose descendents still live and work in Trinidad. And I think, though you might not know me and may not have even gotten to know Dr. Biber, one thing you can say with certainty about us both, is that we too were courageous people.and that it is courage that has always driven the world's future.

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