

## REFERRED OVERTURES – 2016

### **NO. 1 – PRESBYTERY OF PARIS**

#### **Re: Revising appointment protocols for associate secretaries**

(Referred to Assembly Council, p. 2.1.28–29)

WHEREAS, the position of the General Secretary of the Life and Mission Agency is one of the most responsible and important staff appointments in The Presbyterian Church in Canada requiring the confirmation of the nominee by the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, in recent times this vacancy has been filled only by persons who are currently associate secretaries of the Life and Mission Agency; and

WHEREAS, the appointment of associate secretaries are not reviewed nor confirmed by the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, such recent practice has in effect rendered the hiring and confirmation of the General Secretary to be limited to only those who are associate secretaries;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Paris humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to instruct the appropriate agency to revise hiring protocols for the Life and Mission Agency so that the appointment of associate secretaries are confirmed by the General Assembly or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

### **NO. 2 – PRESBYTERY OF WINNIPEG**

#### **Re: Timeline regarding overtures relating to human sexuality**

(Referred to Assembly Council, in consultation with the Clerks of Assembly, p. 2.1.29–31, 7.1.12)

WHEREAS, there is uncertainty and anxiety in The Presbyterian Church in Canada about the present conversation regarding sexual orientation and the inclusion of LGBTQ persons who are in active sexual relationships among the ordained leadership of the church; and

WHEREAS, there are voices on social media and in traditional social contexts saying that a decision will be made at the 2016 General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, there are voices saying that the year 2015–2016 is a year of prayer and discernment and “a study and report process” will follow this year of prayer and discernment; and

WHEREAS, still other voices have suggested other processes and timelines are at work; and

WHEREAS, this lack of clarity about the timeline and the process adds to the anxiety and creates an environment that nurtures speculation and rumour which hampers the ability to have this important conversation;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Winnipeg humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to provide the church with a clear timeline so Canadian Presbyterians can know when decisions will be made, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

### **NO. 3 – PRESBYTERY OF WINNIPEG**

#### **Re: Barrier Act and an individual’s dissent**

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, p. 7.1.6)

WHEREAS, the church affirms “Any member of a court who has voted on a question and is not satisfied with the decision is entitled to have his/her dissent recorded. By so doing he/she relieves himself/herself from responsibility for the decision and saves himself/herself from censure on account of it.” (Book of Forms section 91); and

WHEREAS, the church’s procedure for approving “law or rule relative to matters of doctrine, discipline, government or worship” includes the following, “If a majority of the presbyteries of the church replying to a remit sent down under the Barrier Act, as specified in section 293.1, express their approval and this majority of presbyteries constitute an actual majority of ministers, members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries, and elders on the constituent rolls of the presbyteries, the Assembly may pass such proposed law or rule into a standing law of the church.” (Book of Forms section 293.4); and

WHEREAS, this means that a member of a presbytery who dissents against their presbytery’s approval of a remit under the Barrier Act is counted as “expressing their approval” when it comes to determining if “an actual majority” were in favour, and

WHEREAS, to dissent against an action and then be counted as being in favour of it appears to violate the common sense understanding of what dissent means, similarly to have one’s presbytery vote against a remit and to then dissent from that decision to then be counted as opposed violates the common sense understanding of what dissent means;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Winnipeg humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to change the approval procedure for remits under the Barrier Act so that those individuals who dissent from approving a

remit are not counted as being in favour when a determination is made of “an actual majority”, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

**NO. 4 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW’S, MONCTON, NEW BRUNSWICK**

**Re: A policy for a congregation leaving the denomination**

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, in consultation with Trustee Board, Assembly Council and Pension and Benefits Board, p. 7.1.2–5, 2.1.28)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to struggle with issues surrounding human sexuality; and  
WHEREAS, polarization of the denomination appears to be increasingly entrenched around related issues which inform the positions of the polarities on the issue of human sexuality and other issues with The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly in the coming years will in all likelihood be making some decisions around human sexuality which will make it increasingly uncomfortable for some parts of the polarities with The Presbyterian Church in Canada regardless of whatever directions are taken by General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has established a precedent of sorts in the Lachine, Quebec situation historically, where a congregation chose to leave the denomination around issues relating to the issue of human sexuality, and were initially able to lease their buildings, and then within a couple of years were able to keep their building at a nominal cost for ‘pastoral reasons’; and

WHEREAS, the reputation of Christ and his kingdom would be enhanced if churches were permitted to leave the denomination in a gracious manner rather than through acrimonious and expensive legal battles; and

WHEREAS, the focus of congregations needs to be on the mission of Christ and his kingdom rather than to be consumed with denominational in-fighting; and

WHEREAS, it is probable that numerous congregations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada may seek to leave the denomination regardless of whatever decisions may be made by General Assembly in 2016 and the following years;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew’s, Moncton, New Brunswick, humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to establish a policy of gracious dismissal from The Presbyterian Church in Canada of dissenting churches from the majority decision, as those congregations in integrity may be unable to continue within The Presbyterian Church in Canada in good conscience, as a result of decisions made by General Assembly with respect to human sexuality; allowing congregations to leave the denomination without due encumbrances, with their buildings, endowments and assets intact, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted with disapproval by the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

**NO. 5 – SESSION OF BETHEL, RIVERVIEW, NEW BRUNSWICK**

**Re: A policy for a congregation leaving the denomination**

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, in consultation with Trustee Board, Assembly Council and Pension and Benefits Board, p. 7.1.2–5, 2.1.28)

WHEREAS, the section on human sexuality in Social Action Handbook documents The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s consideration of issues around human sexuality as beginning in 1964 producing statements and study guides in 1987, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2015; and

WHEREAS, within The Presbyterian Church in Canada the ongoing discussions are contributing to an ever increasing polarization of opinion that is opening chasms amongst us rather than drawing us together at a time in our history when focused effort is so very necessary; and

WHEREAS, the climate of the society in which The Presbyterian Church in Canada is presently immersed in does not allow for or tolerate genuine, sincere and loving discussions that take seriously all the starting points of discussion to be found within The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, the 2012 General Assembly passed a motion that Assembly go on record as ‘giving priority to the reimagining and renewal of our congregations’ and that the 2014 General Assembly passed an additional motion ‘to remember, reaffirm and carry forward the strong statement made by the 2012 General Assembly re the importance of local congregations’; and

WHEREAS, this ongoing discussion could prove to be one that for many congregations in The Presbyterian Church in Canada will be damaging and fractious and diverting of our efforts towards the renewal and reimagining of our congregations as it could be for the denomination itself considering the history of such discussions in some of our sister denominations;

THEREFORE, the Session of Bethel Church, Riverview, New Brunswick, humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to establish a policy of gracious dismissal from The Presbyterian Church in Canada of churches dissenting from this conversation; allowing congregations to leave the denomination without due encumbrances, with their buildings, endowments and assets intact, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

**NO. 6 – PRESBYTERY OF SEAWAY-GLENGARRY**

**Re: Revise SASH Policy when complainant is minister in a congregation**

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee (Ministry and Church Vocations) p. 12.1.46–47)

- WHEREAS, ministers of Word and sacraments, diaconal ministers, presbytery appointed lay missionaries, and certified candidates for ministry or ordination, in their roles as church leaders and moderators of the lower court, play a vital role in the life and work of the session; they are involved actively in the whole congregation and bring to the session a deep understanding of the word of God, the needs of the congregation, and the mission of the larger church; and during session meetings, the moderator needs to be free to join in the conversations, while being careful to guard against unduly directing it; and
- WHEREAS, our church leaders due to their positions of leadership within the church, are often put on a pedestal by members of their congregation, including ruling elders, members, adherents, volunteers, salaried employees and members of non-church groups utilizing the church facilities; and
- WHEREAS, sometimes members of the congregation who are impressionable, lonely, gender biased, or have sociopathic traits can become fixated on their church leader, which can manifest itself in romantic attachments, inappropriate sexual comments or behaviour, or attempting to exert sexual control by making false statements about their church leader to others, or by stalking; and
- WHEREAS, our church leaders have a human right to expect that when targeted with unwanted sexual contact, sexual attention, stalking, or when their work is being undermined by false statements made by a perpetrating member of their congregation, the presbytery will receive their complaint, help to identify the problem(s), help to ensure proper boundaries can be maintained, and provide them with pastoral care when dealing with sexual abuse or sexual harassment; and
- WHEREAS, under both federal and provincial human rights legislation The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in its role as the employer of our church leaders, has a legal duty to take steps to prevent and respond to sexual abuse or sexual harassment in the workplace; and
- WHEREAS, sexual abuse and/or sexual harassment cases, involving a church leader/moderator complaining against a member of their congregation, can bring their interests, obligations, or commitments into conflict with the interests, obligations or commitments of their session, thus making these cases especially difficult and delicate; and
- WHEREAS, the current Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment unfairly identifies our church leaders solely as potential perpetrators in all sexual abuse and sexual harassment cases, and fails to fairly and justly provide procedures for synods, presbyteries and sessions to deal with such difficult and delicate cases involving a “complainant” church leader/moderator solely accountable to the presbytery and a “complainee” congregant solely accountable to the session; and
- WHEREAS, the current Policy The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment forces the lower court (session) to receive, investigate and prosecute all complaints that fall under their jurisdiction and fails to address the difficult and delicate circumstances where a church leader/moderator is the “complainant” against a ruling elder, member or adherent or salaried employee of the congregation, thus unfairly placing both the “complainant” and the session in a true conflict of interest; and
- WHEREAS, the stresses of the lower court (session) being forced to deal with sexual abuse and/or sexual harassment complaints of their church leader/moderator, who is the sole responsibility of the higher court (presbytery), against a fellow congregant can also unnecessarily lead to the dissolution of the pastoral tie, which can be perceived as retaliation by presbytery against their own employee for lodging the complaint; and
- WHEREAS, the aforementioned shortcomings in the Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment may force a “complainant” church leader to exercise their legal right to take their complaint directly to the appropriate Provincial Human Rights Commission in order to receive equal and fair treatment of their complaint; and
- WHEREAS, section 87 of the Book of Forms allows for cases of particular difficulty or delicacy, the decision of which, for any reason, it is desirable that a larger body should first decide, be referenced to the higher court;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Seaway-Glengarry humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to revise the Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment to reflect the above concerns, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

**NO. 7 – PRESBYTERY OF PARIS**

**Re: Policy for a congregation wishing to leave the denomination**

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly in consultation with Trustee Board, Assembly Council and Pension and Benefits Board, p. 7.1.2–5, 2.1.28)

WHEREAS, issues related to human sexuality and sexual orientation have been almost constantly before The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1987; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has over the course of that time been significantly divided on various statements, studies and decisions presented to and/or approved by the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the expenditure of the resources of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in terms of time, finances, cost to relational harmony, membership and spiritual energy has clearly been extensive; and

WHEREAS, there were 22 overtures submitted to the 2015 General Assembly related to these topics; and

WHEREAS, it appears that, whatever future decisions are made related to the issues involved, significant division will remain; and

WHEREAS, such sharp and prevailing division neither honours Jesus Christ nor provides vital witness to the gospel; and

WHEREAS, the spirit of the discussion and the amended motion regarding Lachine at the 1998 General Assembly was to allow dissenting congregations to continue independently their mission and ministry in graciousness and without rancor or penalty; and

WHEREAS, there is no present provision whereby a congregation dissenting from a majority decision within The Presbyterian Church in Canada can withdraw from The Presbyterian Church in Canada and expect to retain possession of its property; and

WHEREAS, legal battles over property which are likely to be lengthy, costly to our resources of time, talent and treasury will be a poor witness to the world; and

WHEREAS, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has made allowance for “gracious dismissal” of dissenting congregations whereby congregations may withdraw and become members of other denominations in the Reformed tradition, and be able to retain the title to their property and other material assets; and

WHEREAS, the development of a gracious process to divide, dismiss or dissolve churches in consultation with their members which exercises consistency, pastoral responsibility, transparency and compassionate witness should be our desire;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Paris, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to consider establishing a means for “gracious dismissal” of congregations which might in good conscience either be unable to continue wholeheartedly within the Presbyterian Church in Canada unless significant changes as advocated by some overtures (e.g. Overture Nos. 5, and 23, 2015 are made, or be unable to accept the changes in doctrine or discipline as advocated by these same overtures, or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

**NO. 8 – PRESBYTERY OF PARIS**

**Re: Standing committees secretaries**

(Referred to Assembly Council, p. 2.1.31)

WHEREAS, there exists in various parts of The Presbyterian Church in Canada a perception of increased centralization; and

WHEREAS, in recent years budgetary considerations have reduced the number of staff working at 50 Wynford Drive; and

WHEREAS, significant changes have recently been made to the process and dynamics by which members are elected to serve on national committees; and

WHEREAS, one goal of these changes has been to recruit persons ably suited for the tasks and mandates of those committees; and

WHEREAS, it is critical for each committee to fully own and be responsible for the performance of the tasks assigned to them; and

WHEREAS, recognizing both that staff resources have become more limited and that committee members are quite capable; and

WHEREAS, noting the Assembly Council is mandated to name the Principal Clerk as its secretary;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Paris humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to request the Assembly Council through its advisory function on good governance to strongly encourage and advocate that, with the exception of the Assembly Council, each of our national committees name one of its non-staff members to fulfill the duties of committee secretary, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

**NO. 9 – PRESBYTERY OF WINNIPEG**

**Re: Utilize and develop resources re “passive energy”**

(Referred to Assembly Council and Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries), p. 2.1.31, 12.1.39–40)

WHEREAS, human beings are to be stewards of the creation; and

WHEREAS, climate change is the most significant environmental threat facing the world; and

WHEREAS, achieving the goals laid out in the Paris Agreement will require commitment on the part of all organizations, institutions and individuals;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Winnipeg humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to:

1. develop and implement an action plan to make 50 Wynford Drive a passive energy building,
2. enter into conversation with the three theological colleges so they would become passive energy spaces; and

to instruct the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) to:

1. develop a resource to assist congregations in taking steps towards making their buildings energy passive, such a resource to include examples of what actual congregations have done to reduce energy use,
2. explore the viability of clergy serving multi-point charges using electric cars, such an exploration to include cost analysis and discussion of the availability of charging stations,
3. explore the costs involved with congregations that possess strategically located parking lots building charging stations;

or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

**UNREFERRED OVERTURES – 2016**

**NO. 10 – SESSION OF COQUITLAM, COQUITLAM, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**RE: Declaring overtures re same sex marriage out of order**

WHEREAS, all commissioners to General Assembly are ordained ruling elders or ordained teaching elders, and for their ordination they made ordination vows before God and their congregation; and

WHEREAS, the ordination vows of ruling elders and teaching elders state acceptance of the subordinate standards of the church, with a promise to “uphold its doctrine under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures and to be guided thereby in fostering Christian belief” (Ordination Question 2) and also to promise to “follow no divisive course, but to seek the peace and unity of Christ...” (Question 3); and

WHEREAS, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXIV states that “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman” and “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue...” and Living Faith 8.2.3 states “Christian marriage is a union in Christ, whereby a man and a woman become one in the sight of God... Sexual union in marriage is intended to provide mutual joy and comfort as well as the means of creating new life.”; and

WHEREAS, the request for The Presbyterian Church in Canada to consider approval of same-sex marriage and ordination of same-sex married ministers is known to be a divisive course based on the experience of every other denomination that has followed this path; and

WHEREAS, should ordained elders no longer be able to uphold their vows of ordination as a matter of conscience and belief, as a matter of conscience they should request to be released from their ordination vows and forego their position as elder;

THEREFORE, the Session of Coquitlam Church, Coquitlam, British Columbia, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly, to rule any consideration of overtures relating to approval of the celebration of marriage of same-sex couples to be out of order, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Westminster.

**NO. 11 – SESSION OF VALLEYVIEW, CALGARY, ALBERTA**

**Re: Develop a Reformed confessional hermeneutic**

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is united in agreement to be guided on matters pertaining to conducting meetings, the operation of its courts, and proper procedure for decision making by the Book of Forms, it, nevertheless in its confessions and procedures, has no formal guidelines adopted, such as an agreed-to Reformed confessional hermeneutic (see an example of such a confessional hermeneutic in Dr. Gordon Spykman’s *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, p. 128–133), which might create agreement, and provide guidance on matters pertaining to the interpretation and application of the scriptures; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada declares in its subordinate standard Living Faith that scripture is to be “the rule of faith and life...the standard of all doctrine by which we must test any word that comes to us from church, world or inner experience” and further, that we are to “subject to its judgment all we believe and do”; and

WHEREAS, Western culture now reflects a secular humanistic, post-modern worldview derived from Enlightenment philosophy, most noticeably in issues relating to anthropology, epistemology and soteriology, and Canadian society is following this trend; and

WHEREAS, this has resulted in the issue of human sexuality and orientation persistently presenting itself to The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1987; and

WHEREAS, the contradictory appeals to scripture with regards to this issue, due to lack of a common Reformed confessional hermeneutic guiding The Presbyterian Church in Canada, have revealed that the scriptures cannot fully function as the only rule for faith and life in a unifying manner for our denomination; and

WHEREAS, without a common Reformed confessional hermeneutic in place, The Presbyterian Church in Canada will only experience further contradictory appeals to scripture, resulting in deep dividedness on many issues, and a regular practice of setting scripture to the side, as we make our collective decisions, define our identity in the midst of Canadian culture and outline our mission as Christ’s body in the world;

THEREFORE, the Session of Valleyview Community Church, Calgary, Alberta, humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to consider pausing the current discussion and study on human sexuality and orientation, and deferring any recommendations stemming from this issue, in order to focus on the

development and adoption of an explicitly Reformed confessional hermeneutic, or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted with disapproval from the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod.

**NO. 12 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW’S, PARRY SOUND, ONTARIO**

**Re: Policy for a congregation wishing to leave the denomination**

WHEREAS, the issue of the role and discipline of actively homosexual persons in the church has consistently been before The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1987; and  
WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has over the course of that time been significantly divided on various statements, studies and decisions presented to and/or approved by the General Assembly; and  
WHEREAS, the expenditure of the resources of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in terms of time, finances, cost to relational harmony, membership and spiritual energy has been extensive; and  
WHEREAS, numerous overtures have been submitted to the General Assembly related to these topics; and  
WHEREAS, it appears that, whatever future decisions are made related to the issues involved, significant and damaging division will remain; and  
WHEREAS, such sharp, damaging and prevailing division neither honours nor glorifies Jesus Christ nor provides vital and winsome witness to the gospel; and  
WHEREAS, the spirit of the discussion and the amended motion re Lachine at the 1998 General Assembly was to allow dissenting congregations to continue independently their mission and ministry in graciousness and without significant cost, penalty nor acrimony; and  
WHEREAS, there is no present provision whereby a congregation dissenting from a majority decision with The Presbyterian Church in Canada can withdraw from The Presbyterian Church in Canada and expect to retain possession of its property and assets; and  
WHEREAS, legal battles over property and assets are likely to be lengthy, costly to our resources of time, gifts, talent and treasury; and  
WHEREAS, such legal proceedings and the publicity resulting thereof will be a poor witness to society and to the world; and  
WHEREAS, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has made allowance for “gracious dismissal” of dissenting congregations whereby congregations may withdraw and become members of other denominations in the Reformed tradition, and be able to retain the title to their property and other material assets; and  
WHEREAS, the development of a gracious process to divide, dismiss or dissolve churches in consultation with their members which exercises consistency, pastoral responsibility, transparency and compassionate witness should be our desire;  
THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew’s Church, Parry Sound, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to consider establishing a means for “gracious dismissal” of congregations which might in good conscience either be unable to continue wholeheartedly within The Presbyterian Church in Canada unless significant changes as advocated by some overtures (e.g. Overtures Nos. 4 and 23, 2015) are made, or be unable to accept the changes in doctrine or discipline as advocated by these overtures, or do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Barrie.

**NO. 13 – SESSION OF ST. PAUL’S, LEASKDALE, ONTARIO**

**Re: Request more time for human sexuality discussion**

WHEREAS, the resources of the *Body, Mind and Soul* study guide have been available to us for only four (4) months; and  
WHEREAS, we, the session, have read the resource and discussed it at some length but are far from feeling like we’ve had a full discussion and exchange of thoughts and experiences on the matter; and  
WHEREAS, we have yet to engage our congregation in discussions on the matter at hand, nor have they had opportunity to engage the resources provided; and  
WHEREAS, the resource provided could only ever, at best, be considered a partial voice to the Christian Church in the discernment process around this issue; and  
WHEREAS, we acknowledge that for some this matter appears to be one of systemic tragic injustice and therefore, are pressing that the currently held position be reversed as quickly as possible even though, such a move, quick or slow, would be a complete reversal of what has been the stated orthodox Christian position for 2000 years; and

WHEREAS, the Session of St. Paul's, Leaskdale, when faced with having to directly address this matter five years ago gave ourselves a full 12 months to discuss and study the matter simply among ourselves; and  
WHEREAS, a hasty or premature decision reached before full and adequate discussion would ultimately prove unhelpful and potentially crippling to the church;  
THEREFORE the Session of St. Paul's, Leaskdale, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to provide more time, even a comprehensive schedule such as adopted by the Anglican Church of Canada, to congregations, sessions and presbyteries for study, discussion and reflection on the matter of affirming same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBT individuals to ministry of Word and sacrament or to do otherwise, as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Pickering.

#### **NO. 14 – PRESBYTERY OF MONTREAL**

##### **Re: Indigenous spirituality and defer Native Ministries Endowment Fund**

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been involved for many years in reflection about theological arrogance in relation to Aboriginal people in Canada, and the ways in which this arrogance contributed negatively to the sad history of residential schools in this country; and  
WHEREAS, Living Faith (9.2.1) nicely captures the proper humility requisite to authentic interfaith dialogue and relationships in stating that “Some whom we encounter belong to other religions and already have a faith. Their lives often give evidence of devotion and reverence for life. We recognize that truth and goodness in them are the work of God’s Spirit, the author of all truth. We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance implying that we are better than they. But rather, in the spirit of humility, as beggars telling others where food is to be found, we point to life in Christ”; and  
WHEREAS, our present relationship with those of other faiths than our own cannot be driven simply by a sense of compensatory guilt in relation to a historical judgment about the collective Christian witness of past generations in Canada, but must have its own integrity if it is to amount to anything more than empty political posturing; and  
WHEREAS, God is revealed in scripture as the one God, beside whom there is no other, and God demands exclusive worship from his people; and  
WHEREAS, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the salvation of God provided to us through the reconciling ministry of Jesus, is held in scripture to be singular and unique; and  
WHEREAS, the subordinate standards of our church clearly enshrine this understanding of the uniqueness of God, of Jesus, and of salvation through him; and  
WHEREAS, the pluralistic religious context in which we live, and our recognition of the manifold evidences of the common grace of God in peoples of other faiths and of none, by no means detracts from the fact we are “compelled” to bear witness to Christ (as it says in our subordinate standard Living Faith 9.2.2: “We witness to God in Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and invite others to accept from him the forgiveness of God”); and  
WHEREAS, the 2008 General Assembly responded to a discussion concerning the exclusiveness and uniqueness of the saving work of Christ by affirming our commitment to the doctrine of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ; and  
WHEREAS, the 2015 General Assembly dealt with a recommendation to “encourage Presbyterians to acknowledge, understand and appreciate other faith traditions...” by adopting the amended wording “to acknowledge, understand and appreciate the strengths of other faith traditions...”; and  
WHEREAS, the 2013 General Assembly adopted the report of the Conversation Circle re Theological Framework for Aboriginal Spirituality, which evinced an awareness that Indigenous Wisdom and Christian faith represent two distinct belief systems and ways of life, with some aspects of fruitful intersection, but also with areas in which the significant differences must be honoured; and  
WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities, while having a robust view of God the Creator, and while willing to acknowledge the life-giving help of various guides, may not pivot, as Christian theology does, upon the revelation and incarnation of God in Christ, and the redemptive work that Christ has achieved; and  
WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities, while having a profound respect for the “sacredness” of creation, may challenge the clear dividing line that Genesis, the Nicene Creed and the Reformed confessional tradition place between what is God (the Creator) and what is not God (the creation); and  
WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities have a respect for elders and for ancestors which connects with the biblical commandment to honour parents and the Old Testament custom of giving forebears a memorial and a name, Christian views of the life to come may be challenged at the point where Aboriginal spiritualities tend to regard our ancestors as still present/accessible to us; and



WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities are very alive to the notion of Spirit, Christians are enjoined to discern the Spirits, particularly since our notion of the Holy Spirit is specified in relation to God and with Jesus in Triune relation; and

WHEREAS, the Assembly Council and the Life and Mission Agency are currently considering the three overtures (Overtures Nos. 16, 22 and 36, 2015) sent to the last Assembly which request the establishment of a Native Ministries Endowment Fund, to ensure that the commitment of our church to these ministries will continue and deepen; and

WHEREAS, the Assembly Council briefing notes from November 2015 intimate that of the seven areas in which the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called churches to action, No. 6 (referencing No. 61 of the TRC's Calls to Action) concerns the provision of "permanent ongoing funding for projects that promote Indigenous healing and reconciliation, culture, language and spirituality"; and

WHEREAS, the Assembly Council briefing notes from November 2015 intimate that No. 3 of these seven areas (taking up Nos. 48, 60 and 61 of the TRC's Calls to Action) concerns Indigenous Spirituality explicitly, in that the churches are being called upon to "educate clergy, laity and candidates for ministry to respect in its own right, Indigenous Spirituality as 'a valid form of worship equal to their own'"; and

WHEREAS, this stated objective goes considerably beyond what the TRC actually calls for in No. 60, which is merely to "respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right" ("tis a consummation devoutly to be wished); and

WHEREAS, the invitation to promote Indigenous spirituality and the invitation to teach that the Indigenous spirituality is a valid form of worship equal to our own calls into question what the scripture and our subordinate standards teach concerning Jesus Christ the only way; and

WHEREAS, the church must be ever on guard against forms of syncretistic Christianity, in which we move beyond the inevitable and necessary reality of contextualization, toward an articulation of faith that neglects or contradicts essential elements of our faith in Christ, particularly his singular Lordship; and

WHEREAS, the intention of Assembly Council, as suggested by the briefing notes of November 2015, is to formulate recommendations on how the church will implement TRC Calls to Action by calling on the expertise of the [Assembly Council] Executive in collaboration with Justice Ministries"; and

WHEREAS, the theological and cultural issues at play here are beyond the mandate and resources of the Executive and Justice Ministries; and

WHEREAS, such sensitive and profoundly important theological issues are within the purview of the Committee on Church Doctrine;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Montreal humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to:

1. refer to the Committee on Church Doctrine the matter of whether Christians can accept that Indigenous Spirituality is, in its own right, a valid form of worship equal to our own, and request that the committee produce two statements offering:
  - a. a doctrinal statement outlining those areas in which appreciation of Indigenous Spirituality can be articulated from a Reformed perspective, and also the limits upon the ability of Christians to affirm Indigenous Wisdom teachings and ways which conflict with our theological affirmations,
  - b. a statement defining the worship practices which Presbyterian members, and ruling and teaching elders may participate in or lead without syncretism, and which practices must be regarded as contrary to the teaching of Christian faith; and
2. defer any decisions about the creation of an Endowment Fund for Native Ministries until after the Committee on Church Doctrine has reported back and these matters have been decided by the Assembly;

or to do otherwise, as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

## **NO. 15 – SESSION OF COTES DE NEIGES, MONTREAL, QUEBEC**

### **Re: Extending time for human sexuality responses**

WHEREAS, the issue of human sexuality is a complex one with great emotional charge; and

WHEREAS, some of the new directions being proposed and discussed involve not only a change in the historic perspective on the issue of gender and human relationships, but also a significant change in the historic readings of, and approaches to the Bible; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada places great value on the local lay leadership of individual congregations entrusted to sessions of elders, and has continued to seek and to encourage the informed involvement of the laity in the governance process at all levels; and

WHEREAS, pushing too quickly ahead to the decision making stage without the sufficient time required for the appropriate ground level discussions risks making the issue even more divisive than it already is; and

WHEREAS, the feedback deadlines have come so quickly after the Moderator's pastoral letters in November 2015 and January 2016, and the availability of the study guide, that many congregations did not have a chance to engage the issue properly, much less to provide informed feedback; and

WHEREAS, it would be very difficult for the Committee on Church Doctrine and Justice Ministries, within a mere matter of weeks (between February 15 and March 15), to bring the best of their skill in an atmosphere of open discussion about what will likely be a large number of deeply thought out submissions; and

WHEREAS, it would be far better to take another year to properly receive feedback on the study guide, and to carefully craft the documents that will guide our ongoing discussions;

THEREFORE, the Session of Cote des Neiges, Montreal, Quebec, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to provide an extended opportunity for responses to the documents on human sexuality, thereby allowing individuals and congregations a longer lead time to respond, and providing the Committee on Church Doctrine and Justice Ministries the additional time required to thoughtfully do the work entrusted to them on this pivotal issue, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Montreal.

**NO. 16 – SESSION OF COTES DES NEIGES, MONTREAL, QUEBEC**

**Re: Process for a congregation wishing to leave the denomination**

WHEREAS, any decision that is made about the issue of human sexuality, even the decision to keep the status quo, will likely place some congregations in untenable positions of having to compromise their own convictions in order to continue within The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, there is currently no provision within the policies and processes of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, whereby a congregation dissenting from a majority decision can peaceably withdraw; and

WHEREAS, we do not want any congregation to have to make the hard choice between either foregoing its convictions, or walking away from the historic buildings and resources that have become central to their ministry in their local community; and

WHEREAS, a carefully prepared process of “gracious dismissal” would help to avoid divisive legal battles and the waste of kingdom resources; and

WHEREAS, the experience of other Christian denominations has shown that a refusal of this process has great potential for marring the testimony of the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, several Christian denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA) have already been able to craft workable processes for “gracious dismissal” that allow dissenting congregations to retain title to their property and assets; and

WHEREAS, with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, a precedent for something akin to “gracious dismissal” was already present in the spirit of the amended motion concerning the congregation in Lachine, that was accepted by the 1998 General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, it would likely be much more difficult to peaceably negotiate the details of a “gracious dismissal” process after the fact, once a decision about human sexuality was made; and

WHEREAS, the fear of the outcome of the discussion and of losing congregational property and assets will make it increasingly tempting for individuals to decrease their contributions at a time when they are much needed, and for congregations to slow or even to stop altogether the investment of time and resources in the maintenance of properties and buildings which they fear might be lost; and

WHEREAS, the fear of losing assets or historic property risks bringing the unhelpful intensity to the debate; and

WHEREAS, a clearly laid out process would help allay the fears of congregations who fear that theirs might be a minority position, and could keep them involved and participating in the discussion;

THEREFORE, the Session of Cote des Neiges, Montreal, Quebec, humbly overtures the Venerable, 142nd General Assembly to act quickly, even as the discussions are ongoing, to map out a process for the “gracious dismissal” of dissenting congregations, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Montreal

**NO. 17 – PRESBYTERY OF GREY-BRUCE-MAITLAND**

**Re: Develop a bereavement leave policy**

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada currently has no stated policy regarding bereavement leave for its ministers, employees and employees of its congregations; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of bereavement leave is to provide ministers or employees with time off work to be with their loved ones; make arrangements for the funeral of a family member; to attend the funeral of a family member; and/or to grieve the loss of a family member whose funeral cannot be attended by the employee; THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Grey-Bruce-Maitland humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly, to enact a bereavement leave policy, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

**NO. 18 – SESSION OF FIRST CHURCH, EDMONTON, ALBERTA**

**Re: Research reasons for declining membership**

WHEREAS, the membership of The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to decline and has declined for many years;

THEREFORE, the Session of First Church, Edmonton, Alberta, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to form a committee with broad representation from across the country, to investigate and research the reasons for declining membership, and as part of that investigation and research, communicate with congregations in the church, and to bring recommendations suggesting ways to reverse the declining membership trend to a succeeding General Assembly, and to bring an interim report to the next General Assembly; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with disapproval by the Presbytery of Edmonton-Lakeland.

**NO. 19 – SESSION OF CHINESE, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**Re: Congregational vote re sexual orientation and process for leaving the denomination**

WHEREAS, thirteen sessions and three presbyteries made overtures to the 2015 General Assembly affirming The Presbyterian Church in Canada's current stance regarding human sexuality, as compared to three sessions and three presbyteries desiring substantial change to the current stance; and

WHEREAS, Overture No. 37, 2015 made by the Session of Grace Church, Orleans, Ontario, re process for a congregation leaving the denomination, demonstrates that some congregations will wish to leave the denomination should changes be made to church doctrine related to sexuality; and

WHEREAS, the Report on Human Sexuality that was adopted by the 1994 General Assembly and the 1998 General Assembly affirmed the polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada involving the case with the congregation of St. Andrew's, Lachine in the Presbytery of Montreal and the 2005 General Assembly rejected the ordination of practicing homosexuals; and

WHEREAS, unanimous consensus on the issue of sexuality seems unlikely in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and change is likely to cause the loss of congregations; and

WHEREAS, in other denominations, where same sex ordination was adopted, change was followed by costly court cases and disgraceful conflict between former colleagues; and

WHEREAS, in 1925 each congregation held a congregational vote to affirm their desire to join the newly formed United Church of Canada or continue Presbyterian; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an asset rich denomination with buildings more than adequate for all existing congregations; and

WHEREAS, a process that is likely to result in the disenfranchisement of some congregations is undesirable, being a poor witness of Christ's love to the world;

THEREFORE, the Session of Chinese Church, Vancouver, British Columbia, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to consider requiring every congregation to hold a congregational vote on the issue of same sex marriage or ordination, and establish a means of graciously dismissing (a process to equitably divide and/or share the denominational assets between the two resulting denominations) the resulting minority group to form a new denomination with, in such a way that neither side be disenfranchised, preserving mutual respect and good will, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Westminster.

**NO. 20 – SESSION OF FIRST HUNGARIAN, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**Re: Congregational vote re sexual orientation and process for leaving the denomination**

WHEREAS, thirteen sessions and three presbyteries made overtures to the 2015 General Assembly affirming The Presbyterian Church in Canada's current stance regarding human sexuality, as compared to three sessions and three presbyteries desiring substantial change to the current stance; and

WHEREAS, Overture No. 37, 2015 made by the Session of Grace Church, Orleans, Ontario, re process for a congregation leaving the denomination, demonstrates that some congregations will wish to leave the denomination should changes be made to church doctrine related to sexuality; and

WHEREAS, the Report on Human Sexuality that was adopted by the 1994 General Assembly and the 1998 General Assembly affirmed the polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada involving the case with the congregation of St. Andrew's, Lachine in the Presbytery of Montreal and the 2005 General Assembly rejected the ordination of practicing homosexuals; and

WHEREAS, unanimous consensus on the issue of sexuality seems unlikely in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and change is likely to cause the loss of congregations; and

WHEREAS, in other denominations, where same sex ordination was adopted, change was followed by costly court cases and disgraceful conflict between former colleagues; and

WHEREAS, in 1925 each congregation held a congregational vote to affirm their desire to join the newly formed United Church of Canada or continue Presbyterian; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an asset rich denomination with buildings more than adequate for all existing congregations; and

WHEREAS, a process that is likely to result in the disenfranchisement of some congregations is undesirable, being a poor witness of Christ's love to the world;

THEREFORE, the Session of First Hungarian Church, Vancouver, British Columbia, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to consider requiring every congregation to hold a congregational vote on the issue of same sex marriage or ordination, and establish a means of graciously dismissing (a process to equitably divide and/or share the denominational assets between the two resulting denominations) the resulting minority group to form a new denomination with, in such a way that neither side be disenfranchised, preserving mutual respect and good will, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Westminster.

**NO. 21 – SESSION OF ST. ANDREW'S, DARTMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA**

**Re: Ministry and eldership of and performing marriage of those in same gender relationships**

WHEREAS, biblical scholars hold a wide variety of insights with respect to biblical interpretation; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada consists of a diversity of persons and perspectives that vary because of differing biblical interpretations; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada seeks to maintain the unity of Christ's Church in a spirit of love and mutual respect; and

WHEREAS, the Reformed tradition confesses salvation by grace alone through Christ alone, accepted by the gift of faith alone and not by any claim of human action or identity which makes some persons more acceptable than others; and

WHEREAS, many would agree with the scholar, Walter Wink, when he writes that, "The Bible only knows a love ethic which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in a given country, culture and/or period"; and

WHEREAS, those living in, or who may live in a faithful, committed same gender relationship, may feel called by God to serve as an elder or ordained minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and

WHEREAS, the teachings of Jesus emphasize the acceptance and inclusiveness for oppressed and persecuted minorities;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to seek a means whereby presbyteries and sessions may be permitted to consider for certification for the ministry of Word and sacrament or the diaconate or for election as ruling elders persons who are in committed, faithful relationships with persons of the same gender and further to empower sessions to grant permission for the celebration of marriage of persons of the same gender who are under their pastoral care, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted without comment by the Presbytery of Halifax & Lunenburg.

**NO. 22 – SESSION OF WESTMINSTER-ST. PAUL'S, GUELPH, ONTARIO**

**Re: Preparing a statement on Indigenous Spirituality**

WHEREAS, God is revealed in scripture as the one God, beside whom is no other, and demands from the people of faith their exclusive worship (Exodus 20:1-6, Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 40:25, 45:18, I Corinthians 8:4-6); and

- WHEREAS, the temptation to syncretize the faith with other faiths is a perennial one for God's people, described throughout the scriptures, together with the serious consequences this incurs (Leviticus 10:1–2, Deuteronomy 6:10–15, I Kings 19:15–18, II Kings 17:7–17, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, I Corinthians 10:14–22; Revelation 14:9–11); and
- WHEREAS, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the salvation of God provided to us through the reconciling ministry of Jesus is held in scripture to be unique (John 6:53–68, John 14:6, Acts 4:10–12, Colosians 1:15–23, Hebrews 1:1–4); and
- WHEREAS, the subordinate standards of our church enshrine this understanding of the uniqueness of God and of Jesus: eg. “There is one true God whom to know is life eternal, whom to serve is joy and peace. God has created all that is (Living Faith 1.1). Jesus is the Mediator through whom God has come to us and through whom we come to God (Living Faith 3.4.1). Salvation comes from God's grace alone received through faith in Christ (Living Faith 3.6.1). Faith is...trust in God, involves personal repentance of sin, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and commitment to him as Lord. It includes assent to the truth of the gospel (Living Faith 6.1.1)”, (see also Westminster Confession of Faith II.1–2, VIII.2, XXI.1, 2 and 6); and
- WHEREAS, the pluralistic religious context in which we live, and our recognition of the manifold evidences of the common grace of God in peoples of other faiths and of none, by no means detract from the fact we are “compelled” to bear witness to Christ, as it says in our subordinate standard Living Faith, “Some whom we encounter belong to other religions and already have a faith... We recognize that truth and goodness in them are the work of God's Spirit, the author of all truth. We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance...[Yet] we witness to God in Christ as the Way, the Truth, the Life, and invite others to accept from him the forgiveness of God. We are compelled to share this good news” (Living Faith 9.2.1–2); and
- WHEREAS, the 2008 General Assembly dealt with a recommendation from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee which proposed that the prayer of Overture No. 3, 2008 requesting reaffirmation of “the exclusiveness and uniqueness of the saving work of Christ” be not granted (A&P 2008, p. 260) by adopting this amended motion instead: “That in the interests of clarity the Assembly affirm its commitment to the doctrine of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ” and that this be the answer to Overture Nos. 3, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20, 2008, (A&P 2008, p. 22); and
- WHEREAS, the 2015 General Assembly dealt with a recommendation from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee which proposed that the committee's terms of reference be changed to add the words: “to encourage Presbyterians to acknowledge, understand and appreciate other faith traditions...” (A&P 2008, p. 287) by adopting the amended wording “to acknowledge, understand and appreciate the strengths of other faith traditions...” (A&P 2015, p. 28) after a debate which highlighted the great lack of clarity around what it would mean for Presbyterian Christians to “acknowledge...and appreciate...” other faiths; and
- WHEREAS, the 2013 General Assembly adopted the Report of the Conversation Circle re Theological Framework for Aboriginal Spirituality (A&P 2013, p. 16), which evinced an awareness that Indigenous wisdom and Christian faith represent two distinct belief systems and ways of life, with some aspects of fruitful intersection, but also with areas in which the significant differences must be honoured (eg. “...The Pipe Ceremony, the Sun Dance, the Sweat Lodge and the Medicine Wheel should only be conducted by traditional Indigenous elders who follow Indigenous wisdom ways. For others to conduct these ceremonies would mean appropriating the belief systems or changing their meaning to suit the Christian belief system...The Medicine Wheel is...a complete belief system involving a life long journey...[there is] potential of belittling a centuries-old belief system by oversimplifying it” (A&P 2013, p. 510–511) [One might add that the same is true of the Christian belief system]; and
- WHEREAS, this report of the Conversation Circle constitutes an incomplete answer to the prayer of Overture No. 19, 2011, since, while illuminating in many respects, it remains unclear in the articulation of any limits for the church in blending its theology and worship with Indigenous wisdom and sacred ways, and is more explicit about the problems of appropriating Indigenous wisdom and rituals in Christian contexts than about the areas in which distinctives of the Christian teaching may be subdued or compromised by framing them within a worldview or worship practice that derives from Aboriginal spirituality; and
- WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities, while having a robust view of God the Creator, and while willing to acknowledge the life-giving help of various guides, may not pivot, as Christian theology does, upon the revelation and incarnation of God in Christ, and the redemptive work he (Christ) objectively, and on our behalf, achieved; and
- WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities, while having a profound respect for the “sacredness” of creation, may challenge the clear dividing line which Genesis, the Nicene Creed and the Reformed theology enshrined in our subordinate standards places between what is God (the Creator) and what is not God (the creation), and in shared ritual may tempt Christians to give worship to what is not God; and

- WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities have an understanding of revealed wisdom and of covenant, these views may be challenging to the view which Christian scripture advances concerning the particularity/election of Israel as the bearer of God's revelation, the specific terms of the covenant, and the idea of a closed canon; and
- WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities have a respect for elders and for ancestors which connects with the biblical commandment to honour parents and the Old Testament custom of giving forebears a memorial and a name, Christian views of the life to come may be challenged at the point where Aboriginal spiritualities tend to regard our ancestors as still present/accessible to us; and
- WHEREAS, most Aboriginal spiritualities are very alive to the notion of Spirit, Christians are enjoined to discern whenever the spirit realm is invoked “which spirit is this?,” our notion of the Holy Spirit, identified with God and with Jesus in Triune relation, being quite specific; and
- WHEREAS, the commitment of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, both in word and in financial expenditure to the process of Confession/Truth, and Healing/Reconciliation with the First Nations Community has been deep, ministry grants toward work with Aboriginal peoples constituting between 42% and 46% of all Canadian Ministries grants for the years 2014–2016 (Life and Mission Agency revised draft budget 2016); and
- WHEREAS, the Assembly Council and the Life and Mission Agency are currently considering the three overtures (Overture Nos. 16, 22 and 36, 2015) sent to the last Assembly that request the establishment of a Native Ministries Endowment Fund, to ensure that the commitment of our church to these ministries will continue and deepen; and
- WHEREAS, the Assembly Council briefing notes from November 2015 intimate that of the seven areas in which the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called churches to action, No. 61 (referencing the TRC’s Calls to Action) concerns the provision of “permanent ongoing funding for projects that promote Indigenous healing and reconciliation, culture, language and spirituality”; and
- WHEREAS, the Assembly Council briefing notes from November 2015 intimate that No. 3 of these seven areas (taking up Nos. 48, 60 and 61 of the TRC’s Calls to Action) concerns Indigenous spirituality explicitly, in that the churches are being called upon to “educate clergy, laity and candidates for ministry to respect in its own right”. Indigenous spirituality as ‘a valid form of worship equal to their own’; and
- WHEREAS, such “calls” to regard Indigenous spirituality as a way equivalent to the gospel of Jesus Christ, graciously made known to us as the one way which has been given under heaven, among mortals, whereby we may have reconciliation with and know the truth about God, and moreover to provide “permanent ongoing funding for projects that promote” not the Christian way, but the way of “Indigenous...spirituality” as “a valid form of worship equal to [our] own,” go a bridge too far in light of the exclusivity of worship and allegiance commanded by the Lord of us, the covenant people; and
- WHEREAS, the intention of the Assembly Council, as intimated in the briefing notes of November 2015, to formulate recommendations on how the church will implement the TRC Calls to Action “by calling on the expertise of The [Assembly Council] Executive in collaboration with Justice Ministries” woefully underestimates the issues of doctrine at stake, and the right of Assembly as a whole to have participation as well as the final say in the “planning [of] a way forward,” when the issue is as critical as this one;
- THEREFORE, the Session of Westminster-St. Paul’s Church, Guelph, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly to
1. refer to the Committee on Church Doctrine the matter of whether Christians can respect Indigenous spirituality in such a way as to conclude that “in its own right” it is “a valid form of worship, [revelation of God and provision of a path of salvation] equal to [Christians’] own” for report to the 2017 General Assembly,
  2. request from this committee a facilitated table group discussion to take place at the 2017 General Assembly on the content of its paper, with the record of this discussion feeding back to the committee together with the usually requested feedback from congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and national agencies and committees,
  3. request from the Committee on Church Doctrine, once it has completed this process, two statements (or a statement in two parts) upon which the Assembly will vote:
    - a. a doctrinal statement outlining those areas in which appreciation of Indigenous spirituality can be articulated from the Christian point of view, and also the limits upon the ability of Christians to affirm Indigenous wisdom teachings and ways which conflict with our theological affirmations,
    - b. a statement defining the worship practices which Presbyterian members, and ruling and teaching elders may participate in or lead without syncretism, and which practices must be regarded as “strange fire”,
  4. provide for the communication of these statements to all congregational and non-congregational ministries and missions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and for the reflection of their permissions and limits in the Book of Forms,

5. defer any decision upon the creation of an Endowment Fund for Native Ministries until after these matters have been decided by the Assembly,
  6. communicate to those involved in Native Ministries that this period of reflection on what is and is not sustainable within Christian theological thinking and worship practice by no means detracts from The Presbyterian Church in Canada's commitment to the Confession made in 1994, or its ongoing financial commitment to ministry with Aboriginal Peoples;
- or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted with disapproval by the Presbytery of Waterloo Wellington.