

COMMITTEE ON CHURCH DOCTRINE

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consent Recommendation

That Recommendation Nos. 2 and 3 [identified by the ►) be adopted by consent.

Recommendation No. 1

That the document “Presbyterian Polity: Its Distinctives and Directions for the 21st Century” be commended to the courts and, in particular, to the clerks of those courts for study and response to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the Assembly Office by August 31, 2017. (see p. 6.1.8)

► Recommendation No. 2

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in light of the Reign of God, in a response to the overtures named above and, in particular, the prayer of Overture No. 16, 2015 re encouraging dialogue on marriage and sexuality. (see p. 6.1.14)

► Recommendation No. 3

That all courts of the church be urged to deal with people in same-sex relationships with tender pastoral care. (see p. 6.1.14)

Recommendation No. 4

That the Committee on Church Doctrine in consultation with the Life and Mission Agency continue to reflect on the nature of Christian marriage in relation to LGBTQ and intersex people and report back to the 2017 General Assembly. (see p. 6.1.14)

Recommendation No. 5

That the Life and Mission Agency in consultation with the Committee on Church Doctrine continue to reflect theologically on the spiritual needs of transgender and intersex people, and report back to the 2017 General Assembly. (see p. 6.1.14)

Recommendation No. 6

That the General Assembly receive the above report as an interim response to the prayers of Overture Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 35, 2015; and grant permission to report on the various matters raised in these overtures to a future General Assembly. (see p. 6.1.14)

Recommendation No. 7

That the document “Understanding and Interpreting the Bible” be commended to congregations, presbyteries and other groups in The Presbyterian Church in Canada for their use. (see p. 6.1.27)

Recommendation No. 8

That sessions, presbyteries and other interested groups using the document “Understanding and Interpreting the Bible” report comments to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the Assembly Office by January 31, 2017, and that the results of these comments be reported to a future General Assembly. (see p. 6.1.27)

Recommendation No. 9

That the matters and concerns raised in Memorial No. 1, 2015 be answered in terms of the above report. (see p. 6.1.28)

REPORT

To the Venerable, the 142nd General Assembly:

The Committee on Church Doctrine has met twice in person and once using on-line technology since the last General Assembly.

The 2015 General Assembly spent considerable time considering many overtures broadly addressing matters of sexuality, sexual orientation and some of the current practices and beliefs of The Presbyterian Church in Canada related to those matters. The General Assembly also tasked the Committee on Church Doctrine to work jointly with

the Life and Mission Agency to prepare a study guide on those matters for posting on the web by the end of October 2015. In addition, the church was invited by the 2015 General Assembly to send the results of their prayerful conversations, discernment and Bible study to both committees prior to March 31, 2016. Further the two committees were instructed to confer throughout the year as they continued their work on the matters raised in the overtures.

All of those decisions and tasks resulted in a greatly increased workload for the members of the Committee on Church Doctrine. The study guide, initially envisioned as something on a smaller scale, quickly became a large, though not comprehensive, document demanding several reviews and revisions. While cognizant of some 'frailties' in the guide, *Body, Mind and Soul* was accepted for posting on The Presbyterian Church in Canada website by the deadline set by the 2015 General Assembly.

Even six weeks before the recommended response date of March 31, the invitation to send the results of conversations and study has produced an almost overwhelming number of submissions. Over 200 responses have been already submitted with others arriving on a daily basis. Attempting to sift through this collective wisdom, while still doing the careful research, investigation and reflection outlined in our initial report on the related overtures presented to last year's General Assembly, as well as addressing other important matters on our agenda, has pushed the limits of time and energy available to us.

Nonetheless we are pleased to report as follows.

A STUDY OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY: ITS DISTINCTIVES AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

For several years, the Committee on Church Doctrine has been working on a study of "Presbyterian Polity: Its Distinctives and Directions for the 21st Century". Following a number of revisions, we are pleased to present the following document to the 2016 General Assembly. Our intent is to ask that the document be commended to the church for study and response. As the dynamics of Canadian society change with great rapidity and the shape of all organizations and institutions are being examined and challenged, we believe reflecting on our governing processes and core understandings is of great importance, if we intend to engage effectively our neighbours and our world with the grace and truth evident in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The document asks some questions for consideration within the text. We hope it will evoke others and look forward to considering the responses of the various courts of our church.

Introduction

"[F]or though they keep up a form of religion, they will have nothing to do with it as a force." (2 Timothy 3:5, Moffat translation)

For many generations, The Presbyterian Church in Canada sat comfortably near the centre of Canadian society, resting on our perception of ourselves as one of the founding traditions (together with the Roman Catholic and Anglican) that shaped Canadian history. As society has become both more secular and more diverse in recent generations, and as we have come to acknowledge and appreciate other heritages, including those of First Nations peoples, we have become less certain of just who we are as a church and what place we have in that society. This has provoked questions about the relevance and importance of the church. Some question the exclusive nature of the claims of Christ; others have decided that they have no need to be part of any community of faith; and still others are content to engage in spiritual quests apart or aloof from an ordered or organised religious entity. An increasing number of people now affiliate with a variety of non-Christian faith groups or deny any belief in a god of any description.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada experiences these trends measurably in a decline in membership, participation and income; and immeasurably in feelings like uncertainty about what our purpose and presence in Canadian society should be. We can choose how to respond to those tensions. The easiest choice is to focus on the church as a human organization, considering this simply a management challenge to be solved by following the rules and procedures developed over the years.

In this case, the easiest answer is almost certainly wrong, and leaves us open to holding firmly to the forms of godliness while missing the true power of new life in Jesus Christ. We are more likely to find that power by looking past the procedures to the first principles that lie behind them, looking into why the rules and procedures were created and what values those rules were intended to incarnate.

Reformed and Presbyterian polity has provided the framework for much of our life as the Church of Christ. Our Reformed emphases on the supreme authority of scripture (“the only rule of faith and life”), the importance of a defined theological confession (“This we believe...”), the collegiality and plurality of shared oversight and mutual accountability (“elders”, plural in each congregation and equal numbers of ministers and elders in the presbytery and higher courts), and an orderly record (regularly “attested” which has ensured a long and retentive corporate memory) have all served us well. Any substantive changes contemplated to our polity must be rooted in a clear or clearer understanding of scripture, adequately based on and growing out of our theological confessions, and need to safeguard the strengths inherent in the shared oversight and mutual accountability which remain part of what it means to be Presbyterian. There is a present danger amid a climate of widespread change that we may fail to know what we have until it is gone.

A distinguishing characteristic of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is the way we make decisions through a system of representative courts. The rules tell us how those courts are constituted, but in recent years following those rules has not left us with confidence that we have been able to respond faithfully and effectively in our changing society.

The rules say “A court can be convened only by its moderator.” (Book of Forms section 6) This seems to create an office of presiding elder, but the historic Reformed confession is that directive authority rests not in an individual, even one styled as first among equals, but in a court meeting together to discern the voice of the Spirit. In a society that looks to organizational charts to define who is in charge and who is responsible, what does it mean to place authority and responsibility not in an individual, but rather in the collegial deliberations and shared ministry of elders called together as shepherds under the authority of the Good Shepherd?

The rules say “The session shall assign the names of all members and adherents to the elders who shall keep a list of the names and addresses of those assigned to them, and shall cultivate a personal relationship with those persons through visiting, counselling and encouraging them in the Christian life.” (Book of Forms section 109.4) How does this activity grow out of the church’s call to make disciples, to help people grow in the grace of Jesus Christ? What kind of gifts does a person need to fulfil this calling? Does this unfairly limit who can faithfully serve as a presbyter? In a society increasingly sensitive to privacy concerns and governed by privacy laws, how do elders and ministers work together as equals in providing pastoral care and counsel to individuals and families?

Our Reformed confession is that “the organic unity of the church is maintained in a hierarchy of courts (in contradistinction to a hierarchy of persons); the authority of which courts is ministerial and declarative” (Book of Forms section 3). In this hierarchy of courts, presbyteries oversee the work of sessions. The rules set standards for how presbyteries shall oversee the records of sessions, such as “It is required of minutes that: The number of each page shall be written in full where it is not printed.” (Book of Forms section 27.1) Do these standards adequately ensure the church is working together in faithfulness to Christ’s mission? Or is a different kind of oversight required?

The changing society in which we live calls for a church that does not rest on its heritage. It needs a church focused on its calling as a community sent forth by Jesus Christ to proclaim the word of God, to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to lead people to life in a new kingdom or realm of the Spirit. It needs a church dedicated not to maintaining an institution, but to building a new community.

The heritage of polity we have received from previous generations has given us the place where we stand. Over the years it has preserved the community of faith in which we live. The challenge today is how to build on that foundation so that this community can respond to new challenges and become a place where future generations can be nurtured in the faith we received from Jesus Christ.

Do we need different rules and procedures? Or a different way of looking at those rules and procedures? Perhaps the way our Book of Forms describes the activities of church courts leads us to see them primarily as agents of administrative control and institutional maintenance. How could we rewrite them to make our calling as a community with a mission clear? Darrell Guder in his Laidlaw lecture (2015) challenged the church to recognize that the Christendom model of maintenance ministry is no longer adequate for a church in a culture in which a missional model is required.

Towards a study of church polity

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “polity” as “a form or process of civil government or constitution”.

Polity, or church organization and government, has largely been taken for granted by many individuals, congregations and courts in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. As much of our presbyterian polity has been bequeathed to us as part of our Reformed heritage, we have not had to think too long or too deeply about how it was constructed. How we conceive of the nature of the church has a substantial impact on how we approach the forms and processes of our governance.

Historically, the Presbyterian Church has affirmed and espoused a form of government that emphasizes a shared leadership by “presbyters” – teaching and ruling elders, who are spiritually equal in authority and mutually accountable. We are organised on four levels, sometimes called courts, each with defined areas of oversight. The local congregation is led and overseen by the session, composed of a pastor or pastors and a plurality of elders, elected by the congregation, but ordained – set apart – as examples to the believers and to the community at large to which the congregation bears witness. Congregations in close proximity to each other are grouped in presbyteries, composed of equal numbers of pastors and representative ruling elders. Provincial or regional conference among the leadership is facilitated by synods, which now may be either representative or all-inclusive of the membership of the presbyteries. Nationally, the General Assembly gathers representatives, appointed by the presbyteries, together on an annual basis to oversee the whole and to facilitate and co-ordinate corporate witness to the country and to the world.

Is the expression “the courts of the church” still helpful? In what other ways might we describe shared leadership and governance that is collegial and mutually accountable?

Apart from one relatively recently revised section on formal ecumenical shared ministries (Book of Forms section 200.13), there is very little said in our polity about local inter-denominational co-operation or work with para-church agencies. Yet in many communities and congregations, current reality is that there is much in the way of such collegial support and co-operation in Christian ministry to the local community.

Beyond national geographic borders, the formal governance process is consultative and fraternal, rather than definitive or legislative. We have relations and partnerships with other Presbyterian and Reformed churches and with other branches of the Christian church espousing other forms of polity (most are Episcopalian, although some are Congregationalist). It could be argued that a lack of a formal structure for presbyterians beyond national borders is a weakness of our polity and one which may need further reflection and redress in the present age of globalisation.

How might our polity better reflect existing and future ecumenical and international relationships?

The Church – Marks and Ministry

We confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe in “one holy catholic apostolic church”. In his book, *Models of the Church*, the Roman Catholic Avery Dulles reviews and critiques various models of the church, including the church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, and as servant. In chapter ten, entitled, “Ecclesiology and Ministry”, he describes how differing understandings of the church lead to different approaches to ministry. Dulles understands Protestant ecclesiology to view the church primarily “as a witnessing congregation” and contrasts a “word-centered” witness with a “sacrament-centered” one espoused by the Roman Catholic communion. (p. 161)

Calvin was clear in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that the essential marks of the church are the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely (or sincerely) preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” (Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, chap. 1, sec. 9, Battles trans.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; alt. reading taken from Eerdmans edition, cited below)

“We have said that the symbols by which the Church is discerned are the preaching of the word and the observance of the sacraments for these cannot anywhere exist without producing fruit and prospering the blessing of God.” (Calvin, *The Institutes*, Book IV, chap. 1, sec. 10, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1957)

To these two marks, Reformed churches have often added a third mark: discipline rightly administered. “Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever the Word of God is truly preached and heard, the Sacraments are rightly administered, and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.” (Scots Confession, 3.18)

The Belgic Confession reiterates this: “The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.” (The Belgic Confession, in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff, Vol. 3, New York: Harper and Row, 1931, p. 419–420.)

Living Faith describes these marks in more contemporary language: “The church is present when the Word is truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and as it orders its life according to the word of God.” (Living Faith, 7.1.6) It goes on to emphasize that the church as the community of those who live in Christ are called to a faithful discipleship: “Disciples of Christ are called to obedience. Jesus said: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Obedience involves us totally. Yet as we give ourselves to him we discover that his service alone brings true freedom.” (Living Faith 8.1.1)

In our relatively recent rewrite of chapter 9 of the Book of Forms, we have sought as a church to reform and uphold processes for church discipline which emphasize the collegial nature of our leadership and our mutually accountable responsibilities for the oversight of members (by the session) and ministers (by the presbytery).

The marks of the church, whether they be one, two, three, or four, are to point to Christ. James Bannerman, professor in the Free Church of Scotland, in his classic study, *The Church of Christ*, maintained: “The only true and infallible note or mark of a Church of Christ is the profession of the faith of Christ.” He wrote, “Other things, such as sacraments and ordinances, the ministry, and the outward administration of the Church, are not essential to it, but only accidental; they are necessary for its wellbeing, but not for its being. He goes on to quote Jerome, referring to the prevalence of Arianism in the church of the fourth century: “The Church does not consist of walls, but in the truth of its doctrines; the Church is wherever there is true faith.” [James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, orig. 1869, reprinted Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015, p. 65]

Accepting that the marks of the true preaching of Christ, the right administration of the sacraments and the appropriate administration of discipline are essential for the church’s wellbeing, our polity needs always to be ordered and reviewed with an eye to ensuring that the forms and processes of church administration enable these marks to be clearly seen.

The marks of the church need to be reflected in the way the church is organised. In the Reformed church, such organisation has been built around the distinctive offices or orders of ministry.

T.H.L. Parker wrote, commenting on Calvin’s commission to re-organise the church in Geneva: “For him, the Church in any place must faithfully mirror the principles laid down in the Holy Scripture. In the New Testament, he found four permanent orders of ministry, and around these he constructed his organization. He prepared a draft document, “Ecclesiastical Ordinances”, which was discussed in committee, somewhat modified, and passed for approval by the City Councils. In this fourfold ministry, the whole life of the Church was covered, its worship, education, soundness and purity, and its works of love and mercy.” (Christian History Institute, christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/life-and-times-of-john-calvin/ reprinted from *Christian History Magazine* #12 – Calvin, 1986)

Calvin in his Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances states: “There are four orders of office instituted by our Lord for the government of his Church. First, pastors; then doctors; next elders; and fourth deacons. Hence if we will have a Church well ordered and maintained we ought to observe this form of government.” (*Calvin, Theological Treatises*, J.K.S. Reid, ed., Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus edition, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954)

The Second Book of Discipline reiterates this: “There are four ordinary functions or offices in the kirk of God: the office of the pastor, minister or bishop; the doctor; the presbyter or elder; and the deacon.” (Chapter 2, section 6)

The primary role of ministers ordained as “pastors and teachers” is preaching and teaching. Historically, the role of the “doctor” was to teach doctrine. The primary role of ruling elders is to share in the pastoral oversight of the people. Historically, the primary role of the deacon was the care of the poor and the sick.

Dulles' review of different models of ecclesiology highlights the dangers inherent in viewing the church as "institution", modeled on the secular state, in which the exercise of power in administration becomes divorced from the fulfilling of "the spiritual mission of the Church" (p. 154).

H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James M. Gustafson in a book entitled, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry*, ask a challenging and focusing question: "Is not the result of all these debates and the content of the confessions or commandments of all these authorities this: that no substitute can be found for the definition of the goal of the Church as the increase among men of the love of God and neighbor?"

Accepting that the church does not exist for itself (maintenance, as in the now-past age of Christendom), but to bear witness to Jesus Christ in a non-Christian culture and environment (missional, in our new reality), how might our polity better show a priority for the love of neighbours presently outside and beyond the Church? Is there room for a recovery of the office of deacon to ensure that the evidence of the church's fourth mark of works of mercy and charity is more visible?

Certainly, as the 2014 General Assembly has affirmed, "a clear and critical priority as a denomination is to renew, equip, and inspire local congregations and missions to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) and the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29–31)." (A&P 2014, p. 30) To that end, we would affirm that a key focus of our work on polity needs to be directed toward sessions and presbyteries in their leadership in renewing, equipping and inspiring local congregations and missions. In what ways does the polity of The Presbyterian Church reflect our ecclesiology (i.e. our doctrine of the church)? In what ways does our polity fail to reflect our ecclesiology?

The plurality of elders in the local session, and the spiritual and numerical equality of ministers and elders in the higher courts of the church within our Reformed and Presbyterian practice has served well as a barrier and bulwark against clericalism. What it has not done, at least in recent years, is to prevent us from becoming increasingly immersed – some would say submerged – in administrivia. Neal Mathers in a recent online posting said, "Perhaps we need to ask the question: If presbyteries could only do three things to move the mission of the church in their bounds forward what would those three things be? – I can see referrals from GA, examining records, and chasing down statistical reports not being on the list." The volume and length of regulations governing the church has grown in recent years almost in direct proportion as the size of the church has shrunk.

At the risk of provoking presbyters and presbyteries by giving them one more internally-focused task, it might be helpful along the lines of Neal Mathers' question to ask presbyteries and sessions to reflect on aspects of our polity which help to facilitate effective ministry, and to identify, with a view to elimination or minimalization, those which do not.

A review of the role and responsibility of the session

Recent initiatives to re-imagine the church in terms of being the "missional church" call for substantial reflection on the contours of church polity, especially at the local level. Acknowledging the call from the 2014 General Assembly for all agencies and committees of the Assembly to give priority to strengthening local congregations, we would review sections 109–113 of the Book of Forms in which the responsibilities of the session are set out. The headings and groupings and the order of these serve to point out emphases which may well have served the church in a settled, Christian culture, but which perhaps do not serve as well to aid in energizing and equipping a missional church in a post- and non-Christian environment to take the gospel to a largely non-Christian population.

The following observations and questions are offered to teaching and ruling elders, to sessions, to presbyteries and to synods as a stimulus to discussion:

1. What does it mean to be an elder or presbyter?

Is it to be gathered in courts where we are accountable to one another under Jesus Christ? Is it to pray and take counsel together? Is it to be out in the world and the workplace bearing witness, living and sharing with neighbours, colleagues, and strangers the love of God found in Jesus Christ? Is it all of these, and more? How can we recover a sense of mutual accountability to the voice of the Spirit? How can the church – the community of Christ – respond nimbly (i.e. appropriately, quickly and effectively) to what Christ calls us to do today? How might the roles of pastors and ruling elders be different in a missional church?

2. What does it mean to be a session?

How are the description and delineation of duties in sections 109–113 of the Book of Forms helpful? How is it limiting? (“Duties and Powers” are broken down as “Supervision and Oversight”; “Membership and Pastoral Care”; “Worship”; “Christian Education”; “Stewardship and Mission”.) Would “Responsibilities” be a better introductory tag than “Duties and Powers”?

Is the first task of the session “Supervision and Oversight”? Might we conceive of the session first as a community of mutually-accountable elders who are called as disciples of Jesus Christ to bear one another’s burdens and to spur one another on to love and good deeds?

Is the linking of “Stewardship and Mission” really appropriate? Asserting as does section 113.2 that “The session is responsible for seeing that the congregation develops and maintains programs of mission and outreach...” reduces mission to a program. In his essay on “Missional Renewal”, Todd Hobart quotes from Darrell L. Guder et al in *Missional Church: A vision for the sending of the church in North America*, “It has taken us decades to realize that mission is not just a program of the church.” Rather, the church is defined as “God’s sent people”. The quotation goes on to say, “Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and the mandate of the church. Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church.” (Craig Van Gelder, ed. *The Missional Church and Denominations*, p. 246)

Would a greater emphasis on “discipleship” be helpful amid or ahead of the section on “Christian Education”?

Congregational renewal in worship has engaged many more than the minister or pastor alone in the conduct of worship. In some congregations, multiple staff and in many congregations teams of volunteers work together in crafting and leading worship, especially with respect to praise, employing a variety of voices and instruments. Readers other than the minister share in the reading of scripture. Although we affirm that the minister is responsible for the conduct and content of public worship, most sessions either directly or through delegation to a worship co-ordination team undertake with respect to worship many other responsibilities than simply “regulating the hours and forms of public worship”.

What might be said about the use of church facilities as a witness to the community and as a means to bridge barriers and build bridges to the local neighbourhood? Nothing concerning online audio and video communication or the use of social media has found its way into any part of our stated polity.

A review of the roles and responsibilities of presbyteries and synods

We would put forward to sessions, presbyteries and synods some questions for study and reflection on first principles:

3. What does it mean to be a presbytery?

In acknowledging the declaration of the 2014 General Assembly “that a clear and critical priority as a denomination is to renew, equip and inspire local congregations and missions to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment” (A&P, 2014, p. 31), we would seek to challenge presbyteries to answer this question from the viewpoint of the congregation.

In the chapter of the Book of Forms pertaining to the role and work of the presbytery, only three relatively short sections (sections 198–200) are “in relation to congregations”, while 52 sections, and many long ones (sections 201–252) are “in relation to the ministry”.

Beyond appointing interim moderators, processing calls, and approving building and borrowing plans, how are presbyteries serving in aiding, equipping and supporting congregations?

There is also a need to renew an emphasis on the planting of new congregations, at the initiative of the presbytery. The underlying assumptions in sections 200.1 through 200.4 appear to be that in most cases congregations will be organized on the basis of a petition from a group of individuals eager to be a congregation. The stated alternative is that the presbytery may “of its own motion” form a congregation, but it first “must give notice to the session of any congregation that may be affected...” All of this is fine, but how can we communicate a vision that challenges and encourages presbyteries to be planting churches as a vital part of its work and witness?

The current framework appears focused on the erection of places of worship and their “character”. Section 200.1 says: “Congregations may be organized and places of worship erected only with the sanction of the presbytery, which should be satisfied that such places of worship are of a suitable character.” A preoccupation with buildings is part of the bane of our existence. The early church met together in homes. The persecuted and missional church in every age has met in fields and camps. The extent of our preoccupation with buildings contributes to time, energy, talents and resources being directed and expended more inwardly than outwardly.

Recognising that large geography is a fact and factor of life in Canada, are some presbyteries too small in terms of numbers to be effective? Should some presbyteries be combined? Should there be provision for some roaming presbyters to support the work of presbyteries, as the former superintendents of mission did in the synods, in times when The Presbyterian Church in Canada was planting or strengthening more missions and congregations?

4. What does it mean to be a synod?

Part of the impetus for current discussion and decisions around “optional elimination of synods” arises from observations that synods do not have as much “work” or “money” to manage as formerly. Yet our first principles remind us that synods are “for weighty matters, to be intreated by mutual consent and assistance”. (Book of Forms section 274, quoting the Second Book of Discipline, VII, sec. 19)

Presbyteries can go astray, and fail congregations. Small presbyteries, scattered by distance, stretched to the limit through vacancies, or troubled by inter-personal conflicts, may be unable to function in ways that ensure appropriate and necessary oversight of congregations and support for effective missional ministry to the communities in which they are situated, and necessary and appropriate collegial oversight of presbyters. In such cases, it is the role of the synod to intervene to provide what is needed and to ensure mutual accountability.

In addition, synods as corporate entities provide for oversight and organisation for multi-presbytery initiatives and programs, including camps, conferences and retreats which may foster leadership training.

If one or more synods were eliminated, how would the oversight of presbyteries and the coordination of multi-presbytery functions and programmatic initiatives be exercised? How might the polity and ecclesiology of The Presbyterian Church in Canada be more effectively reflected in the processes of committees and boards of the General Assembly?

Concluding Reflections

What is the scriptural context for the way we have done things? How have our procedures expressed the values we confess? And if in our current society those procedures obscure our confession, how can we change those procedures to more accurately reflect the values we learn from Christ’s word? How can we be both reformed and reforming according to God’s word in a rapidly changing context?

In what ways do our existing rules and patterns of doing things set The Presbyterian Church in Canada free to be creatively missional? How do current rules and behavioural patterns get in the way of creativity and mission? He said to me, “‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’” (Ezekiel 37:3, NRSV)

Recommendation No. 1 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the document “Presbyterian Polity: Its Distinctives and Directions for the 21st Century” be commended to the courts and, in particular, to the clerks of those courts for study and response to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the Assembly Office by August 31, 2017.

LIVING IN GOD’S MISSION TODAY (A&P 2015, p. 255-68, 33)

In our report to the 2015 General Assembly we presented a document ‘Living in God’s Mission Today’ which outlined priorities and understandings for believing and being God’s people in our time and situation. That General Assembly commended this document to the church for its ‘up-building and understanding’. We also invited the church to study the document and forward comments to the Committee on Church Doctrine by May 31, 2016.

At the time of preparing this report only a few comments had been received. We will review all the comments and make a report of our findings to the 2017 General Assembly. This document can be found in the A&P 2015, p. 254–268 or on the website, presbyterian.ca/gao/committee-on-church-doctrine under ‘Related Resources’.

500TH ANNIVERSARY OF PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Since the last Assembly, the Committee on Church Doctrine, through its sub-committee, has continued to discuss with other agencies ways in which we can celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017. Several have or are engaged in various initiatives. The Committee on History has been holding annual events across the country focussing on the five solas of the Reformation to culminate in a final event at Knox College in Toronto. Knox College intends to sponsor or co-sponsor a number of events through 2017, both for scholarly and for wider audiences, including lectures, colloquia and an exhibit at the Fisher Rare Book Library. VST/St. Andrew's Hall also has plans for lectures and workshops. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee is working with representatives of the Christian Reformed Church on a joint liturgy for the anniversary.

In co-operation with the *Presbyterian Record*, the committee is planning to offer a series of four articles in the fall of 2017 focussing on the theological legacy of the Reformation. These articles intend both to review how we have been shaped by the major affirmations and actions of the Reformation and to ponder how this legacy can assist us in imagining our church moving forward.

In addition we are investigating the establishment of an on-line list of resources for those who are seeking information about or ways of participating in or initiating activities related to the 500th anniversary.

There are many exciting opportunities to pursue in the next eighteen months and we intend to continue to work in partnership with the various agencies and committees of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in exploring, designing, producing and promoting all parts of the celebration available to us.

ASSEMBLY COUNCIL ADDITIONAL MOTION, 2014 (A&P 2014, p. 30–31)

Item 4 of this additional motion 'directed' all 'national committees' to include an evaluation re the priority of congregations in The Presbyterian Church in Canada in their report to 'future General Assemblies'. The Committee on Church Doctrine would report diligence. As noted above, we devoted many hours of members' time to the preparation of a study guide to assist congregations in their consideration of the various issues raised in the overtures on human sexuality and sexual orientation and related matters of polity and belief.

Our ongoing study of polity has always been undertaken with a goal of congregational vitality as an important factor. We believe the document presented in this report offers the opportunity for congregations and sessions to examine their processes with a view to enhancing their life and mission. One intent of the initiatives being planned for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation is to enable individual members and congregations both to celebrate and to experience the power of the Spirit evident in our history.

Our continued work on the matter of Biblical Hermeneutics (understanding and interpreting the Bible) is intended to assist each member of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to comprehend better the how, as well as the what, of discerning the divine message of the scriptures. We are convinced that such 'gains' are essential for vital congregations in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

As we continued our deeper considerations of the overtures noted above, we have been aware of the deep concerns and anxieties that are present in many of our congregations. Thus, as we ponder and prepare our response as a committee, we are hoping to offer our church a way forward that will add to, not take away from, congregational health and vitality. The initial section of a paper, 'The Way of God's Reign' offered later in our report (p. 6.1.11–14), presents some characteristics of kingdom life that we believe is a step in achieving this goal.

Our prime task is to undertake with thorough and diligent care the work entrusted to us on an annual basis by the General Assembly. As we do so, we seek to be both cognizant of the direction given by this motion and faithful in fulfilling its directives.

***BODY, MIND AND SOUL* – STUDY GUIDE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY**

As noted earlier the 2015 General Assembly tasked the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) jointly to prepare a study guide "on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation and other related matters raised in the overtures to be posted on the church's website by the end of October, 2015." (A&P 2014, p. 46)

In June 2015, discussions began between the convener of this committee and the General Secretary of the Life and Mission Agency seeking to set a process for pursuing this goal. Engaging a contract writer and establishing guiding terms of reference for an 'editorial team' to produce the guide were suggested by the General Secretary. It was agreed to go that route.

Our committee convener made an initial proposal of terms of reference for the guide and the team. They were as follows:

1. To outline and provide both areas for the study guide to address and the general content/approach for the guide to express.
2. The broad areas will be:
 - a. A covering 'page'* along the lines of respectful listening used at the Vancouver Assembly acknowledging that within the church there are varying degrees of prior reflection that exist. It also notes materials on the PCC website, especially the 1994, 2000 and 2003 documents.
 - b. Other 'pages' [or modules] that assist engagement around passages of scriptures either cited in documents and/or overtures or considered relevant by the Design Team on the topics of
 - Sexuality and Marriage
 - Homosexuality [*could be more such topics, but for brevity's sake*]
 - c. A 'page' of scientific perspectives [perhaps referencing material in church documents and/or overtures]
 - d. ...
3. To recruit and engage a writer to prepare the guide.
4. To review the prepared guide and offer any editing deemed helpful.
5. To present the 'edited' document to the Life and Mission Agency and the Committee on Church Doctrine for their approval.

* page is intended to suggest each module should as brief as possible not necessarily that it is limited to one page.

After several exchanges and recognizing the tight timeline, the terms of reference as posted on the Sexuality page on the church's website were accepted, with the verbal caveat that the whole Committee on Church Doctrine would need to approve any document presented as a result of their work to fulfil the task given to them by the General Assembly.

August and September were busy months for the design team and the writer. A very extensive proposed guide was presented to the early October meeting of the committee. It was not endorsed and many suggested revisions were made and forwarded to the team and writer. Changes were made and timeline challenges considered. At the end of October, the Committee on Church Doctrine met via internet and agreed to accept a revised guide for posting. We also agreed to prepare a letter to share with The Presbyterian Church in Canada some of the challenges that had emerged in the consideration of the study guide.

We are pleased, that together with our partners in the Life and Mission Agency, we were able to fulfil our task and present to the church a guide that can assist us, as we engage the many varied perspectives and topics raised by the overtures that precipitated the preparation of the Study Guide, *Body, Mind and Soul*. Stephen Allen was a helpful administrator throughout the summer and fall, and he ably assisted in the production and preparations required.

OVERTURE NOS. 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 26 and 31, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 576–81, 582–87, 601–02, 605–06, 248–49, 16–17)
Re: Affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

OVERTURE NOS. 14, 18, 19 and 21, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 588–90, 591–95, 595–97, 248–49, 16–17)
Re: Study paper on Human Sexuality affirming the Statement on Human Sexuality (1994)

OVERTURE NOS. 5, 24, 30 and 35, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 575–76, 598–99, 603–05, 609–10)
Re: Full inclusion regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity

OVERTURE NOS. 15, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 590, 268–73, 47)
Re: Calling the church to listen regarding human sexuality

OVERTURE NOS. 16, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 590–91, 268–73, 47)
Re: Encouraging dialogue on marriage and sexuality

OVERTURE NO. 23, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 598, 248, 16)
Re: Gay and lesbian candidates for ministry and same-sex marriages

OVERTURE NO. 29, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 603, 248, 17)

Re: Review biblical texts that speak to homosexual relationships

OVERTURE NO. 32, 2015 (A&P 2015, p.17, 606)

Re: Upholding marriage as between one man and one woman

OVERTURE NO. 33, 2015 (A&P 2015, p.17, 607–08)

Re: Issues of Human Sexuality

Immediately following the 2015 General Assembly, members of the Committee on Church Doctrine began to consider the diverse prayers and affirmations made in these 22 overtures. [A related Overture No. 4, 2015 was not referred to our Committee]. Our initial investigations focussed on seeking and considering some of the relevant scientific information available, looking at the biblical material cited in the overtures and other passages deemed important, theological themes and a concise bibliography.

When we met in October to share our initial findings some broad directions for our ongoing work emerged. As we examined the various biblical texts, reviewed different and often antithetical interpretations, recalled previous work pursued on these matters, the range of perspectives among us and some of the themes that had arisen, we agreed to develop a ‘Kingdom’ framework or perspective to root and guide our ongoing work. Some early parts of this document are shared below.

We also agreed to continue to ponder and reflect on the biblical texts noted above and other passages that would ‘naturally’ reflect a Kingdom perspective as we endeavour to assist our denomination ‘to seek first God’s Kingdom and God’s righteousness’. In addition we are carefully examining the various assertions in the overtures and their prayers to be able to respond directly to the requests based on the validity of the reasoning.

In our ongoing reflections, investigations and discussion we have been able to make interim decisions to present as recommendations. We also have become very aware that while some overtures are seeking quick action, the scope of the material to be considered, the reports of many who are still in the process of reflection, the large number of requests for additional time to do careful consideration and the importance of the decisions for The Presbyterian Church in Canada indicates that we be permitted to continue these initiatives and make further reports of our findings to the 2017 General Assembly.

As noted above we are developing material on a Kingdom perspective as a basis and guide for our work on these 22 overtures. Some of the foundational work has been completed and we offer this beginning piece to the church for consideration, encouragement and as a way to continue discussion and reflection embracing both grace and truth. Even though this initial part is a work in progress, it does provide some of the foundation for the recommendations which follow. It is entitled ‘The Way of God’s Reign’.

THE WAY OF GOD’S REIGN

Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace

There is no simple solution that slices the Gordian knot in which we have tied ourselves regarding sexuality and marriage, gender and faithfulness, discipleship and mission within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Indeed, the issues are so complex and fraught that we find that most of our discussion concerns only a piece of all that needs to be discussed – and that piece is the question of whether The Presbyterian Church in Canada should affirm same-sex relationships.¹ It is unlikely that a clear way through the tangle of our differences will appear with more conversation about how we interpret scripture. While The Presbyterian Church in Canada has not officially argued about same-sex relationships for a number of decades, we would be ignorant not to acknowledge that many Christians, both within and outside of our denomination, have been making nuanced and subtle exegetical and theological arguments on the matter. Still, no agreement on the path forward has become manifest. Any new path will likely not come about with more conversation regarding our understandings of theological anthropology, Christology, or justice. While we are Reformed and there is profound agreement about the core of our faith and our subordinate standards, there is also a breadth within the tradition in terms of opinion and practice. At the same time, it is also not likely that a constructive way ahead will come about merely with more scientific research: science can add to our understanding of God and one another, but does not necessarily determine it.

We argue that a way forward can only emerge if we start in a different place than we have in the past. Turning away from our favoured arguments to such a different place will take courage because we all have a stake in the prayers of the overtures around same-sex relationships. Given that we do not have agreement on many issues, the question

becomes how can we have unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Our answer is, “within the Kingdom of God”. As we have examined the theological lens of “the Kingdom of God” we have become convinced that it offers a better option because it so profoundly points to the unity within diversity of the church and where we are called to go as disciples. The conversation we should be having first is about the nature of the church and then about human sexuality.

Our argument proceeds in three parts. First, we trace how the coming Reign of God is conveyed in the larger themes of scripture. Second, we point to an ethic for us as servants within the Kingdom that finds its centre at the Lord’s Table. This ethic includes a posture of humility before each other and God as we work together towards a common Kingdom – diverse but unified. Third, we explore how faithful unity in diversity might begin to be lived out within The Presbyterian Church in Canada in the light of the characteristics of God’s reign.

Contours of the Kingdom of God

As we speak about the reality of God’s coming gracious rule, we will use the terms “Kingdom of God” and “Reign of God” interchangeably. This use of language highlights some of the paradoxical truths about the great hope that God offers to the world, as Christians proclaim it. We declare that the hope God offers has appeared with the coming of Jesus Christ, with his life, death and resurrection; but we also proclaim that the completion of that hope has not yet happened, as the universe does not yet exhibit the peace and holiness which God intends. Alongside this, we declare that God has sovereignty over all that is, was and will be, now and forever, beyond the beginning and the end of time. We trust in these things, but have only a limited understanding of them. Thus, the term “Kingdom” implies a static political boundary that has a punctiliar nature – that is, it happens at a particular point in time – and so can refer to the hope inaugurated by Jesus as well as the final fulfilment of that hope. The term “Reign” implies a dynamic political action that has an ongoing nature, and underlines the constant work of God in the world. The Kingdom of God is all of this: present and effective today, a time we long for, and the ongoing action of God’s ruling providence that stretches backward and forward in time. Faithful followers of Christ have always witnessed to the tensions between these while still affirming all three, and the situation is no different for us today.

As we trace the Reign of God theme in scripture we recognize the Kingdom as:

A Metaphor Appropriate to Describe God’s Intentions for Creation. The Bible regularly resorts to parable, a way of telling something slant, and poetic imagery to stake the contours of the Kingdom. For example, in Isaiah’s prophetic vision of redemption, people “are inscribed on the palms of God’s hands” while ruins are rebuilt (Isaiah 49:16–17); in Matthew’s account the Kingdom is said to be like a mustard seed which grows into an impossible tree (Matthew 13:31–32).² Following scripture, our speech about the Reign of God must be humble. To speak of the thing itself as if we know it entirely is to fall into idolatry. Humility does not imply apophaticism or appeals to the “ineffable mystery” of God. Rather, it is to suggest that God in God’s action in the world disturbs our normal discursive ways of encountering God so that we must rely on God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ for our knowledge.

Centred on Jesus Christ, Servant King. Scripture proclaims the Reign as coming near in the presence of Jesus (Matthew 4:17). While King, Jesus reigns like no other. Christ reverses worldly conceptions of power by means of a righteous grace, a holy love and, ultimately, a powerful self-giving on the cross. With Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God the Father, the Kingdom of God continues until that final day when every knee shall bow in submission and worship before the throne. The Reformed tradition recognizes this as an integral part of the offices of Christ by naming him King. The Reign of God is therefore personal (found in relationship to a person not a concept) and when we encounter Jesus Christ, we encounter God.

Upheld by Jesus Christ, Lord of Time. Because Jesus Christ was and is and ever shall be, the Kingdom of God is found within the witness of all scripture, within our everyday lived experience, and within time as yet to come. Christ’s presence is made known through God’s Holy Spirit, even as all creation exists through that providential accompanying, sustaining, and creating Spirit. To privilege either protology or eschatology (theology of creation and of end-times, respectively), or to dwell on matters of chronology is to deny the reality of the Reign of God.

Proclaimed by the Son of Mary, Son of God. God sent Jesus as a human man, a Jew, a student and interpreter of the law, teaching and ministering in a particular time and place. Christians are bound to follow this Jew, this Galilean of a different faith than our own. The Kingdom is not Docetic, a purely ‘spiritual’ reality. Thus, the Kingdom of God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth looks to the redemption of all

our ordinary moments, the transfiguration of us as creatures in all our particularities and differences, and not in the abolition of those particularities and differences.

The Law Fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it in his person. Like all kingdoms, God's Reign has a law but a different one from the normal human legal systems. Following Deuteronomy and Leviticus, Jesus Christ sided with those interpreters who defined the heart and essence of the law as the love of God and neighbour (Matthew 22:37–40). Consistently and thoroughly, Jesus challenged and reinterpreted any understandings of God's covenant with humanity which strayed from justice, love and holiness. The Law of the Kingdom is Jesus Christ. For instance, Jesus reminds listeners that Sabbath is a time of mercy (Matthew 12:7) rather than a time for prideful neglect of the needs of others. In the Reign of God, the law will be/is written upon human hearts rather than carved in stone (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

A Prophetic Call to Faithfulness. Jesus as Prophet calls all of humanity to lives that are consonant with his reign as Servant King. Earlier prophets, such as Isaiah, called God's people to covenantal faithfulness all the while pointing to an eschatological vision of God's Kingdom that encompasses all of creation (Isaiah 62:6–12; 65:17–25). When Jesus uses Isaiah to declare the Reign coming, he declares that the Kingdom is at work right now as the world becomes a place of abundance, freedom, healing and justice for the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed (Luke 4:16–22).

Inviting and Requiring Obedience. Through Jesus Christ, who is the fulfilment of God's covenantal faithfulness with and for humanity, God reveals how we should act as citizens of the Reign of God. Our duty is not onerous or based on a set of laws or principles. Rather, we submit to Jesus Christ through the way of the cross. This obedience will result in a unity of action and belief. God's reign is lived out by seeking mercy and justice through humility before God (Micah 6:8; Matthew 6:33). Christians are those who call on Jesus as Lord and seek to do God's will as God's Kingdom comes.

Creating a Community. No king reigns without citizens. We should not conflate "church" and "Kingdom", for some once considered unclean or excluded find a place in the eschatological vision of the reign of God (e.g. eunuchs, foreigners, the blind, the lame; see Isaiah 56:1–8, Matthew 11:5, 20:1–16 for examples) and in the end God chooses who stands within God's Reign. One of the hallmarks of a Kingdom community is a concern for those who are "lost" (Luke 15:3–10). The Kingdom belongs to those such as children, although some, such as the rich, may find obedience too high a price to pay (Mark 10:13–16, 23).

Restoring Creation through Reconciliation. The power of sin that leads to death has been abolished by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus is called King and he demonstrates his lordship over all by conquering death. In the empty tomb found in a garden, God reveals God's saving action to restore the natural world and heal fractured relationships (Isaiah 11:6–9; Matthew 13:31–32), leading creation to the full reconciliation of all things (Colossians 1:20).

A Concrete Reality. Contrary to popular conceptions of "heaven", the Kingdom is not ephemeral or some sort of parallel universe. Rather, both in the here-and-now and in the time-to-come, the Kingdom is tangibly manifest. Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine, and as the fulfilment of the Kingdom, demonstrates that both flesh and spirit are constitutive parts of being a creature. The Reign of God includes a new temple (Priest), new Jerusalem (King), and a new earth (Prophet) (Ezekial 40:1–47; Revelation 21:1–4).

A Feast whose Promise is Embodied in the Lord's Supper. On the night of his arrest, condemned in part by the political charge of treason, Jesus gave a banquet for his disciples. Contrary to images of grandeur and opulence, Jesus gathered his friends (including those who betrayed, abandoned and denied him) around a table to inaugurate a new community. As often as we, faithful servants and sinners, eat the bread and drink the wine we do so with Christ the King presiding. Each communion is a proleptic revelation, an anticipation of the final feast hosted by God (Isaiah 25:6–10a; Luke 14:15–24).

Endnotes

¹ Similarly, the majority of this paper addresses same-sex relationships within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We suggest that the Kingdom/Reign of God lens that we use may also help to address questions of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, intersex and queer identities and belonging but have only hinted at that further conversation

here. That said, we acknowledge that the challenges facing LGBTQ would be in no way ended by an ecclesiastical agreement over same-sex relationships. We admit, neither for the first nor the last time, that much more work needs to be done.

². See also Isaiah 60:1–61:11; Jeremiah 31:10–14; Ezekial 34:11–31; Micah 4:1–4; Matthew 14:44–53; 25:31–46; Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 13:20–21; Revelation 22:2, among many others.

The 2015 General Assembly also instructed our committee to confer with the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries) throughout the coming year as each continues the work of responding to the overtures referred to them. (The joint preparation of the study guide was a separate initiative mandated by last year's Assembly.) We have attempted to do so by sharing draft reports and also relevant material approved by our committee for reporting to the 2016 General Assembly. These documents were normally sent to Stephen Allen, Associate Secretary, Justice Ministries. One of our sub-committee's conveners also spoke with him during the preparation of their draft report. Throughout the course of the year some responses sent to the Committee on Church Doctrine were also shared with Stephen Allen and vice-versa. Most responses from our church, however, were distributed directly to both groups. As well a number of conversations and emails between the convener and Life and Mission Agency staff have taken place.

Unfortunately, the decision of the 2015 General Assembly to make available the notes of the conversations during the facilitated process to the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries) to assist our committees as we prepared our responses for this year's Assembly wasn't completed. We did have the prayers accessible and many of them were incorporated into the study guide.

Recommendation No. 2 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in light of the Reign of God, in a response to the overtures named above and, in particular, the prayer of Overture No. 16, 2015 re encouraging dialogue on marriage and sexuality.

Recommendation No. 3 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That all courts of the church be urged to deal with people in same-sex relationships with tender pastoral care.

Recommendation No. 4 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the Committee on Church Doctrine in consultation with the Life and Mission Agency continue to reflect on the nature of Christian marriage in relation to LGBTQ and intersex people and report back to the 2017 General Assembly.

Recommendation No. 5 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the Life and Mission Agency in consultation with the Committee on Church Doctrine continue to reflect theologically on the spiritual needs of transgender and intersex people, and report back to the 2017 General Assembly.

Recommendation No. 6 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the General Assembly receive the above report as an interim response to the prayers of Overture Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 35, 2015; and grant permission to report on the various matters raised in these overtures to a future General Assembly.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE (A&P 2015, p. 273–74)

As reported to previous General Assemblies, the Committee on Church Doctrine has been developing a paper on "Understanding and Interpreting the Scriptures", commonly referred to as biblical hermeneutics. As we noted in our report last year this is a very timely topic for The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

We have a document ready to share with the church and are looking forward to the responses its use will engender. We also believe, even at this stage of its development, it has great value and hope that it will assist all of us as we seek to know more fully the revelation of God's will, character and purpose written in the scriptures.

**UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE BIBLE
AN AID FOR THOSE WISHING TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY,
AND FOR THOSE WISHING TO STUDY AND INTERPRET IT**

1. Introduction
2. The relationship of scripture to God's authority

3. What does it mean to say the Bible is “inspired”?
4. Who wrote the Bible?
5. Who decided what books would be in the Bible?
6. Jesus’ perspective
7. Other perspectives within scripture itself
8. Understanding *sola scriptura*
9. The role of tradition in interpreting the Bible
10. The “literal” sense of scripture
11. New interpretations and changing understandings
12. The role of worship
13. An awareness of our own contexts
14. One perspective on why scripture is authoritative
15. Images and metaphors for what the Bible is and does
16. Aids for interpreting the Bible
 16. A The Holy Spirit
 16. B Heinrich Bullinger
 16. C The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America
 16. D Living Faith and the Westminster Confession
17. A Note on The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral”
18. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The Bible is centrally important to Christians because “the written word bears witness” to the living Word, Jesus Christ¹. In the Presbyterian tradition, the Bible’s vitality to the life of faith is evident in various places including, but not limited to, the Bible itself, our subordinate standards, ordination vows, and the devotional lives of those who seek to follow Jesus. The Bible is our “canon”, meaning “that which regulates, rules, or serves as a norm or pattern for other things.”²

Eugene Peterson writes: “Language is spoken into us; we learn language only as we are spoken to. We are plunged at birth into a sea of language.... Then slowly syllable by syllable we acquire the capacity to answer: mama, papa, bottle, blanket, yes, no. Not one of these words was a first word.... All speech is answering speech. We were all spoken to before we spoke.”³ In a similar way, just as a child’s talking is directly impacted by the language used by his or her parents, the life and actions of God’s children are directly impacted by the word of God heard in scripture.

However, for all the importance that the Bible holds for Christians, the scriptures are not always easy to interpret. Along with a great diversity in style and approaches within the Bible itself, a large distance in time and place exists between us and the people who wrote the Bible. The culture, the geography and even the spiritual practices portrayed in the text remain in many ways foreign to our twenty-first century Canadian lives. That said, it is written that “the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and your heart for you to observe” (Deuteronomy 30:14). Christians approach the Bible in the faith that the Holy Spirit will shed light on what seems dark to us.

The intent of this document is to provide some background information and help for those wishing to understand the nature of the Bible’s authority for Christians, and for those wishing to interpret the Bible, especially given its centrality to the Christian life for Presbyterians. In the Reformed tradition there has been no definitive rule for how to interpret scripture; however, various principles have been proposed which aid in this process. Such principles are meant to help guide us as we seek to discern God’s will in scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit. This document seeks to draw attention to some of these principles and to tools for using them.

We begin by looking at what is meant by Biblical authority and inspiration, followed by some notes on the writing and assembly of the Bible as we know it. We then give some examples of models for understanding what the Bible means for us as Christians, and tips on how these may be helpful for studying and interpreting scripture.

We also offer a word about vocabulary. Various terms are used to describe what are commonly called the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is also sometimes called the “Hebrew Scriptures”, “First Covenant”, or “First Testament”. The New Testament is also sometimes called the “Greek Scriptures”, “Second Covenant”, or “Second Testament”. In this report we will use the terms most common among Presbyterians in Canada today – The Old and New Testaments. As we do so we honour the fact that the books of the Old Testament are sacred scripture for our Jewish brothers and sisters.

2. The relationship of scripture to God's authority

When making statements about various topics, many people quote or appeal to the Bible. When people say “The Bible says...” or “God’s word says...” they are often appealing to God (through the Bible) as an authoritative voice who lends strength to a point of view. Yet we also know that two people quoting from the Bible may also be claiming very different things. So when we try to evaluate different claims, it’s important to understand the nature of any claim to authority, especially since, for people of faith, there is no higher authority than God.

What is God’s “authority”? In short, it is God’s almighty and creative rule. It is when and how God makes God’s will be done. This power belongs to God to exercise; that is, God is free to act as God desires. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth sheds some light on the nature of God’s authority by comparing Jesus to ancient ideas of what a judge is: “In the biblical world of thought, the judge is not primarily the one who rewards some and punishes others; he is the man [sic] who creates order and restores what has been destroyed.”⁴ God’s authority is the power to give and renew the life of the universe.

Let us continue to go deeper. According to Anglican Bible scholar Tom Wright, God’s authority “is the sovereign rule of God sweeping through creation to judge and to heal. It is the powerful love of God in Jesus Christ, putting sin to death and launching new creation. It is the fresh, bracing and energizing wind of the Spirit.”⁵ Similarly, Presbyterians declare that God’s authority is revealed in the mystery of the relationship of the Trinity.

So what does “the authority of scripture” mean, and how does that relate to God’s authority? It is helpful when answering this question to consider these things:

1. All true authority is from God.
2. Jesus Christ, fully human, fully divine, reveals the nature of God’s authority. (In Matthew 28:18, Jesus says: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”)
3. As the Bible is the primary way we learn about God’s dealings with creation, the Bible is where, led by the Holy Spirit, we encounter this authority. Thus, as Wright notes, “the authority of scripture” is shorthand for “God’s authority exercised through Scripture.”⁶
4. The authority of scripture thus refers to the Bible’s ability, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to make and nurture a new relationship between readers, God, others, and the world.⁷

Still, as the sixteenth-century Reformer John Calvin wrote “the Word will not find acceptance in [human] hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”⁸ To look more closely at the connection between God’s authority and scripture, we turn now to the idea of “inspiration”.

3. What does it mean to say the Bible is “inspired”?

Out of many ways to understand this term, a helpful place to start is here: to say the Bible is “inspired,” according to Wright, can mean that the Holy Spirit “guided the very different writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the books God intended his people to have.”⁹ At the same time, the words of scripture are also expressions of the faith of men and women who came to profound understandings of God in their daily life, in the midst of both joy and suffering. As we believe that God’s Spirit is at work in prodding human faith, so there is also inspiration in people trying to understand their experience of God’s presence and action in the world. Inspiration at the level of the production of what Christians know as the Bible stretched from ancient Israelite times to a few hundred years after Christ.

As it says in the Westminster Confession, the books of the Bible “are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life” (1.2). Because of this, and because God inspired the writers to produce the books God wanted God’s people to have, “God...still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.”¹⁰

But inspiration does not only refer to the Bible itself and its creation; inspiration needs also to be involved in the relationship between the written words and the reader. As the Westminster Confession states, “we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word” (1.6). That is, without the Holy Spirit working within us, the Bible would be merely interesting ancient literature and history, beautiful even, but not sacred; the Spirit is required for the words of scripture to speak to us and light the path to the way of God for us.¹¹

4. Who wrote the Bible?

The Bible is not a book in the modern sense of the word where we think of a single human author. The Bible is a library – a collection of ancient writings by dozens and dozens of authors spanning over a thousand years.

Many different people wrote and edited the Bible. Sometimes it is hard to know who wrote certain books – for example, the letter to the Hebrews. Ancient convention did not always demand that authors identify themselves. Sometimes the books are connected to particular people – for instance, through the titles which have become attached to them over the years – but ancient ideas of authorship may not have been quite the same as ours. So we have writings like the letter to the Romans, which clearly was from the apostle Paul, but at the same time we have letters like the one to the Colossians which says that it was written by Paul, but whose authorship is disputed by some scholars. Even if the identity of the author is not certain, early Christian communities concluded they were the word of God. We believe that the Holy Spirit continues to connect Christians to what God is saying through these texts in order to form faith and life.

This means, of course, that not everyone agrees about who wrote different biblical books. There is also much ongoing discussion about the effect of the process of writings being passed down through time, and what roles the editors who put the text together – who are also considered as being inspired by the Holy Spirit in their work – had in the shaping of scripture. In all of it, it is important to remember that communities of faith agreed upon the writings that would be authoritative for their lives.

John Calvin placed a high emphasis on the Bible. He knew that human writers and editors are not perfect, but felt that, ultimately, God was the author of scripture, though the revelation of this depends on the Holy Spirit acting inwardly upon the readers. In a sense, people write and read sacred texts, but God moves hearts.¹²

5. Who decided what books would be in the Bible?

Various people wrote, edited and collected the texts of what we call the Bible over a span of more than a thousand years. Some suggest that the community was collectively using many early writings by the time of King David (about the year 1000 BCE). As the community developed, and as time went on, other writings were added including psalms and various prophetic works. A significant time for this collection occurred while the Israelites were in exile in the Babylonian Empire in the 6th century BCE. While we are used to Bibles which have a fixed order, this was not always the case. Even at the time of Jesus the order of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (the only writings he would have known as sacred), including the Greek translation known as the Septuagint, had not been fully fixed. Changes continued to happen in both Judaism and Christianity, so that the collection used by much of modern Judaism, called the Tanakh, has a very different order than any Christian Old Testament. Protestant Bibles also differ from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox ones because the reformers of the 16th century sought to clarify which books should be used when making decisions about doctrine. Books which were mostly Greek Jewish texts, commonly called the Apocrypha, were excluded – they were considered helpful for instruction, but not sacred.

Very early in the Christian movement, Jesus' words were considered authoritative (see 1 Corinthians 7:10, 9:14) and at least once quoted as scripture (see 1 Timothy 5:18b). This was also happening for the writings of the apostles (see 2 Peter 3:16).

In the debates about which books to include in the New Testament, it was “widely conceded” argues American Religious Studies professor Bart Ehrman, that for a book to be accepted as scripture it needed to meet four criteria. It needed to be: (a) ancient (near to the time of Jesus), (b) apostolic (written by an apostle or companion of an apostle), (c) catholic (meaning it needed to have wide-spread acceptance among churches), and (d) orthodox (the views presented needed to be right teaching).¹³

The New Testament came into being after a long process of discussion and debate. The first time we encounter an exact listing of the 27 books that would be included is in a letter written in 367 CE by an influential bishop named Athanasius. Through it all, both before this listing appears and in the debates that continued afterward, the Holy Spirit guided his people to ensure they had access to the books that told God's unfolding story. The process of Christian texts being included in the Bible took place over a long period of time and involved a wide range of Christians.

6. Jesus' perspective

As Christians, it is also helpful to reflect on Jesus' own usage of scripture. The gospels often depict Jesus' followers as calling him “Rabbi”, that is “Teacher” or “Master”. Although the term did not have the same type of official or

formal meaning as it has taken on in later Judaism,¹⁴ it still indicates the respect and authority which many granted to his teaching. Jesus the Rabbi, our Lord, frequently appealed to scripture as an authority. As a Jewish teacher, Jesus joined in the interpretation of scripture. He was part of a tradition of interpretation going back to the prophets and earlier, and used scripture in his teaching and debates with other religious teachers. Jesus' interpretation of the Law and the prophets can help to shape our own interpretation.

Take, for instance, when Jesus asked about or was asked about the greatest commandment (Matthew 24:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28); movement from the loving God (Deuteronomy 6:5) to loving neighbour (Leviticus 19:18) involves linking texts based on associated ideas (love) in a way that has each interpret the other. This example also shows how he stood in an interpretative community – others before and after him made a similar connection between loving God and loving neighbour.¹⁵ Jesus also built on or expanded scripture based on his interpretation (“You have heard...but I say to you...”). He also joined in what became a common rabbinic method for exploring the interpretation of scripture, conversation and debate. He confronted various religious leaders, including members of rival Jewish groups, the Sadducees and Pharisees (Matthew 22:23–33; 15:1–9). Three of the gospels even show Jesus using this type of argument beyond human debates – when he is tempted by the devil, Jesus counters the devil's use of scripture with his own quotations (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–12). Like Jesus, we are called to use all the tools for interpretation at our disposal in the twenty-first century. This includes historical-critical analysis and other methods which have been devised over the centuries.

The New Testament proclaims Jesus to be the living Word to whom the written scripture bears witness, and who thus is the measure of Christian interpretation of scripture. Jesus says that the scriptures testify about him (John 5:39), and “cannot be broken” or “cannot be set aside” (John 10:35). In addition he says that his words “will never pass away” (Mark 13:31). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also said that he came to “fulfill” the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17).

7. Other perspectives within scripture itself

Several biblical writers highlight that the Bible is not just a storehouse for information, but a means by which we learn about God's will and are equipped to live it out. A psalmist writes of the Lord's Law as “reviving the soul”, “making wise the simple”, “enlightening the eyes”, and “sweeter also than honey” (Psalm 19:7–10). Observing God's commandment brings blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1–14). Scripture teaches how to walk in the way of the Lord. In a passage intended to comfort God's people, assuring them that God will restore them after they have been exiled to a foreign land, the writer of the book of Isaiah declares that God's message and promise is never diminished: “For the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

In addition to what Jesus said, there is a consistent pattern within the Bible itself stressing not only the centrality but the divine origin of the inspiration of scripture. Perhaps most famously in the New Testament, the apostle Paul, while writing to Timothy, says that “All scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). Here, the author was referring to the Old Testament and was encouraging Timothy to be well-schooled as he prepared for ministry.

While encouraging God's people to make every effort to enter God's Sabbath rest – a term equivalent to the Kingdom of God in the letter to the Hebrews – the writer of the letter notes that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” and “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). This speaks of an ongoing power in the lives of those reading the letter; moreover, it reminds us that the word of God is not always (not often?) safe and easy in the good news that it brings, but causes us to bare the secrets of our hearts before God, and works to transform even our innermost thoughts.

In 2 Peter, we read that “no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (1:20–21). In this letter, followers of Jesus are encouraged through hardship to hold fast to right teaching. One of the emphases is on the fact that prophetic words recorded in the Bible were of divine inspiration: their utterance and authority depend on the work of the Holy Spirit.

8. Understanding *sola scriptura*

There are five great *solas* of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. These are short Latin summary statements which highlight key emphases of those who desired to reform the European church. They are *sola fide* (by faith alone), *solus Christus* (through Christ alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *solus Deo gloria* (glory to God alone), and *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone). *Sola scriptura* refers to the Reformers' strong belief that Christianity should, first and foremost, look to the Bible to understand the origins and shape of our faith. According to Tom

Wright, in the great debates of that time, this phrase meant that “nothing *beyond* scripture is to be taught as needing to be believed in order for one to be saved. On the other hand, it gave a basic signpost on the way: the great truths taught in scripture are indeed the way of salvation...”¹⁶

Karl Barth used the term “the scriptural principle”, which is closely linked to the idea of *sola scriptura*: truth is found in scripture, and “every *doctrine* must therefore be measured against an unchangeable and impassable standard discoverable in the scriptures.”¹⁷ Such a principle is at work today in the ordination vows of The Presbyterian Church in Canada when, in the preamble, it states: “The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine, by which Christ rules our faith and life.” (Book of Forms section 447)

The *sola scriptura* emphasis can also be seen in Living Faith, one of our subordinate standards:

The Bible has been given to us
by the inspiration of God
to be the rule of faith and life.
It is the standard of all doctrine
by which we must test any word that comes to us
from church, world, or inner experience (5.1).

The emphasis here is that we turn to the scriptures, in part, to check, that our thoughts and actions in the present day do not go against what the Bible shows to be the way of God. But *sola scriptura* does not mean that the Bible is the only book Christians should read, or the only source for learning about God. We also have reflections and expressions of women and men down the ages, theology and poetry and prayer, the traditions of the churches, and signs of God working outside the churches too. The Bible is a measuring stick and not a god; we must beware turning a book, however holy, into an idol.

9. The role of tradition in how we understand scripture and its authority

People understand tradition in different ways. Some people think that *sola scriptura* means that tradition has no role to play in the church. This is a fairly new view and doesn't honour the practice and understanding of the early church or the reformers of the sixteenth century. The churches, and the traditions of the churches, offer a community for interpreting the Bible; thus, the traditions of the churches have authority, but only insofar as they stand on the firm foundation of scripture. Of course, different churches, and even different people within the same church, will have different understandings of that foundation, but we work out our interpretations using the gifts which God has given to us, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide us. The gifts include the work of Biblical scholars and theologians, teachers and companions who help us in our reading, and our own reason and imagination. (For an explanation of tradition and the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” see below, p. 6.1.25.)

Whenever we read and interpret the Bible, we are part of a community of other people who are also reading and trying to understand its meaning. Even if we are reading alone, our reading is shaped by other people: translators and scholars of the text, teachers who have shared ways for finding meaning, and also by the way that society around us thinks about what the Bible is for and about. In the Presbyterian Church, we believe that acknowledging the community nature of reading the Bible is important. Even more, we think that it is essential that we remember that we are not alone in the task of interpretation, but are stronger together.¹⁸ Sometimes we must even help one another unlearn things we thought we knew, in order to find our path as pilgrims.

We rejoice in the gifts of interpretation, thoughtful reflection, and imagination which God has given to many. Christianity has a long tradition of scholarship that includes various viewpoints. Bible scholars and theologians and others continue to wrestle with the meaning of the text as it was written and for addressing the needs of the world today. While the multitude of approaches may be bewildering at times, God has also given us minds with which to think, to evaluate the work, and even to add to it.

10. The “literal” sense of scripture

In popular vernacular, the expression “taking the Bible literally” (or uncritically) has almost become synonymous with fundamentalism; a movement that sprung from a meeting of mostly American churchmen in 1895 in Niagara-on-the-Lake that tried to stress certain “fundamentals” of the faith.¹⁹ Today it is often used to more broadly refer to strict, conservative theological positions on various topics. However, an uncritical “literal” reading of scripture does injustice to the history, layers and interpretation of the text.

For ancient Christians, it was not uncommon to interpret the Bible through various methods at the same time; the four key readings were: the literal, or the plain sense or surface meaning of a text; the allegorical, a reading which interprets the characters, events and images as symbolic meaning; the anagogical, looking for what the text might tell you about the end of all things; and the moral, or interpreting the text in terms of what it means for how you should behave. Influenced by the humanism of the Renaissance, the reformers of the sixteenth century argued that the literal sense represented the one most intended by the first writers, and should be preferred. The reformers who sought the literal sense would have pursued the historical, cultural, and linguistic background and context to better understand a passage, all of which is necessary when trying to find out what the first writers intended. Yet, in interpreting the Bible, Christians seek to discern God's will for today, meaning that uncovering what the first writers intended is always only a first step. Thus, in the twenty-first century, some interpreters have returned to ancient methods, while others find insight using literary and artistic methods.

Occasionally, words like “infallible” or “inerrant” are used to describe scripture. Are they appropriate? The Committee on Church Doctrine has previously provided guidance on this question in their 2010 response to Overture No. 15, 2009:

In recent confessional documents, The Presbyterian Church in Canada does not use the words “inerrant”, “literal inerrancy” or related terms such as “infallible” or “without error in the original autographs” with respect to the nature of the Bible. We recognize that all these terms are subject to considerable range of interpretation in an extensive body of literature.

The words used to describe the Bible, as Holy Scripture of the Church, in *Living Faith and A Catechism for Today* are “necessary”, “sufficient” and “reliable.”²⁰

11. New interpretations and changing understandings

Looking back through church history, we find several examples of Christians changing their interpretation of the Bible and theology in ways that affect Christian understanding of the world. Sometimes change results from new understandings of the text itself and translation. Sometimes people have reinterpreted particular passages on the basis of considering wider visions of the way of God shown elsewhere in the Bible, such as God's justice or the offering of mercy. Sometimes developments in the world we experience prompt us to look at scripture with new eyes. Notable instances of change include altering interpretation on slavery and race, supporting the ordination of women in many Protestant churches, and turning to a new understanding of and relationships with people of other faiths. In Canada, new understandings of scripture have helped churches answer the call to seek reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples.

Sadly, we must confess that the Bible has not always been used to promote the common good for all people. Some passages have been identified as “texts of terror” for advocating anything from the oppression of women to genocide.²¹ Faithful men and women have sought to address difficult Biblical passages in many ways over the years; for some, this has prompted new models for reading the Bible, such as feminist and postcolonial, which have provided churches with new insights.

Not everyone accepts each new interpretation. But there has never been a time when there has only been one interpretation of the Bible. Even in the Bible itself there are tensions: four gospels, several creation stories, differences of opinion from one letter writer to another, and more. New interpretations will always be proposed to address new (and old) issues. As *Living Faith* declares: “Relying on the Holy Spirit, we seek the application of God's word for our time.” (5.4) The church must always look afresh at the Bible and do the difficult, but rewarding work of more fully understanding what the text can teach us today.

12. The role of worship

While seeking to understand scripture and its authority, we are wise to remember the central place of preaching in the life of the church. When God's people gather as a worshipping community, the written word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is proclaimed and points to the Living Word, Jesus Christ. It is a moment when the world behind the text, meets the lives and current world of the hearers, and seeks to equip God's people to engage in Christ's mission to the world. Jesus himself, when visiting the synagogue in Nazareth, used the moment of public worship to read scripture (Isaiah 61:1, 2) and proclaim its fulfilment in himself: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21) Question 67 in *A Catechism For Today* links the reading and study of scripture with worship in a helpful way: “The regular reading and study of scripture, together with the hearing of the word in public worship, are some of the richest joys of Christian commitment.”

When God's people gather to pray, sing, celebrate the sacraments, read scripture and interpret it, they are nourished on the words of eternal life. As we are reminded in Deuteronomy 8:3 – a passage quoted by Jesus when he was being tempted by the devil – “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” When God's people gather, they don't do it because a speaker has something unique to say on his or her own, but in hopeful anticipation that God's energizing and probing wisdom will speak a fresh word to them, their communities and world.

13. An awareness of our own contexts

While we work prayerfully and thoughtfully to hear God's word in the Bible, it is also important that we be aware of our own contexts. Every person has a history which includes an upbringing, socio-economic context, linguistic frame-of-reference, perspective, etc. It is very difficult to be fully impartial or “objective” when we read the scriptures. We must be honest about that.

While we work to listen for God's word to us in the present day, we may be tempted to think that our own initial reading of scripture is the only reading. One way to grapple with this temptation is to ask intelligent questions about the passages under consideration, such as:

- What does God seem to be doing in this text?
- Might God be doing something similar in our world?
- Who are the persons or groups in this text?
- How are we dissimilar or similar?²²

Another way to grapple with this temptation to think that our own reading is the only reading is to learn from those who are different from ourselves – especially by listening to the way they interpret the Bible, and by listening to the questions they ask of various passages. For example, Professor Musa Dube from Botswana asks “How can we know and respect the Other?”²³ By learning to ask broader questions and from different perspectives, we may see new aspects of God's word.²⁴

The process of studying a text to draw out a meaning is called exegesis. But the process of reading a meaning into a text, a meaning which may not have originally been present, is called eisegesis. Much like “proof-texting”, the practice of finding an isolated passage and quoting it out of context to support a point-of-view, deliberate eisegesis contaminates biblical study. Every student of the Bible must be careful to examine their motives and ask whether or not they are seeking God's will, or simply their own.

Hopefully the principles listed below will help in the process of interpretation. But it needs to be stressed that the choices we make about which passages to study and which to ignore or gloss over may be choices that reflect our own biases and agendas. As Christians, we should approach scripture with humility, seeking God's will. Sometimes we will find what we expect to find. Other times, we will be surprised, and may need to adapt to a different perspective.

14. One perspective on why scripture is authoritative

In light of what has been said, here are six points that may help us think about how scripture is authoritative.

1. Scripture is the primary way we learn about and encounter God's will.
2. God uses scripture to judge and to heal.
3. Jesus himself appeals to the authority of scripture.
4. If we look within the Bible itself, its authors confirm divine origin.
5. God's people have affirmed its use as authoritative for thousands of years and we stand in solidarity with them as an ongoing community of faith.
6. Biblical authority appears in the way that reading the Bible, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can generate new relationships between the reader, God, other people, and creation, as they look to pattern themselves in the living Word, Jesus Christ.

15. Images and metaphors for what the Bible is and does

Over the years, people have used various models to help understand the Bible as they have sought to interpret scriptures. None of the models are perfect, and they do not always agree; some make more sense in certain situations than in others. Still, each can be helpful in some ways, so we point out a selection here, with strengths and weaknesses.

The Bible as story

In this view, the Bible's various parts come together to tell one overarching story of God's relationship with the world; this story begins with creation, reaches a climax with Jesus, and ends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth in the book of Revelation. This image helps us to understand the wider movements and themes within scripture better, and to see our place within them. However, looking at the Bible in these terms can obscure the fact that the Bible is not set up like an ordinary story, but is made up of many books, some of which are not stories at all. Moreover, the Bible-as-story model does not always make it clear that any overarching narrative is a theological interpretation, and threatens to fit the Bible to the interpretation.

The Bible as reference library

This model depicts the Bible as a collection of books which you use to look up information that you need when you need it. You can consult more than one book at a time to see how one might help you understand another. This understanding takes the variety of types of writing in the Bible seriously, helping you to read poetry as poetry and history as history, and so on. However, this does not necessarily stop you from spending too much time in one section of the library, while neglecting others.

The Bible as script for sacred living

Another way of thinking about the Bible is that it is like the script of a play or a musical score which readers must bring to life in their actions in the world. Feminist Reformed theologian Letty Russell writes that

The Bible continues to be a liberating word as I hear it together with others and struggle to live out its story. For me the Bible is "scripture," or sacred writing, because it functions as "script," or prompting for my life. Its authority in my life stems from its story of God's invitation to participation in the restoration of wholeness, peace, and justice in the world. Responding to this story has made it my own story, or script, through the power of the Spirit at work in communities of struggle and faith."²⁵

This model focuses on the way that the Bible forms people into disciples. Will Willimon is a bishop in the United Methodist Church. He notes, "The truthfulness of scripture is in the lives it is able to produce."²⁶ One great strength of this understanding of the Bible is that it takes into account the fact that people are embodied creatures; it acknowledges that reading the Bible should change the whole person, and not just the way that a person thinks. Sadly, the witness of the lives of readers of the Bible is not always convincing. It is also not always easy to know how to perform a book like, for example, 1 Chronicles.

The Bible as eyeglasses

Calvin compared the Bible to the eyeglasses we must use to see clearly.²⁷ Using that same metaphor, American theologian Garrett Green writes, "The scriptures are not something we look at, but rather look through, lenses that refocus what we see into an intelligible pattern."²⁸ That is, in this model, the Bible changes the way we see, allowing us a vision of truths about the world that we would not be able to see without God's word, including granting readers a vision of God working in creation. This image helpfully reminds us that the Bible is never the goal of the churches' mission, but rather is used in looking for God at work in the world. Still, this model in itself does not tell us where to look in the world, and there is always a danger that we will bring the Bible to bear on one area of the world while missing God where we are not looking.

The Bible as lamp/map/compass

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" we read in the Psalms (119:105). This image and others like it, such as map or compass, present the Bible as a tool for helping you find your way in the world. To that end, this view focuses on the life of faith as a journey, bringing out the important aspect of discipleship as following Jesus Christ. A strength of this image is that travelling involves the whole self, and seeing the Bible as a guiding light reminds us that the life of faith is not just about intellectual beliefs. A beacon is also light available to more than one person. No one needs to be guided by this light alone. Yet, this model is mainly for the pilgrims; it does not say much about the world and its transformation through the power of the grace of God.

The Bible as measuring tool

The scriptures can be pictured as a ruler, as measuring tape, as a level. As mentioned earlier, the word "canon" is connected to the idea of measuring. This model emphasizes the word of God's role in the judgement of human

actions, as a check on whether people measure up. Perhaps because of this, it seems to be the image most favoured by people drafting subordinate standards and texts for occasions such as ordinations. This model offers a way to set a standard for a church. However, problems can arise when people think of the Bible as exactly like a kilometre or a litre: such units of measurement as these have simple, defined standards, easily consulted, but the Bible's standard is God's own self, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and any measurement of life taken by human beings from the Bible will always be an interpretation open to revision through new insights offered by God.

16. Aids for interpreting the Bible

As Christians who conclude that the Bible is authoritative, we want to do our very best in our attempts to understand what the Bible is revealing to us about the word God is speaking to us today. If we are to honour the Bible's richness, we will admit that no one person can figure it all out by themselves: we need one another, as well as the faithful who have gone before us; we need help interpreting scripture. So here is some help in the often multi-layered process of interpretation. Below are several insights which seek to honour the authority and complexity of scripture as we seek to interpret it.

16.A The Holy Spirit

It should be stressed again that it is only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, that we can faithfully interpret scripture. As it states in the Westminster Confession, "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority [of the Word of God], is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." (1.5). This affirmation is echoed in Living Faith 5.1: "The Holy Spirit gives us inner testimony to the unique authority of the Bible and is the source of its power." On our own, we have no capacity to fully grasp the words we read and seek to live.

16.B Heinrich Bullinger

Bullinger was a 16th century Swiss theologian. He held 5 principles of interpretation that are helpful today.²⁹ Each principle is listed below with some short explanation. Some language has been updated to reflect modern usage:

1. Scripture should be interpreted by scripture, the more obscure passages by the clearer

This means, if one passage is confusing, we look at other passages on similar topics. The hope is that other passage(s) will be able to shed light on the more difficult one.

2. With attention to language, to historical setting, to the author's intention

This means that looking to a word's meaning and context can be important. For example, the word "cool" today means more than just a low temperature. Some biblical words also have more meanings that the original author may have had in mind. Context is very important. For example, if a passage says that "All chocolate is bad," but it was originally written to a group of people who were all allergic to chocolate, then we have to take that into consideration. The author was surely looking out for their health and not pronouncing a universal principle for all-time. This is a light-hearted example, but others exist for more serious issues.

3. In the light of the church's understanding of scripture

We're encouraged to lean on the enduring wisdom of the church and its teachers. It has long and deep wisdom, dating back centuries from which we can benefit. There are many different commentaries available. Bible teachers and ministers should also be a helpful resource to know the historic wisdom of the church. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we expect ministers to have been trained in both historic and present-day understandings of the Bible.

4. Any authentic interpretation of scripture will increase love for God and love for humanity

Jesus emphasizes the great commandment as loving God with our whole being and our neighbours as ourselves. Therefore, any interpretation that instead advances hate, greed, etc. is surely misplaced. We must have this central command in mind as we interpret scripture. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world...".

5. All true interpretations of scripture presuppose that the heart of the interpreter loves God and seeks to do God's will

When we go to the Bible to find out what it "says" about something, we must ask whose agenda we are trying to further. It is sometimes possible to find small chunks of scripture and pull them out of context to

support a variety of views. So we need to pray before we read the Bible, asking that God purify our motives so that they align with God's own. Interpretation is not an abstract dusty exercise, but an act of love and devotion, furthering what Jesus taught us to pray: "Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10).

16.C The United Presbyterian Church of the United States of America

In 1982 this denomination produced a resource to help summarize some of the basic principles of interpretation from the Reformed tradition. Here are these six basic rules for interpreting the Bible found in this tradition's confessions:

1. First, Jesus Christ, as our redeemer, is the central focus of scripture.
2. Second, our appeal should be to the plain text of scripture, to the grammatical and historical context, rather than to allegorical or subjective fantasy.
3. Third, the Holy Spirit aids us in interpreting and applying God's message.
4. Fourth, the doctrinal consensus of the early church as summarized in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon is the "rule of faith" that guides us.
5. Fifth, all interpretations must accord with the "rule of love," the two-fold commandment to love God and to love our neighbour.
6. Sixth, interpretation of the Bible requires human scholarship in order to establish the best text, to understand the original languages, and to interpret the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the divine message has come.

Some of these principles are reflected in Bullinger's approach. Yet they stand as strong summary statements of much of the wisdom in the Reformed tradition.

16.D Living Faith and The Westminster Confession of Faith

Living Faith, the most recent subordinate standard of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, includes a section on the Bible which has been partly excerpted above. As a statement of our faith, its words offer a guidepost for our work of interpretation by providing a framework for understanding the aims and reasons behind interpretation.

The whole section is reproduced here:

- 5.1 The Bible has been given to us
by the inspiration of God
to be the rule of faith and life.
It is the standard of all doctrine
by which we must test any word that comes to us
from church, world, or inner experience.
We subject to its judgment
all we believe and do.
Through the Scriptures the church is bound only to Jesus Christ its King and Head.
He is the living Word of God
to whom the written word bears witness.
- 5.2 The Holy Spirit gives us inner testimony
to the unique authority of the Bible
and is the source of its power.
The Bible, written by human hands,
is nonetheless the word of God
as no other word ever written.
To it no other writings are to be added.
The Scriptures are necessary, sufficient, and reliable,
revealing Jesus Christ, the living Word.
- 5.3 Both Old and New Testaments were written
within communities of faith
and accepted as Scripture by them.
Those who seek to understand the Bible
need to stand within the church
and listen to its teaching.

- 5.4 The Bible is to be understood in the light of the revelation of God's work in Christ. The writing of the Bible was conditioned by the language, thought, and setting of its time. The Bible must be read in its historical context. We interpret Scripture as we compare passages, seeing the two Testaments in light of each other, and listening to commentators past and present. Relying on the Holy Spirit, we seek the application of God's word for our time.

The Westminster Confession of Faith has long been a subordinate standard in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Its first chapter is about scripture and stresses how necessary it is. The confession states that "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his glory, man's [sic] salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture..." (1.6). At the same time, it states that "All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them" (1.7). In other words, if it is necessary for salvation, scripture will offer sufficient and clear understanding.

When it comes to the matter of interpretation, the confession states that "The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself." This means that other parts of scripture should be searched to shed light on more obscure passages. As it goes on to explain, "when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly" (1.9).

The Westminster Confession also confirms that "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority [of scripture], is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" (1.5).

17. A Note on The "Wesleyan Quadrilateral"

People often talk about the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" as a helpful tool when trying to interpret something. Although John Wesley (1703–1791) never used the term, he did refer to these ideas. Here is the quadrilateral:

Scripture	Tradition
Reason	Experience

The idea is that you reflect with these four lenses to better understand something and make a decision. However, this was never intended to be a four-legged stool, i.e. never was it intended that these four things be weighed equally. To Wesley, scripture was primary, and our tradition and reason helped us better understand scripture. Further, "experience" was never our 'isolated modern experience'. What was meant was our experience of God's Spirit helping us grow in obedience to his word.³⁰

Perhaps it's helpful to understand the quadrilateral like this:

1. Scripture guides us
2. Reason, Tradition and our Experience of God's Spirit helping us grow in obedience to his word help us better understand how scripture guides us.

18. Conclusion

The Bible has long been authoritative for God's people. It has also been the primary place where we seek God's will no matter what lies before us. Through the Bible, guided by the Holy Spirit, we listen for what God is speaking to us today.

Speaking of himself as "the gate for the sheep," Jesus said that his sheep follow him "because they know his voice" (John 10:4). We have offered this document in the hope that it may help provide some basic background to scripture

and its authority, and also some practical tools for when we try to interpret the Bible as we seek to know Jesus' voice and follow him.

Endnotes

¹ Living Faith 5.1.

² Henry Jackson Flanders, Jr., Robert Wilson Crapps, David Anthony Smith, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 13.

³ Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), p. 49.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p.134–35.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Last Word* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 33.

⁶ Wright, *The Last Word*, p. 23.

⁷ See Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1991.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. xx of The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) I.vii.4, p. 79.

⁹ Wright, *The Last Word*, p. 37ff.

¹⁰ Second Helvetic Confession.

¹¹ See Douglas John Hall, *What Christianity is Not: An Exercise in “Negative” Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), p. 52–3.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “God is its Author. Thus, the highest proof of scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.” ... “the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.” 1.7.4.

¹³ Bart D. Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity* (Oxford University Press, New York, NY: 1999), p. 308ff.

¹⁴ Cf. Craig Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), p. 85.

¹⁵ See the footnotes in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Wright, *The Last Word*, p. 72.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, “The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches”, delivered at the General Assembly of the Union of Reformed Churches at Emden, September 1923.

¹⁸ Living Faith 5.3.

¹⁹ These were: the verbal inerrancy of scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary theory of the atonement, and the physical resurrection and bodily return of Christ.

²⁰ Readers are encouraged to read the entire report found in the Acts and Proceedings 2010, p. 287–90.

²¹ The phrase “texts of terror” comes from Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984).

²² These four questions are based on a set of questions proposed by The Rev. Dr. Stephen Farris in a course for lay preachers and leaders of worship.

²³ “Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010) 89–102, 98.

²⁴ One helpful resource in this regard may be, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), particularly the chapter “Overcoming the Gendered Division of Humanity,” p. 91–114.

²⁵ Letty M. Russell, “Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation,” in Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 1985, p. 138.

²⁶ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN: 2002), p. 130.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

²⁸ Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 107.

²⁹ See Heinrich Bullinger, *Decades*, Parker Society ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1852), Third Sermon for the First Decade.

³⁰ In an essay called “the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley” that appeared in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in the Spring 1985 edition, historical theologian Albert Outler says this: “The term “quadrilateral” does not occur in the Wesley corpus—and more than once, I have regretted having coined it for contemporary use, since it has been so widely misconstrued. But if we are to accept our responsibility for seeking *intellecta* for our faith, in any other

fashion than a “theological system” or, alternatively, a juridical statement of “doctrinal standards,” then this method of a conjoint recourse to the fourfold guide-lines of scripture, tradition, reason and experience, may hold more promise for an evangelical and ecumenical future than we have realized as yet—by comparison, for example, with biblicism, or traditionalism, or, rationalism, or empiricism. It is far more valid than the reduction of Christian authority to the dyad of “scripture” and “experience” (so common in Methodist ranks today). The “quadrilateral” requires of a theologian no more than what he or she might reasonably be held accountable for: which is to say, a familiarity with scripture that is both critical and faithful; plus, an acquaintance with the wisdom of the Christian past; plus, a taste for logical analysis as something more than a debater’s weapon; plus, a vital, inward faith that is upheld by the assurance of grace and its prospective triumphs, in this life.”

Recommendation No. 7 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the document “Understanding and Interpreting the Bible” be commended to congregations, presbyteries and other groups in The Presbyterian Church in Canada for their use.

Recommendation No. 8 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That sessions, presbyteries and other interested groups using the document “Understanding and Interpreting the Bible” report comments to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the Assembly Office by January 31, 2017, and that the results of these comments be reported to a future General Assembly.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE OVERTURE NO. 34, 2015

Rec. No. 1 re Physician Assisted Death (A&P 2105, p. 608–09, 47–49)

This recommendation instructs the Committee on Church Doctrine to undertake a study of physician assisted death and to report to a future General Assembly. One congregation and one individual have made submissions. We have assembled a task force of committee members and other persons well-versed in fields of medicine and law to explore the many dimensions of this subject. The unexpected resignation of the convener of the task force doing our initial investigations has caused some delay in our progress, but we expect to be able to present a substantive report to the 2017 General Assembly. We are very cognizant of the pressing nature of this topic.

MEMORIAL NO. 1, 2015 (A&P 2015, p. 611–12, 249–50, 17)

Re: Process re changes to church’s teaching on human sexuality

This memorial from the Presbytery of Montreal made several comments about the scope and use of a Declaratory Act, with particular reference to specific overtures addressed to the 2015 General Assembly. This memorial was referred to the Clerks of Assembly to provide a definition of the scope and purpose of a Declaratory Act. It was also referred to the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministries).

The Committee on Church Doctrine makes the following response.

Memorial No. 1 from the Presbytery of Montreal was referred to the Committee on Church Doctrine, as well as the Clerks of Assembly and the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Justice Ministry). The Clerks of Assembly were specifically asked “to provide a definition of the scope and purpose of a Declaratory Act.”

The Committee on Church Doctrine’s mandate generally is to consider and report on “all matters of faith and order which the General Assembly may from time-to-time refer to it and make recommendations to the General Assembly for the furtherance of the church’s continuing ministry of determining and declaring the church’s confessional position.” The expertise the committee brings to reviewing this memorial is our expertise in the church’s confessional heritage and how the church has expressed and modified it in changing circumstances.

The memorial’s rationale includes the statement “the denomination’s historic belief and teaching concerning human sexuality is encapsulated in the statement of Living Faith (a subordinate standard adopted in 1998) that “Christian marriage is a union in Christ whereby a man and a woman become one in the sight of God.” (8.2.3) This stands in the tradition of the Westminster Confession, which is a formally-adopted confessional standard of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is also an accurate description of the Reformed tradition as a whole, which has generally seen marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

Some recent theological thinking has raised the question of whether marriage should be considered a confessional issue. Whether Living Faith should have included marriage as part of the doctrinal teaching of the church is not a question for us to decide now. It did include the topic as part of the doctrinal standards of the church. If the church

wishes to change its teaching on marriage, it needs to do so by the ordinary process for a change in the doctrinal standards and in the law of the church, that is, through the Barrier Act process.

In the list of Declaratory Acts in the Book of Forms, only one pertains to the confessional standards of the church, one adopted in 2001 declaring “we do not believe it is now warranted to” refer to the Pope as antichrist. This Declaratory Act declared a belief that was already broadly held in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and at that only after a long process of conversation and study. No such breadth of agreement exists in The Presbyterian Church in Canada about a change in our teaching on marriage. And the recent round of conversation and study has only been going for months, not years. Another occasion when the church made a significant change in its teaching is the decision in the mid-1960s to allow women to be ordained as teaching and ruling elders.

In this case, the Barrier Act process was respected and followed. A decent respect for the peace of the church, and for the church’s historic law and practice, and for the convictions of members deeply conflicted over these questions, leads the Committee on Church Doctrine to recommend to the 2016 General Assembly that any change in the church’s teaching on marriage should be through the Barrier Act process.

Recommendation No. 9 Adopted/Defeated/Amended

That the matters and concerns raised in Memorial No. 1, 2015 be answered in terms of the above report.

PUBLICATIONS

The committee draws attention of the church to some of its works that are both available and offer assistance to individuals and congregations. Most can be found on The Presbyterian Church in Canada website at presbyterian.ca/gao/committee-on-church-doctrine. Some are located elsewhere as well:

A Catechism for Today. [presbyterian.ca/resources-od]

Wisely and Fairly for All: The Christian Gospel and Market Economy (A&P 1997, p. 235–54, 38). [presbyterian.ca]

Confessing the Faith Today: The Nature and Function of Subordinate Standards (A&P 2003, p. 247–72, 25), and (A&P 2010, p. 220–65). [presbyterian.ca/resources-od]

One Covenant of Grace: A Contemporary Theology of Engagement with the Jewish People (A&P 2010, p. 291–355). [presbyterian.ca/wp-content/uploads/referrals_2011_one_covenant_of_grace_study_document_re_engagement_with_jewish_people.pdf]

1994 Report on Human Sexuality. [presbyterian.ca/sexuality]

Living Faith, Foi Vivante, Living Faith–Korean version, [presbyterian.ca/resources-od]. They are available in print. Contact the Resource Centre. A study guide is also available.

Doing Weddings Better (A&P 2009, p. 243–49, 26). [presbyterian.ca/wp-content/uploads/ga137_report_church_doctrine.pdf]

TECHNOLOGY

The Committee on Church Doctrine often uses on-line technology to enhance our meetings and to facilitate our work between meetings. When the press of deadlines required an additional meeting, we were able to meet using on-line technology. Though not as advantageous as being in one physical space to consider our tasks, it did enable some work to be completed. It has also enabled two of our corresponding members to participate actively in ‘real’ time, even though they were separated by 1,000s of kilometers from us and each other. Members have been provided, when needed with suitable headsets, to enable technology to serve us better.

ASSEMBLY COUNCIL

Our convener participated in a conference call meeting with several other committee conveners in the fall, discussing effective committee dynamics. He also provided some feedback to the Assembly Council regarding a Committee Conveners Handbook.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The 2015 General Assembly requested that the Rev. Jin Sook Khang be added to the Committee on Church Doctrine if a vacancy should occur (A&P 2015, p. 47). A resignation made it possible to act on this directive and our committee has requested that she continue to complete the term of the resigned member. The Rev. Paul Johnston

was also named to replace a corresponding member who resigned in the summer. We are grateful for the contributions both of them have made to our work.

APPRECIATION TO RETIRING MEMBERS

We express our sincere thanks to retiring members: the Rev. Dr. Aubrey J. Botha, the Rev. Dr. Dong-Ha Kim, the Rev. R. Ian Shaw, the Rev. Dr. Cynthia J. Chenard, the Rev. Dr. Roland De Vries and Ms. Myrna Talbot for their valuable service to the committee during their terms of service.

Ian Shaw
Convener

Myrna Talbot
Secretary