

BOOK TWO– RELATIONSHIPS HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality

The Church Speaks

General

- Homosexual orientation is not a sin. The weight of scientific evidence suggests that sexual orientation is innate, established early in life, and not a matter of choice.⁷ This position was reaffirmed by the 2019 General Assembly.¹⁷
- Scripture treats homosexual practice as a departure from God's created order.⁴
- Homosexual acts between consenting adults are a private matter and should not be criminalized.¹
- The church does not limit the roles of its members on the basis of their sexual orientation. These roles include church school teachers, musicians, youth leaders, ruling elders, teaching elders and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries.⁷

Homophobia

- We must oppose the form of hatred known as homophobia as vigorously as any other.³ Anger, hatred, and acts of denigration towards gay and lesbian people should not be tolerated within a congregation or the greater community.⁷
- The church as a whole must repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy. The church is called to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supporting community, a true church family, where all are welcomed, nurtured, loved and supported.⁴
- Sessions should provide support groups if needed and/or requested for those who are struggling with sexual issues, to support parents whose children are gay or lesbian, individuals facing sexual discrimination, and victims of sexual abuse. Presbyteries should also provide similar pastoral care of their ministers.⁷
- Studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for programs to change a person's sexual orientation.⁷ This position was reaffirmed by the 2019 General Assembly.¹⁷

Ordination and same-sex relationships

- Neither scripture nor church prohibits ordination on the basis of the direction of one's sexual attraction to others, whether homosexual or heterosexual.⁶
- Both scripture and church do concern themselves with the proper and acceptable expression of sexual attraction in sexual activity.⁶
- A celibate homosexual may be ordained/designated as a minister or member of the Order of Diaconal Ministries under the present laws and practices of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.⁸
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not prepared to ordain self-avowed, practicing homosexuals or to allow public worship services blessing same-sex relationships.⁸

The Church Acts

1969: The 95th GA communicated approval of the GOC's proposed legislation to remove homosexual acts between consenting adults in private from the Criminal Code and adopted a statement prepared by the ESA.¹

1982: The 108th GA agreed to continue support of PLURA upon re-assurance that a grant made by a local committee to a homosexual group to make a study of their relationships to society had been investigated by the national council, recognized as an error in judgment, and steps taken to ensure that a similar grant would not be issued in the future.²

St. Andrew's, Lachine

1995-1998 A controversy on the role of homosexuals in the ministry was precipitated by the action of St. Andrew's, Lachine, in the Presbytery of Montreal, when it issued a call to a licentiate (person who has fulfilled all the requirements for ordination and is licensed to preach while seeking a call) who had declared to them his commitment to an active same-sex relationship. When the presbytery sustained the call, dissenting members appealed to the 121st GA, which appointed a special committee to look into the matter.¹¹

By 1998, three special committees had reported on various aspects of the situation and the conclusion of the matter was that:

- the call was nullified.

- the presbytery's action in sustaining the call was declared ultra vires because "it is contrary to our current consideration and declaration of the teaching of scripture, our subordinate standards, and all GA statements on homosexuality, and contrary to the procedures of this church."¹²

- the candidate's licence to preach was revoked.

- the congregation was offered the option of accepting the directives of presbytery and GA or terminating its connection with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. St. Andrew's chose the latter option.

This incident was a catalyst in mandating the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation whose final report was issued in 2003.¹³

1985 & 1994: The 111th GA adopted a statement on homosexual practice prepared by the CCD³ and the 120th GA adopted for study a statement on human sexuality prepared by the CCD, which included a section on homosexuality.⁴

1997-2003: The 123rd GA appointed a committee to clarify the roles of homosexual and lesbian persons in the church.⁵ This committee's work was expanded to include clarification of the term 'sexual orientation' by the 124th GA.⁶ Interim reports were presented every year from 1998-2002. A study guide for congregations was prepared

and distributed in the fall of 2002.ⁱ The final report was received and adopted by the 129th GA in 2003.⁷ Not all of the recommendations in the report were approved. (See footnote below)

ⁱ PCC study documents related to sexuality are online here: <http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality/>

A recommendation to encourage the use of the 2003 study by congregations was defeated by the 129th GA (2003).

ⁱⁱ LGTB is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual or Transgendered people. Variations of the acronym emphasize the spectrum that exists with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

2015: The LMA and the CCD received overtures regarding human sexuality. Twenty-three overtures were received by the 141st GA. Commissioners of the 141st GA participated in facilitated, small group discussions.⁸ Reading resources were recommended to Commissioners to prepare for this discussion. The CCD published an annotated bibliography as part of its report.⁹

The LMA and CCD jointly designed a framework under which the overtures could be considered. The 141st GA passed recommendations that: 1) Commissioners participate in a facilitated process to discuss the issues addressed in the overtures and the church's response to them; 2) that notes from the process be submitted to the LMA (Justice Ministries) and CCD as they prepare responses to the overtures; 3) that the LMA (Justice Ministries) and the CCD confer with each other as responses are prepared; 4) that the church (congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and denominational committees) be encouraged to engage in a year of prayerful conversation, discernment and bible study on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation and other related matters raised in the overtures; 5) that the CCD and LMA (Justice Ministries) prepare a joint study guide on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation, and other related matters raised in the overture to be posted on the church's website by the end of October 2015 and that congregations, sessions, presbyteries and synods be invited to share the result of their conversations with both the CCD and the LMA (Justice Ministries) prior to March 31, 2016. Responses to the overtures will be forthcoming at the 142nd GA (2016).¹⁰

The 141st GA recommended that the Moderator write a pastoral letter to all congregations, presbyteries and synods of The PCC inviting them to: 1) maintain unity in the bond of peace while debating and studying the full inclusion of LGBTⁱ people within The PCC; 2) treat one another with profound and mutual respect and integrity despite differences in biblical interpretation and perspective; and 3) be particularly sensitive and gracious to all who are vulnerable and might despair as a result of such deliberations.¹⁰

2016: The 2015 GA tasked the CCD and the LMA (Justice Ministries) to prepare a joint study guide on the topics of human sexuality, sexual orientation and other related matters. A guide called "Body, Mind and Soul" was prepared and available to the church by October 31, 2016. The 142nd GA (2016) adopted a report from the LMA (Justice Ministries) summarizing responses to "Body, Mind and Soul".ⁱ¹¹

ⁱ 463 responses were received as of April 21, 2016. The majority of responses indicated no consensus or did not declare a position on same-sex marriage or blessing and ordaining a ministry in a same-sex relationship. There were responses from 1 synod, 16 presbyteries, 115 sessions, 72 congregations or congregational study groups, 91 responses from individuals who participated in group discussions, 124 responses indicated they did not participate in group discussion, 1 youth group. There were no responses from theological colleges. 157 responses affirmed the current position of the church; 56 of these were from sessions, congregations or congregational study groups. 85 responses affirmed that gay and lesbian people in same-sex relationships be allowed to serve as ministries and affirmed recognition of same-sex marriages by the church; 31 of these were sessions, congregations or study groups in congregations. (A&P 2016, pp. 437)

GA adopted an interim report from the CCD recommending The PCC seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in light of the Reign of God, and that all courts of the church be required to deal with all people with tender pastoral care.¹²

GA recommended that the CCD in consultation with the LMA: 1) continue to reflect on the nature of Christian marriage in relation to LGBTQ and intersex people; and 2) reflect theologically on the spiritual needs of transgender and intersex people.¹²

GA recommended that the LMA in consultation with the CCD include in their respective responses to a number of overtures, consideration of Romans 14:1-13 as permission to recommend a dual or two pronged approach in the interest of avoiding a rupture of the denomination as an option to their overtures. The CCD and the LMA (Justice Ministries) will respond to these overtures at the 143rd GA (2017).¹³

GA received several overtures requesting a process for congregations to leave The PCC and retain church property and assets. GA adopted the report of the Clerks of Assembly declining to create this process because it would be contrary to both federal and provincial civil legislation. The current provisions of the church for members and ministers to leave if they feel constrained by conscience to do so, is available, though church property remains with The Presbyterian Church in Canada.¹⁴

2017: Responses to overtures on sexuality were considered by two groups: the Committee on Church Doctrine, and the Life and Mission Agency – Justice Ministries because overtures on sexuality were referred to both groups. The CCD and the LMA-JM jointly prepared a report with recommendations. Each group also prepared separate, individual reports. The joint report covers three topics: 1. How the overtures were referred by the GA since 2015; 2. The history of the consultation between the CCD and the LMA; 3. Repentance of Homophobia, recognizing that the church failed to fulfill the 1994 resolution "to listen to and share the very real pain of homosexuals and their families" that was adopted by the PCC in 1994 (see page 267 of the 1994 Acts and Proceedings) and failed in its call "to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supportive community" (6:23, A&P 1994, 267).

The 2017 GA adopted a recommendation that declined an overture asking to table amendments on same sex marriage for ten years (A&P 2017 14, 540).

GA adopted recommendations: that (from the CCD report) The PCC and its agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups “seek the peace and unity of Christ among [our] people and throughout the Holy Catholic Church” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it discerns the mind of Christ in the matter of sexuality before the church (A&P 2017, 14, 479); and (from the LMA report) That The PCC and its agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups seek the unity of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it discerns the mind of Christ in the matter of sexuality before the church.

GA adopted recommendations from the CCD’s report: that the documents “The Historic Argument Concerning Human Sexuality” (A&P 2017, 480-504) and “What the Bible teaches on Covenanted Monogamous Same-sex Relationships” (A&P 2017, 505-536) and “Where from Here?” (A&P 2017, 536-539) be commended to the agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for study and response to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the General Assembly Office by January 31, 2018 (A&P 2017, 28). GA adopted an additional motion from the LMA (Justice Ministries)’s report that the biblical reflection concerning the responses to the various overtures on human sexuality be sent to sessions, presbyteries, synods and colleges for study, reflection and report by January 31, 2018 (A&P 2017, 38, 542-549). GA agreed that “The Historic Argument Concerning Human Sexuality,” “What the Bible teaches on Covenanted Monogamous Same-sex Relationships,” and “Biblical Reflection” from the LMA (Justice Ministries) report be translated into Korean and were to be ready for distribution to the Clerks of Eastern and Western Han-Ca Presbyteries by August 31, 2017.

GA adopted a recommendation from the CCD/LMA joint report that The PCC repent of homophobia, as defined above (see A&P 2017 476-7), and hypocrisy by establishing a special committee to: 1) create a safe and respectful environment in which LGBTQ people can tell stories of harm done to them, of God’s grace experienced by them, and of Christian ministry performed by them, even in the midst of the challenges that they have faced; 2) listen to the stories told by LGBTQ people; 3) draft an appropriate response regarding homophobia within the denomination; 4) name concrete actions that the General Assembly consider implementing; and 5) report to a future General Assembly within the next 3 years. The terms of reference for the special committee were formulated in consultation with the conveners of the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee (A&P 2017, 28). A Special Committee on Terms of Reference the Special Committee re LGBTQI People and The Presbyterian Church in Canada re Sexuality Overtures was formed at and reported to the GA. GA adopted these Terms of Reference for the Special Committee:

1. The Special Committee shall create a safe and respectful environment in which confidentiality is assured, in order to encourage LGBTQI people:
 - a. to tell their stories of harm done to them within and by the church; and
 - b. to share their stories of God’s grace experienced by them and Christian ministry performed by them, even in the midst of the challenges they have faced.
2. The Special Committee shall invite LGBTQI people to submit their stories orally or in writing. Stories will be included in the committee’s report to a future General Assembly with permission of those who have shared.
3. The Special Committee shall make use of relevant documents of the church, including but not limited to:
 - a. the 1994 Human Sexuality Report;
 - b. Body, Mind and Soul study document and the individual responses received by the Life and Mission Agency and the Committee on Church Doctrine to it; and
 - c. any other such documents as the committee may deem relevant.
4. The Special Committee shall provide an appropriate response to the issue of homophobia within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
5. The Special Committee shall recommend concrete actions addressing homophobia to the General Assembly for implementation within the church.
6. The Special Committee shall report its progress at each upcoming General Assembly, with a final report by or before the 2020 General Assembly.
7. The Special Committee shall be made up of seven members drawn from across the church. The Special Committee shall be reflective of the ethnic diversity of the denomination and shall include at least two members of the LGBTQI community.
8. The Assembly Council shall be instructed to support the Special Committee with an appropriate budget and appropriate document support.

GA approved the creation of a Special Committee re LGBTQI People and The Presbyterian Church in Canada and named these members: M. Jean Morris (opening convener), Timothy F. Archibald, Joseph Bae, Kay S. Diviney, Robert N. Faris, Jane Johnson and Basma Younan. The Special Committee was given power to issue should any of the nominees not be able to serve or continue to serve.

The GA adopted an additional motion that Moderator prepare a letter of repentance addressed to the LGBTQ community during his moderatorial year.

2018: The GA adopted additional motions to set up a Special Committee of Former Moderators of the 2005-2017 Assemblies to propose a way ahead that allows the mission and ministry of The PCC continue. All overtures, reports, recommendations and petitions pertaining to sexuality, except for the Rainbow Communion, were referred to the Special Committee. The Special Committee will work in parallel with the Rainbow Communion. The Special Committee will report back to the 2019 GA.¹⁵

The Terms of Reference for the Special Committee re Listening LGBTQI People (renamed as Rainbow Communion) and The PCC was modified. In Section 1, LGBTQI people were explicitly listed, rather than referring to “they” or “them.”

Section 4 was also modified and reads as follows:

4. The Special Committee shall provide an appropriate response to the issues of homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia within The PCC.

The GA agreed that those who are subject to the discipline of The PCC who accepted the invitation to serve on the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) or who accept the invitation to tell their stories of harm done or grace experienced, even in the midst the challenges they have faced because of homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism or transphobia in the church, would have potential censure with respect to The PCC’s stance on same-sex relationships suspended indefinitely in order to allow them to participate freely and honestly in the work of the Special Committee.

Individuals and groups were encouraged to tell their stories of harm done by homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia, and to share stories of grace received in the midst of challenges in The PCC through the listening process developed by the Rainbow Communion until June 15, 2019.¹⁶

2019: The 2019 General Assembly adopted the recommendation of the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) otherwise known as the Rainbow Communion, that congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church be urged to give public expression to the Moderator’s Letter of Repentance and to seek ways to live out that repentance for harm done and that continues to be done, to LGBTQI people and others as a result of homophobia, hypocrisy, transphobia and heterosexism in The Presbyterian Church in Canada including developing discussion spaces with leadership drawn from a diversity of people.¹⁸ General Assembly also adopted their recommendation that the Life and Mission Agency develop and gather resources to strengthen our ability to provide appropriate support to congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church in developing models of pastoral care that recognize the gifts of all and encourage mutual support and care for those who have been harmed by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy.¹⁷

Additionally, after a process of prayerful discernment following the report of the Special Committee of Moderators, the following were remitted to presbyteries:

The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds two parallel definitions of marriage and recognizes that faithful, Holy Spirit filled, Christ centered, God honouring people can understand marriage as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman or as a covenant relationship between two adult persons. That congregations, sessions, ruling and teaching elders be granted liberty of conscience and action on marriage.¹⁹

That congregations and presbyteries may call and ordain as ruling elders LGBTQI persons (married or single) with the provision that liberty of conscience and action regarding participation in ordinations, inductions and installations be granted to ministers and ruling elders.¹⁹

Additional recommendations were adopted by the 2019 General Assembly as follows:

That the Clerks of Assembly be instructed to provisionally prepare guidelines to ensure that calls to LGBTQI ministers and the election of LGBTQI elders are facilitated in presbyteries and congregations; That the Moderator write a pastoral letter to the church; That as a matter of urgency, the Life and Mission Agency provide a means for those affected by this decision to express their concerns, views and pain in a safe environment, and that these concerns be reported back to the 2020 General Assembly before the report on remits is received and its recommendations considered.¹⁹

The Church Reflects

Excerpt from “The Church and Homosexuality”, ESA statement, 1969₁

It is not practical to insist that civil law should coincide at every point with canon law or to contend that every sin ought to be the object of criminal prosecution. The effect of the proposed amendment is simply to recognize in law what is presently the case in fact, namely that legal action is not being taken against homosexual practices when committed in private between two consenting adults.

Excerpts from “The Church and Homosexuality”, CCD report, 1985₃

[T]he questions of the origin of [homosexual] orientation and the ethical estimation of homosexual acts are not the same. It may be true that the orientation arises either from genetic causes or from experiences so early in childhood that the person cannot be held responsible for that orientation. ... In short, homosexual orientation may well not be culpable but the practice that can spring from that orientation may be so.

We are also dealing with currents in the social atmosphere in our day. ... First, we must take note of the widespread existence of “homophobia”, the irrational fear and loathing of homosexuals, in our society. Interviews with homosexuals show the real pain and discrimination this attitude causes. Certainly, we must oppose this form of hatred as vigorously as any other. On the other

hand, we must beware of those who label as homophobic anyone who hesitates to accept homosexuality. ... The issue is too serious for name-calling, sloganeering, or labelling, by either side.

The Witness of Scripture

Lev. 18:22. This verse and the very similar Lev. 20:13 are quite clear as to their meaning. A translation such as “No man is to have sexual relations with another man” (TEV) is entirely accurate. The real problem here is, in fact, not exegetical but hermeneutical. To what degree are these passages authoritative for US? ... [W]e may neither automatically accept nor reject as authoritative any particular commandment in Leviticus. We must always consider them in their wider canonical context. Does the law in question accord the key themes in the rest of Scripture? Is it contradicted or declared invalid at some other point in Scripture? Does it accord with the work and witness of Jesus Christ?

The Old Testament does not merely or even mainly condemn sexuality. It has a consistent viewpoint with respect to human sexuality which may be summed up simply as, “Committed heterosexuality is a good and joyful gift of God.” This basic insight is affirmed in the two creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2, in the entire Song of Songs and underlies many accounts of male/female relationships throughout the length of the Old Testament. Heterosexuality is considered to be a basic and fundamental part of human nature as God created it.

There is no point in the Old Testament at which it can be said that homosexual acts are viewed with any favour at all. The basic understanding of Genesis that humans are created to be heterosexual is accepted by the Jesus of the gospels, Mt. 19.3.12 Mk. 10.2-12. The regulations of Lev. 18 and 20 are fully in accord with this key biblical line of understanding. They are part of a trajectory which simply cannot be justifiably removed from the Bible.

The New Testament texts ... confirm this basic understanding. Romans 1:26-27 presupposes the creation stories of Genesis. For Paul the “natural” is not merely what may be observed all around us; it is always rooted in the will of God disclosed in Scripture. The natural is not simply what is “there” but that which properly reflects the will of the creator. In this passage, therefore, Paul is not simply using a natural law argument; this passage is an extension of the trajectory we have already identified in the Old Testament. Homosexual relations are part of the general brokenness of a humanity infected by sin. This understanding is by no means laughable, nor has it been rendered untenable by modern psychiatry.

It must be noted that those who engage in homosexual acts are not here separated from the rest of humanity; this passage is part of a section of the epistle which aims to show that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”. Homosexuals and heterosexuals alike need the grace of God appropriated in faith.

Excerpts from “Human Sexuality”, CCD report, 1994⁴

The question before us is not so much the general issue of the nature of homosexuality. Scripture does not deal with homosexuality in any theoretical sense. Nor are we debating the merits of homosexual relationships in either the form of promiscuity or pederasty. What we wish to explore is this: Is a faithful, committed, homosexual relationship ever a Christian option?

The following outlines a few of the options that have been put forward within the Christian community that deserve a respectful hearing in ongoing discussions in the church:

a) that we welcome homosexuality and its sexual expression as an appropriate lifestyle, though not that of the majority of the population. Scripture, for such advocates, is so ‘culture-bound’ that on this topic it can be set aside. (e.g. Norman Pittenger)

b) that we welcome homosexual relationships as valuable in certain contexts, that is, when those of homosexual orientation commit themselves to a church-blessed homosexual ‘marriage’ covenant, marked by love and faithfulness. (e.g. Mollenkott and Scanzoni)

c) that we see homosexuality as one among many signs of disorder in God’s creation, but that we allow homosexual relationships as pastoral accommodation to human weakness, just as we do for example, with accepting divorce, which in Scripture is clearly not God’s intention for marriage. (e.g. H. Thielicke, L. Smedes and the report of the House of Bishops of the Church of England)

d) that we see homosexuality as one among many signs of disorder in God’s creation and encourage church-blessed homosexual unions that allow for companionship, physical intimacy, but not genital intercourse. (e.g. Chris Barrigar)

e) that we see homosexuality as one among many signs of disorder in God’s creation creating a painful tragedy for those of homosexual orientation, who should be asked by the church to uphold chastity, while supported by different and same-sex friendships within the wider family of God. (e.g. John Stott and J. White)

f) that we view homosexuality as an abomination from which those who are caught in it need to be rescued. (e.g. Leanne Payne)

Some scholars negate the relevance of these texts (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:24; 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; and Judges 19:22-25) for today. One argument considers them part of a now outmoded system of taboos belonging to the early church. Others contend that Christ brought the end of the law and released Christians from an obligation to keep it. ... The question arises to what extent the prohibition texts of the Holiness Code still apply. On the one hand the New Testament continues to speak against homosexual relationships; but on the other hand, the New Testament does not mention the prohibition in the Holiness Code of intercourse during menstruation. The use of the Holiness Code in Christian ethics requires further exploration.

In his letter to Romans, ... Paul condemns homosexual practice as the exchange of “natural” relations between men and women for relations that are “contrary to nature”. ... It appears that Paul’s appeal to ‘nature’ in Romans 1 is to appeal to the order of creation.

Some, however ... argue that what Paul considered unnatural was the perversity of heterosexuals exchanging what was natural to them personally (i.e. intercourse with the opposite sex), for what was unnatural to them (i.e. intercourse with the same sex). That is to say, they were acting contrary to their own individual nature. However, Paul's use of the words 'male' and 'female' (Gen. 1:26-27), in distinction from the words 'man' and 'woman', would seem to point to sexual intercourse proper to the physical nature of each. Furthermore, the phrases 'natural' (kata phusin) and 'contrary to nature' (para phusin), are not original to Paul, but are frequently found in the writings of Hellenistic moral philosophers, with, at times, specific reference to heterosexual and homosexual behaviour respectively. This use and application is taken over by Hellenistic Jewish writers like Josephus and Philo, who vehemently attack homosexual behaviour as 'contrary to nature.' Paul's thought and vocabulary in this passage stand within this milieu.

In the light of the biblical norm of the one flesh union of male and female, the Bible consistently rejects homosexual practice. At this point however the question is raised: what homosexual practices are in view which scripture so consistently rejects? ... Scholars such as Robin Scroggsⁱ argue that Paul rejects, not homosexuality in principle, but the exploitive, promiscuous and frequently pederastic homosexuality of the Hellenistic culture of Paul's day. ... In Romans 1, there is no textual evidence that Paul is confining his strictures against homosexuality to pederastic or exploitive relationships. From what we currently know of homosexual practice in the Graeco-Roman world prior to the first century A.D., homosexual relationships of all types were common, both exploitive and loving, both casual and committed.

ⁱ Author of *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, 1983.

There is great debate with respect to the cause or causes of homosexuality. ... Although the research has not solved the "nature versus nurture" debate, it does seem clear that while some may choose to participate in homosexual activity, many people—whether for reasons of genetics or upbringing—feel themselves attracted to members of their own sex. The question becomes, how much weight do we give to this? Are we, because of our predisposition, excused from moral accountability?

All persons are born somewhere along a continuum of sexual identity, from an exclusive heterosexuality at one extreme to an exclusive homosexuality at the other. Surely no one is excused from moral accountability for the choices we make, sexual or otherwise, to which our biological constitution may have disposed us.

The church is concerned with what we are by nature and what we are called to become by grace. Whatever our interpretation of the fall in Genesis 3, the church recognizes that we are all part of a distorted creation, where the power of sin has marred the image of God in humans, and dislocated all relationships, whether with God, with our neighbour or with ourselves. Sexual identity and desire are not exempt. Scripture sees evidence of sexual distortion to God's creation pattern in adultery, rape, incest, promiscuity and homosexual relationships. ... In the sexual dimension of our lives as well as in all dimensions, all stand in need of the law's direction. All persons are in need of the redemptive grace that Jesus Christ offers.

Is homosexual practice a Christian option? Our brief exegetical review of biblical texts set within a broader biblical perspective on our vocation as sexual beings leads us to say 'No'. Committed heterosexual union is so connected with creation in both its unitive and procreative dimensions that we must consider this as central to God's intention for human sexuality. Accordingly, Scripture treats all other contexts for sexual intercourse as departures from God's created order.

Is 'No' the only word that the church has for those who struggle with homosexuality? To be merely negative is lacking in pastoral sensitivity. The church must listen to and share the very real pain of homosexuals and their families. ... God has so created us that we humans need one another. Social intercourse is necessary for all. Sexual intercourse, however, is not. Life can be full and abundant for the single, both homosexual and heterosexual, without sexual intercourse, despite the dictates of current society. ... The alternative is not between the intimacy of homosexual intercourse on one hand and the pain of isolation and repression on the other. The church is called to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supporting community, a true church family, where all are welcomed, nurtured, loved and supported. Sadly, the Christian Church has frequently shunned homosexuals and failed to minister to them and with them. The church as a whole must repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy. All Christians, whether our sins are of the spirit or of the flesh, whether heterosexual or homosexual, need God's forgiveness and mutual forgiveness as we pursue together the path of holy living. Grace abounds, and in our weakness God's strength is made known.

Excerpts from the report of the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation, 2003

The 1994 “Statement on Human Sexuality” re-affirmed the biblical and traditional view that “committed heterosexual union is ... central to God’s intention for human sexuality.” ... In light of this stance, and in recent precedence, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not prepared to ordain unrepentant practising homosexuals or to allow public worship services blessing same-sex relationships.

Several texts in the New Testament refer to ‘false prophets’. We are taught that false prophets can be identified by their works. Similarly, we read about the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, etc. in Galatians (5:22-23), the good things that come when one is filled with the Holy Spirit. In both cases, the results are considered in the evaluation. Is there any value in considering the results we often see from our present attitudes about homosexuality? Could it be suggested, for instance, that the high rate of suicide among homosexual teens is partially related to experiences of rejection, low self-esteem, and other problems resulting from lack of acceptance? Is it valid to consider the many marriages that come to a painful end when a gay person can no longer ‘play the straight game’?

People in the Reformed tradition believe in the continual illumination of the Holy Spirit active in the lives of Christ’s followers. Over the years, the understanding of scripture has developed and changed through the guidance of the Spirit on such matters as slavery and the place of women in the church. Could we consider that the Holy Spirit might be trying to lead us today into a different understanding of the traditional texts relating to homosexuality? Or are the texts sufficiently clear and definite that it is wrong to compare them to other changing social positions?

As a Reformed church, we appreciate the overall message of God’s word. A clear theme, especially in the New Testament, is the emphasis on love. “Love one another because love comes from God.” “I give you a new commandment, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” “The greatest of these is love.” “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” Love is clearly what God wants for creation and what Christ taught as the best way to live. Is a committed, monogamous relationship between two people of the same sex when expressed physically, always contrary to the will of God? Is it possible that there could be exceptions to the rule? What makes some forms of sexual behaviour holy and others unholy?

Some questions and concerns that have been raised in our deliberations include the following:

- What makes some forms of sexual behaviour holy, others unholy, and what has this to do with God’s own holiness?
- Why does the church continue to regard sexual sins as more serious than other sins? What is its justification for doing so?
- Can we uphold the bond of marriage in male-female relationships as paramount and the ideal; yet also maintain that God calls some people into gay and lesbian monogamous relationships?
- Does the affirmation of faithful, loving and constant same-sex unions challenge the essential value of the male-female relationship any more than the affirmation of celibacy does?
- While some people fear homosexual orientation as a “threat to family values” we know that domestic violence, infidelity, child abuse, poverty, children having children, unsupportive parents, stressed relationships, lack of time together and substance abuse are some factors that contribute to the destruction of families. How effectively are we in the church providing support and pastoral care in these situations? What can we improve upon?
- Discrimination in the form of active or passive prejudice against lesbians and gays is a reality in our society. Anger, hatred, and acts of denigration towards gay and lesbian people should not be tolerated within a congregation or the greater community. Physical violence (including assaults and murder) needs to be named, addressed, stopped and prevented. What is holding us back in pursuing justice on these issues?
- At times pastors and leaders in the church are called to confront and challenge practices and acts of injustice that are hurting the body of Christ while also being involved in a ministry of reconciliation. What do we need to learn from the Spirit in order to be a discerning and compassionate community that cares for our neighbour?
- There is a saying, “When children come out of the closet, the parents go in.” Talking about sexual issues is difficult for many, including we who are in the church. Helping families to talk about their feelings and their situations can help reduce isolation and fear. How can we provide pastoral care to parents and relatives whose family members are gay or lesbian? How might we in the church provide a safe environment for all people to seek support and pastoral care?

- A variety of sources suggests that lesbian and gay teens commit suicide at a higher rate than heterosexual teens. Often they end up on the streets and as a result of discrimination are disproportionately represented in the street youth population, experiencing a higher rate of alcohol and drug problems. Are we willing to examine how our prejudices may be hurting our children and youth?

Presbyterians need to learn and understand more about sexual orientation in order to live with this diversity in our congregations.

In our liturgy there should be prayers for those who are suffering from sexual issues as well as prayers asking for God's help in freeing us from sexual bigotry and prejudice.

The church should involve people wherever they find themselves in the "continuum of sexual identity" in the loving family of God. They should not be excluded from the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

The weight of scientific evidence presented to the committee points to the conclusion that sexual orientation is innate, established early in life, and not a matter of choice. We were left with little doubt that it is caused and influenced by numerous factors beyond the choice of the individual. ... We have come to understand that it is never appropriate to refer to sexual orientation as a "lifestyle choice". ... The lifestyles voluntarily adopted by people of either orientation are not a matter of innate sexuality but of social expression. It is only this superficial outward expression that can be a matter of choice.

While the earlier statements on homosexuality primarily dealt with the theological issues, the Special Committee was mandated to explore thoroughly the scientific evidence on homosexual orientation. Much of this report is devoted to the scientific and psychological conclusions about homosexuality.

We understand that many people do have faith in the ability of conversion programs to change sexual orientation, and this topic has been examined carefully in our discussions with the specialists. Yet, our studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for such programs. We have learned that, where

counselling of any kind is sought by a homosexual person, the greatest of care must be taken to ensure that it is provided by a properly qualified person, and that it is appropriate to the specific case.

Our studies have indicated no scriptural, scientific, legal or pastoral justification for imposing conversion or any other kind of treatment on homosexual people. We have found that such actions, whether for therapeutic or punitive purposes, have been increasingly rejected by the scientific and legal communities since the middle of the last century.

The higher than normal risk of suicide among homosexual people, and especially among the younger ones, is well documented and must be understood by those who counsel them.

Is the homosexual person entitled to the same rights, privileges and pastoral care as any other church member? We believe this to be so. The right to acceptance and to privacy surely belongs to the homosexual person as much as to any other, and none should ever feel that there is a risk of exposure of their private lives in the church or elsewhere. While this is easily stated, the committee believes that the church should take steps to ensure that full pastoral care is extended to all people, regardless of sexual orientation, and that all congregations and courts of the church anticipate the pastoral needs of homosexual people among their fellowship.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has never limited the roles of its members on the basis of their sexual orientation. These roles include church school teachers, musicians, youth leaders, ruling elders, teaching elders and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries. No legislation has ever existed for this purpose and, following six years of study, the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation finds that none is needed.

See also: A&P 2000, pp. 482-492, 39, 48-49

Excerpt from “The Way of God’s Reign” CDC report, 142nd GA, 2016¹²

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”. . . .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.

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 fulfill 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).

¹ A&P 1969, pp. 316-17

² A&P 1982, pp. 201-202, 39

³ A&P 1985, pp. 238-241, 31

⁴ A&P 1994, pp. 251-274, 56

⁵ A&P 1997, pp. 503, 19, 58

Inviting and Requiring Obedience. Through Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment 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 fulfillment 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).

⁶ A&P 1998, pp. 474, 48

⁷ A&P 2003, pp. 526-547, 26, 34, 37-41, 43-45

⁸ A&P 2015, pp 20,30,35

⁹ A&P 2015, pp. 268-274

¹⁰ A&P 2015, pp. 539-541, 43-44, 46-47

¹¹ A&P 2016, pp.436-439

¹² A&P 2016, pp. 260-265, 26, 28

¹³ A&P 2016, p. 39

¹⁴ A&P 2016, pp. 281-283,23

¹⁵ A&P 2018, pp. 25-26

¹⁶ A&P 2018, pp. 459-464, 27,29

¹⁷ A&P 2019, pp. 46, 486

¹⁸ A&P 2019, pp. 19, 486

¹⁹ A&P 2019, pp. 5, 47-52