

## **Policies on Gender and Sexuality**

### **Preamble:**

*The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognizes the harm that homophobia has had and continues to have on people in our communities.*

*Brave Presbyterians have shared their stories of being rejected by their congregations, church leadership and families because of who they love or how they express gender. People have been excluded because of their choice to support their children or loved ones who are LGBTQI2+. Some have left the church and some have stayed but have hidden their true selves. Heartbreakingly, church rejection has led some of our siblings in Christ to die by suicide. This is a tragedy.*

*Some churches have made a commitment to love and welcome all to pray, worship and learn in community. These churches become a balm for people who have been rejected.*

*The session of Trinity Presbyterian Church recognizes that God's love and the fellowship of worship is available to all God's children and that all should be safe and loved at Trinity. Trinity is a "friendly" church and that includes everyone. We recognize that people who identify as LGBTQI2+ are already full and faithful members of the Presbyterian church!*

**The session recognizes that consensual, loving relationships between consenting adults do not cause harm but exclusion from the church does.** For this reason, the session of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Victoria has voted to define marriage as a covenant relationship between two adult persons.

**In order to joyously share our love of God and our worship with all, and in accordance with direction from the national church, the following has been adopted by the session:**

### **Inclusive Language and Inclusion for Gender Diversity**

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. -Galatians 3:28*

While people may disagree on certain issues, we will use language which respects the dignity and worth of others and the truth of their lives.

Inclusive language in church isn't new! Some terms for God in the bible are:

*Advocate, Almighty, Consuming Fire, Creator, Deliverer, Dwelling Place, Friend, God of Peace, Ground of our Being, Guide, Healing One, Judge, Lawgiver, Light, Living God, Loving Kindness, Mighty One, Potter, Power, Radiant, Redeemer, Saviour, Shepherd, Strength, Tower of Strength.*

None of these are gender specific!

The session recommends that gender non-specific language be used as often as possible in our worship and our correspondence:

- “the clerk of session” instead of “Mr. So-and-so”
- “siblings” instead of “brothers and sisters”
- “children” instead of “boys and girls”

This doesn't mean that gendered language is never used, just that we understand that more inclusive options are simple and available.

We will always use the gender and pronouns that a person tells us to use. Just like we would listen to someone who says their name is “Bill” rather than “William”, we will always believe someone when they tell us their gender or pronouns.

Trinity has a gender non-specific bathroom in the upper hall.

## **Pastoral Care and Community Life**

Everyone at Trinity should feel that they are important to the community. We celebrate birthdays and anniversaries. We pray for many different people and situations. We provide for the pastoral care needs of people in care homes or who are shut in. Any LGBTQI2+ people who attend Trinity should be included in our life and celebrations in the same way.

Leaders who don't feel equipped to help members of the community specifically with concerns to do with LGBTQI2+ issues are encouraged to reach out the PCC Life and Mission Agency to learn more.

The session recommends that community celebrations, hymns, prayers and sermons should all reflect the diversity of God's creation. We are blessed that this already happens at Trinity in many ways.

### **Examples of Inclusion:**

- Instead of just mother's day, Christian Family Sunday might be celebrated (and is already a part of the church calendar for that day). Flowers or gifts could be offered to everyone who has been a part of the family of God and appreciated as such.
- When requested, celebrations honouring name changes, adoption days or other important anniversaries should be remembered.
- Prayers and hymns that celebrate and remember diverse people and experiences are encouraged.

The session recommends that prayer groups and bible studies should offer flexibility as to who should attend. Women's and men's groups might make a statement of welcome or consider a less gender-specific name.

Harmful language will not be used when talking to or referring to LGBTQI2+ people. Everyone should lovingly call out a friend who uses harmful language and remind

them that it is not acceptable. The Life and Mission agency of the PCC can help provide resources or learning opportunities on how to create safer spaces for all.

Anyone experiencing homophobia or transphobia should feel safe expressing this to a teaching or ruling elder for support. Elders should know safe people and resources to recommend to someone who has experienced harm. As in any case of bullying or harassment, the session may need to provide council or discipline when someone is causing harm to others.

### **Communication**

The session recommends that these policies be available on our website and to anyone who asks for them.

**These policies are outlined to help us show that we love God and love our neighbours. We are saddened that anyone would feel that they can't come to church to pray, sing, learn and worship because of their relationship status, sexual orientation or how they express gender. We are "the friendly church" and all should feel welcome to worship God with us.**

### **Glossary:**

**What is LGBTQI2+? It's a big acronym but it actually makes a lot of sense!**

**L-** Lesbian (women who are attracted to women)

**G-** Gay (an umbrella term for anyone attracted to someone of the same gender/ men who are attracted to men)

**B-** Bisexual (people who are attracted to people of the same gender and other genders)

**T-** Transgender (people who don't identify with the gender they were assigned when they were born)

**Q-** Queer (an umbrella term for anyone who is part of a gender or sexual minority. This word used to be used as a slur but has been taken back by the community. Always check though if someone is comfortable with the term because it can remind some people of being hurt)

**I-** Intersex (someone born with sex characteristics (chromosomes, genitals etc) that don't fit the usual standard of binary male/ female. Intersex people may choose to identify their gender in many different ways)

**2-** Two Spirit is a term for indigenous people who don't identify as just male or female. Many indigenous traditions understood gender as broader than western definitions.

+ - Plus! There are lots of ways that people refer to themselves and the plus helps to include everyone

**Sex:** The different biological and physiological characteristics of male, female and intersex people, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones. Sex is biological but diverse (for example, someone might be born with “female” sex chromosomes and “male” genitals).

**Gender:** Socially constructed characteristics such as roles and relationships of and between groups. Gender expression and gender norms can be different depending on culture, socio economic status and more. The standards of gender accepted by different cultures are already varied!