

SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE

To the Venerable, the 126th General Assembly:

The Sexual Orientation Committee is presently dealing with several overtures; Overture No. 15, 1997, Overture No. 34, 1998, Overture No. 22, 1998 and Overture No. 6, 2000.

During the two years that this committee has been meeting, we have had several presentations by "experts" in their respective fields. In most cases, these presentations were followed by discussions.

At the June 24, 1998 meeting Dr. Richard Isaac addressed the committee. As an openly gay man and a Presbyterian Church elder, Dr. Isaac shared insights and suggestions for the ongoing work of the group. He cautioned us to be careful with such things as our use of specific terms and helped us with precise definitions. Since this time, Richard has continued to serve on the committee as a valued consultant.

On November 20, 1998, The Rev. John Congram spoke to the committee about the role of the *Presbyterian Record* in communicating with the Church at large some of the controversial issues around sexual orientation. Through the *Record*, the committee has appealed for personal stories by homosexual and heterosexual people and also requested sessions to tell us how pastoral care is provided for gays and lesbians and their families within their congregations.

Later that same day, The Rev. Cameron Brett presented a well prepared and thought-provoking paper from a pastoral perspective. He raised many questions for us to consider, not just about homosexuality but about the sexual conduct of all ministers and the Church's role in addressing such issues with sensitivity and clarity.

That evening representatives from SAGA (St. Andrew's Gay Association) joined us for dinner and then shared some of their personal stories as gay people in the Church.

On November 21, 1998, Dr. Ruthann Dyer of Atkinson College, York University and Seneca College was our guest presenter. She spoke about gender identity and sexual orientation including such topics as genetics and both internal and external environmental factors. She helped us understand the influence of many factors on the development of gender identity and was careful to explain terms and scientific data.

On April 16, 1999, The Rev. Susan Mabey, former Presbyterian and now minister at Christos Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto, told her personal story and spoke about her pastoral concerns and biblical understanding. Her insights and professional experience as a gay pastor ministering to gay people gave us much on which to reflect.

Next The Rev. Calvin Brown, Executive Director of the Renewal Fellowship addressed the Committee. He too, spoke from the pastoral and biblical perspective. He talked about different categories of homosexuals and how each category needs special pastoral attention.

The final presenter that day was gay psychiatrist Dr. Steven Atkinson. He shared his personal experiences and talked about his work with gay and lesbian clients, explaining the uniqueness of the "coming out" process.

In the evening, we were taken out for dinner by members of ANN (A New Network). Informally, we shared more stories and heard their concerns for our Church.

At the September 24, 1999 meeting Dr. Iain Nicol, Professor of Systematic Theology at Knox College, Toronto, addressed the committee from a theological point of view. He spoke about theological methods and walked us through its application using one helpful model.

In addition to these "expert" presentations, the committee members have received many articles, stories and other submissions. These have been carefully read and other reading and study has been done by committee members. We have been in dialogue with the Church Doctrine Committee, the Ministry and Church Vocations, and the Clerks of Assembly.

This is the second interim report of the Sexual Orientation Committee. The overtures will be answered more completely in our final report.

In our discussions to date we have achieved unanimous agreement on some points, for example:

1. we are all sinners,
2. there are many models of interpretation of scripture,
3. Jesus commandment regarding love ... is central to our faith,
4. Presbyterians are uncomfortable discussing sexuality,
5. many people fear homosexuals but do not know why,
6. sexual orientation is not sexual behaviour,
7. there are lesbians and gay people at all levels of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,
8. clarity is possible,
9. persons of homosexual orientation are able to have all the privileges of church membership,
10. The Presbyterian Church in Canada still needs to examine the issues around ordination, and
11. the church is called to a ministry of reconciliation;

and substantial agreement on others:

- sexual expression is a fundamental human need, and
- homosexual orientation is not a sin.

On others, we continue dialogue and our discussions mirrors those within areas of this Church and others.

HEARING THE STORIES

In its debate on sexuality, the Church ... needs to remember we are talking about people's lives, not about mechanisms, reflexes or bodily reactions.

John P. Burgess, "Sexuality and the Presbyterian debate",
Christian Century, March 5, 1997 p. 248.

When the committee began its work in 1998, one of its priorities was to invite personal stories from people within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. To that end, an invitation was issued in the *Presbyterian Record* and on the internet. This invitation was repeated again in 1999. As well, all presbyteries were contacted requesting they bring the matter of this invitation to each congregation within their bounds.

We were privileged to receive stories from people who represented many points of view. From gay and lesbian people there were stories of self-discovery, isolation, struggle, anger, rejection and acceptance. We heard from parents who told us their struggle to understand, love and support their lesbian or gay children, from parents who received support and understanding from their ministers. As well, there were stories of those who felt betrayed by their church, and from

those who are grieved by this on-going debate. There were comments from some who hoped for continued dialogue. Those who wish this debate to end and those who joined The Presbyterian Church in Canada having left one denomination because of its open and affirming position toward homosexuals also wrote to us. We are grateful for all the submissions we received.

What follows is a small sample taken from some of the stories we have received. We have quoted extensively only from those letters where permission has been granted to do so by the author.

What does it mean to be gay/lesbian and Christian? Having had lifelong commitments to the Church, some speak of the pain, exclusion, loneliness and silence.

To be a gay minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an intensely lonely experience. We all need to have an intimate relationship with someone. I am not talking about a sexual relationship. I have long since given up hope of that being a possibility. I am talking about sharing one's inner feelings with someone. I cannot have such a relationship with a man, for that would lead to disaster for both him and me. To be seen too much with any man would lead to gossip. ... I cannot have such a relationship with a single woman. She would want to give that kind of time to a man who would marry her. I cannot have such a relationship with a married woman for it would harm her marriage.

To be a gay minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is also to be the victim of hatred. How often I have sat in the company of Presbyterians while they breathed fire and condemnation against homosexuals. I have been unable to say anything. For, that would make them turn their hatred on me."

To be gay in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is also to be treated with immense indifference. Many Presbyterians simply do not care about homosexuals. They do not particularly hate them, but they do not love them either. It never occurs to them that the discomfort homosexuals feel in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is many times worse than their discomfort. Others would not object if justice were given to homosexuals in the Church, but they think someone else should do it.

I served my Lord in many capacities ... [in all, seven different ministries were listed by this writer] ... Lately, with the current debate and discussion of the place of lesbian and gay Christians within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I have become a little uneasy, and more and more uncomfortable ... and find it difficult to attend worship.

Being gay ... is often overwhelming, especially within a church setting. The bigotry, hatred, misinformation and homophobia that I endured within my ... church often provoked anger, despair and depression. ... I have felt humiliation and pain, which ultimately led to severe depression and several suicide attempts. ...

For the first five years it was rather lonely at this church. I was single, no children. I was shy then. ... No one asked if I had a husband or kids, and when I started to bring my godson, everyone assumed ... he was my son. I felt I was not valued because I was never asked ... to do anything ... that was not what I observed with new families who started coming to church. They were integrated and active in no time ... church growth was often on the tongues of people and was always spoken of in terms of we have to find ways to attract more young families.

Once I asked to become involved there was no stopping the requests made of me ... after 12 years ... I was wonderfully blessed to receive an honour as one of the congregation's members who was 'living the most Christ-like life'. I was truly touched, but some dark part of me could not help wondering if I would have received the votes if they really knew who I was (a gay person).

I never officially shared my sexual orientation with the congregation ... I was not brave enough to face the rejection ... but there were people with whom I could share. ... I have left The Presbyterian Church in Canada ... to find a denomination that is openly and fully affirming.

I was baptized as a baby ... I know now that God the Father was present in power in my baptism ... I married in the forties and have children. I was converted, born again of the Spirit in the seventies ... became an evangelical ... but all the time did not disclose my homosexual orientation. Thank you that you guarantee confidentiality, because ... my

family ... not I, need protection ... I have been 'out' 8 years ago. When I told my family, they insisted I receive counselling. It did nothing for me, made me angry and alone. I now serve in a Presbyterian Church where my story is known.

He was a good friend and organist at the Presbyterian Church. I still grieve over his death ... but what struck me most was the isolation he had to endure. He was afraid (and rightly so) of what people would think or do, if they found out his situation. As a result, he suffered much more than necessary. Since then, I have tried very hard to help people share their stories, so we could get on with the job of living and dying together.

STORIES OF STRUGGLE AND FAITH FOR THE GAY/LESBIAN PERSON

From within many of these same letters, and from other submissions, we learn of the on-going struggle with matters of faith and sense of call to serve in the Church.

This story is from a minister who counselled a candidate for ministry of word and sacrament:

... she talked about her understanding and of discerning her call to the ministry of word and sacrament. She talked about the joy of preaching God's Word, and to walk with people who were trying to find or deepen their faith. I could see this was a person of deep spiritual substance. 'The church is blessed to have you', I told her. 'Well, maybe the church isn't so lucky to have me', she said. 'The problem is the church doesn't want me. I have come to the realization that I am a lesbian woman and this church won't ever ordain me.' She avoided my glance, looked off into the distant part of the room, allowing her tears to flow. 'Why would God do this to me? Why would God call me to serve Him in the Church knowing that I am a lesbian? No one will understand this.

If someone came to me and told me they were gay or lesbian and were considering ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I would tell him or her that they should consider it only if they were immune to intense loneliness, unaffected by hatred, and indifferent to indifference ...

This letter spoke of the writer's experience with two gay men who served their church as elders.

I marvelled at how these two men put their Christian faith into action. They taught me, the minister, much about giving the best pastoral care I could. ... I observed them as they sat on committees, greeted worshippers ... they were numbered among the few elders who still believed that visiting their people in their districts was important. It occurred to me it would be wonderful to have more men in the church like these two.

To experience these two men was to experience God's grace in action ... They are like other gay men I know who are trying to live out their lives as best they could in a world which all too frequently does not care much for Christians, let alone gays.

My challenge was this: I am aware of what the Bible says about gays ... I am equally aware of what it means to live a Christ-like life and for a Christian to be the light in the dark and the servant of others. What I experienced in these two wonderful men was this Christ-light in their lives ... they were Christians ...

The whole point here is that I have come to firmly believe that we are judged by God by how well we live out our lives as authentic Christians and not by how we express our sexuality. These two men were not a couple. They are simply two men who are members of session in the same congregation, and who try to give authenticity to what they know to be the Christian life-style.

While the majority of letters and stories received were from gay/lesbian persons or heterosexuals who affirm homosexual orientation, there was this testimony received from one who spoke of supporting and caring for homosexual friends, while at the same time struggling to hold to the orthodox biblical teaching and tradition of the church:

I have struggled for over 25 years with this issue, and I have hoped, foolishly, I suppose, that it would simply disappear from my life. But it hasn't, so this is the story of my struggle to understand and accept God's view on this issue - it is also a testimony to God's faithfulness to me and his mercy ... There is hope and healing through repentance, for all of us ... who struggle with homosexual feelings or behaviours, and want to be free. I knowingly married a gay man ... when I was able to get free of this relationship, I hoped it would be the end of an issue that had become gut-wrenching for me. Over the years several

close friends told me they were gay ... Throughout these years I occasionally saw my former husband and we would connect because we never stopped being friends. When he became ill and died it was an awesome privilege for me to support him and his partner. I believe God heard and answered my prayers for his salvation ...

This writer went on to tell of her personal struggle between knowing and loving homosexual friends and what the Bible taught her.

I felt torn between what my upbringing told me, and the experiences of people I knew and loved. I felt tormented and wanted to run away from it. My friends believed themselves to be born gay ... I couldn't understand, based on their life stories how God could judge them ... however, I was in pain and confused ... that comes when beliefs and actions aren't congruent.

Being part of a congregation which has given her information about ministries "that see people successfully come out of the gay lifestyle", has given her the strength to speak her opinion and belief that homosexuality is contrary to the Word of God, while at the same time offering support and friendship to people of homosexual orientation.

She ends her testimony this way:

I long for walls to come down - especially the one that says, unless you accept my orientation as innate, you can't accept me. I long to see the rest of the story told, that healing and change is possible, for those who desire it. I long to see the church repent of condemnation and judgment, but also of silence and of condoning sin.

One person spoke of their upbringing in the church, which has given them a positive appreciation of the Bible and a strong identification with orthodox Christian tradition. A tradition that understands heterosexual marriage to be the normal expression of human sexuality. "If the Bible as translated remains as our guide, then we must state clearly that the marriage of male and female persons is the only acceptable family lifestyle".

Another expressed fear and anxiety that the centre of the Christian faith will not hold if scripture is not held as our primary authority. "If we as Presbyterians believe the Bible to be the true Word of God, then we cannot simply ignore its content when we disapprove of what it asks of us."

Still others caution the Church to refuse the temptation to be "trendy" or "hip" at the expense of what we know to be God's truth. "Homosexuality is fashionable ... and we must be careful to not blindly rush in ... because of our call to love and accept everyone".

CONCLUSION

While not an exhaustive retelling of all personal stories received, we believe this sampling offers a reasonable hearing of the diverse voices surrounding homosexual orientation.

Some questions that may arise from hearing the stories are: Does our sexuality define our lives before God? What is the relationship between sexuality and spirituality?

In one presentation made to the Committee it was suggested that while listening to the biblical text is a vitally important task, unavoidable, absolutely essential and foundational, that we never listen to the text in isolation from our life together in the community of faith. The presenter went on to say that "we never do (our theology) as if our conclusions don't somehow affect us. We don't do our theological and biblical work as disinterested, dispassionate observers divorced from the specificity of individual believers."

PASTORAL CARE

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Statement on Human Sexuality has provided us with certain background and guidelines in order to "help individual Christians and the Church sort through the choices we face in a changing world, in light of our interpretation of scripture, in dialogue with tradition, reason and experience." (Statement of Human Sexuality Study Booklet, p. 4)

The statement within the report which has perhaps created the most controversy is the one regarding homosexuality.

Is homosexual practice a Christian option? Our brief, exegetical review of biblical texts set within the 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. (6.20) (A&P 1994, p. [266-67](#))

The Statement on Human Sexuality amended and adopted at the 120th General Assembly was a clear doctrinal response to the question posed at that time. The ideas in the statement, however, are very complex. For example, at the same time that our Church recognizes the legitimacy of "committed heterosexual union" (6.20) it also confesses that

all Christians ... whether homosexual or heterosexual, need God's forgiveness and mutual forgiveness as we pursue together the path of holy living. (6.23) (A&P 1994, p. [267](#))

Also,

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 ... 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'. (Romans 3:23) 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. (6.19) (A&P 1994, p. [266](#))

Unfortunately, these complex doctrinal issues have been oversimplified in their pastoral application. What was carefully presented in the Statement on Human Sexuality has often been misunderstood across our denomination as meaning Presbyterians having excluded homosexual persons from the work and life of our congregations. The Committee on Sexual Orientation has been asked, among other things, to study and offer pastoral insight to grapple with the pastoral problems that arise from our doctrinal position. The following assertions can offer a pastoral response to our current doctrinal statement.

All members of our Church regardless of sexual orientation must be regarded as brothers and sisters in Christ in need of forgiveness, understanding and compassion. No one among us should be held to be unworthy of our fellowship. "Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you the judge, are doing the very same things." (Romans 2:1)

The Church in affirming the legitimacy of "committed heterosexual union" (6.20) must never be used as a weapon against homosexual persons. Heterosexual persons are not allowed to feel superior before God or others, as if they had in some fashion brought this state upon themselves by their own efforts.

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. (6.19) (A&P 1994, p. [266](#))

Homosexual persons are not to be excluded from the mission of Christ. Congregations need to call on the gifts of people not on the basis of their sexual orientation but rather on what they have to offer. All areas of leadership and service should be open to our members.

Since we are all "justified and at the same time sinners" (Martin Luther) we are all in need of pastoral care. The same quality of support should be given to all people within the congregation. Compassion and sensitivity should inform our pastoral oversight.

Practical Suggestions:

1. Presbyterians need to learn and understand more about sexual orientation in order to live with this diversity in our congregations.
2. Church leaders should be especially sensitive to those who because of their sexual orientation have been shunned by the Church and society. Ministers need to make it clear that they are prepared to listen and help their homosexual parishioners especially when they have been marginalized within the Church. Negative social behaviour and anger to homosexuals should not be tolerated within a congregation.

3. Ministers, sessions and youth leaders need to be aware that one of the causes of the high suicide rate among adolescents and young adults is the isolation and anxiety associated with homosexual orientation. Our children and youth need to know that the Church is a safe place where they can find compassion and understanding whatever challenges they face. Support is needed for those experiencing low self-esteem, isolation and despair.
4. 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.
5. Sessions should provide support groups if requested for those who are struggling with sexual issues:
 - parents whose children are homosexuals
 - individuals facing sexual discrimination
 - victims of sexual abuse
6. The Church should involve people wherever they find themselves in the "continuum of sexual identity" (6.18) in the loving family of God. They should not be excluded from the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The committee has approached its theological work in the knowledge that the differing positions and commitments of its members makes the process of theological reflection on questions of sexual orientation a challenging one. Further, the lack of a gay or lesbian committee member has meant that we are engaging scripture, tradition, reason and experience in the absence of key voices in the wider debate concerning sexual orientation in our Church. We are, nonetheless, committed to an interrogative approach in our theological work, in the spirit of questioning that is the driving force of Anselm's classic definition of theology: *fides quaerens intellectum*, 'faith seeking understanding.' As Daniel Migliori has noted, the spirit of theology 'presupposes a readiness to question and to be questioned'. (1991)

Early in our work we made a commitment to narrative, biblical and contemporary, as a medium of theological truth. We have engaged ourselves in a process of theological reflection on the stories of members of our Church as they have been forwarded and entrusted to us, as a first step in seeking understanding of the faith experiences of our people with respect to sexual orientation. We see these stories, which include both accounts of lived experience and analytical and faith-based reflection, as comprising an important locus *theologicus* for our work. Some of the themes that have emerged from these stories and reflections include the question of suicide (contemplated and attempted), the relation between being and believing (in particular, the relation between the suppression or denial of a gay or lesbian orientation and a person's faith), the experiences of fear, loathing and hiding, judgment and alienation, exclusion and embrace, vocation and sexual orientation, the meaning of baptism, the question of biblical interpretation, and the importance of encounter and dialogue - the sharing of experiences and reflections among those who differ and yet are members of the same Church.

Among those whom the committee asked to provide theological guidance, Professor Iain Nicol of Knox College made a most useful contribution in the form of a dialogue between two different perspectives. Identifying the themes of creation, sin and grace, and church, ministry and sacraments as being relevant to the Church's discussion of sexual orientation, Professor Nicol presented two theological perspectives, neutrally named 'A' and 'B', on each theme. The following summary of his presentation is included for the consideration of the Church as a whole.

We begin, not inappropriately, with the theme of creation. Given that humankind is created 'male and female,' the question arises, 'Is a sexual orientation other than heterosexual compatible with a Christian understanding of creation?' Differently put, we could ask, 'Is being gay or lesbian a given mode of being created human, or is it a matter of choice?' In perspective 'A', any orientation other than heterosexual is seen as being incompatible with a Christian understanding of creation. It is not that homosexuality is considered to be a 'flaw' in creation, for God does not create flaws. Rather, homosexuality is seen as being a consequence of the Fall, one that likely, but not necessarily, involves a deliberate choice. God, however, does not leave us helpless. Choices can be undone, decisions can be reversed. With the help of God's grace two options are seen to be open to homosexual persons: they can either choose a heterosexual

orientation or they can refrain from expressing their homosexuality. The norm, it is insisted, must be that of heterosexuality. Any deviation from this norm is sin and represents a deliberate distortion of our created being as male and female. In perspective 'B', God's creation is seen to allow for a diversity of created beings, and for variation in our specifically created human being. We are created differently. 'Homosexuality,' states a widely-quoted US Methodist Bishop, 'quite like heterosexuality, is neither a virtue nor an accomplishment. It is a mysterious gift of God's grace ... It is neither a virtue nor a sin. However, what a person does with this gift, as with any other gift, is his or her own moral, personal, and spiritual responsibility.' In this view, both heterosexuality and homosexuality are God's gifts to us as God's created beings, but they are gifts that can be deployed either for good or for ill.

With respect to sin and grace, Professor Nicol noted that our understanding of the one shapes our understanding of the other. In perspective 'A', those who judge any sexual orientation other than heterosexual to be a result of the Fall, and as possibly involving a deliberately sinful choice, see grace as the event that is both judging and saving. In this view, Jesus is the one whose mission is to preach repentance as the essential condition of entrance into the kingdom that is 'at hand'. It is important to note that this view does not set Jesus up as a legalistic judge whose chief concern is to enforce a law prohibiting homosexuality. Rather, it is love that judges and love that elicits repentance on the part of the sinner. Thus, with the help of God's grace the sinner's unhealthy condition can be healed, a sinful choice can be reversed, and the de-formed life can be re-formed (in the direction, as noted above, either of heterosexuality or of refraining from expressing homosexuality). Without repentance, however, grace is rendered 'cheap'. In perspective 'B', the view of Jesus is different, though equally biblical. Jesus is seen to be the one who lives in solidarity with those who are persecuted, marginalized and voiceless - a category of persons that may include those whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual. Christ is the friend of all those who suffer from any form of injustice. Yet, in this view the call to repentance is not eliminated or relaxed. Christ's call to repentance is seen as being addressed to us all, particularly to the powerful, those who marginalize others. The difference is that what is demanded is not that persons should repent of their basic sexuality, for one cannot repent of a God-given gift. It is the abuse of this gift that constitutes sinful behaviour. In this view, the gift of sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, like any other gift, can be deployed in ways that are incompatible with the nature of the gift and the giver. That is, one's sexual behaviour can be loving, centered on the well-being of the other, or it can be irresponsible, narcissistic, even cruel. It is with respect to this latter kind of behaviour that Christ calls us to repentance. In the transformative power of God's grace what one can and must surrender is any mode of behaviour, homosexual or heterosexual, that is not formed and motivated by agape (God's love as shown in Jesus Christ). It is the ethic of agape that forms and determines any ethic of sexuality.

With respect to church, ministry and sacraments, Professor Nicol suggested that the committee consider the central questions (e.g. the question of who should hold office, who may be ordained, whether the Church is an inclusive or exclusive community, whether the Church can be caring and compassionate while at the same time condemnatory of homosexuality) in the light of the stories we have received. He also urged that we view the stories in the light of the theological themes he had presented, and, in turn, the theological themes in light of the stories. To assist us in this process, he offered a set of distinctions drawn from the work of Geis and Messer regarding attitudes in the church toward homosexuality. Messer identifies the following four positions: 1) 'rejecting punitive' - a position that might involve absolute exclusion from normal membership of a congregation or denomination, from its ministry and from participation in its celebration of the sacraments; 2) 'rejecting non-punitive' - a position that condemns homosexuality but not the homosexual person, while upholding the norm of heterosexual marriage; 3) 'qualified acceptance' - a term that defines the position of those who think that it is most likely that sexual orientation cannot be altered, and that heterosexuals should be accepting and compassionate, while still maintaining that celibacy must be the norm; and 4) 'absolute acceptance.' In this connection, the committee was urged to consider the sacrament of baptism with regard to our further understanding of these questions. For example, we might ask: does it or does it not matter, for the purposes of developing a theological understanding of sexual orientation, that we baptize, and that we baptize infants? We were urged to a consideration of The Presbyterian Church in Canada order for the baptism of a child, and to review also the orders for baptism of other Reformed churches.

We continue, as people of faith, to seek understanding of our sexuality, and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us in our efforts to understand the scriptures, our tradition, our ways of thinking and our experience, to the glory of God and the deepening of our love, in Jesus' name, one for another.

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATION

In reflecting on The Presbyterian Church in Canada's current position in light of the overtures creating and referred to this committee and the ongoing dialogue within the committee, we believe that we can be most helpful to the Church (in the context of our terms of reference) at this time by calling the Church to engage in an open process of dialogue informed by our theology (based on scripture, doctrine, tradition and experience) and the current scientific thinking, and open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Various parts of our Church are at different stages of this process and much of The Presbyterian Church in Canada has not yet engaged in a real study. We are also called to respond to changes in legal and social standards within our country. Thus the committee prayerfully calls the Church to devote energy, time and resources to the task, listening to the diverse voices and mindful of the many needs within our community.

In considering the process we also all agree:

1. The Church needs the tools, skills and resources to engage in study and to live with the diversity which we celebrate in our nation and our Church. The committee intends to identify some of these and encourage their use at congregational and presbytery levels and welcomes other suggestions. These resources will include individual experiences of Presbyterian Church in Canada members. The committee has found that some personal stories (both our own and from others) have helped to name and identify pastoral issues.
2. During a period of deliberate learning and discussion, we call for a period of patient attendance and waiting upon God, listening for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and sharing the insights received.
3. If there's an earnest focus on discussion throughout the Church, we would foresee a period of three to four years. However, if large portions of the Church do not feel called to engage in this discussion, the period will be much longer, and may not reach a conclusion.
4. We are convinced of the need to talk with and involve in this dialogue those in our community who are openly lesbian and gay and to have them present in a safe and mutually respectful process. This will be difficult, but we learn from each other's personal stories and experiences. Likewise, the ability to share our own personal stories and experience within a Christian context will strengthen an understanding of Christian sexuality.
5. Throughout our discussions precise terminology is necessary. For one example, the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual sexual activity should always be clear. We should also not fear explicit discussion if done respectfully and within mutually acceptable limits. Our society now accepts much explicit sexual discussion and imagery. Because we are created as sexual beings there should be no false modesty and no foreclosing of discussion because of inability to talk with each other about all aspects of human love.

The committee will provide some basic definitions and terms useful to the discussion.

Above all we must be mindful of Christ's commandment and love and validate each other as human beings.

The committee continues to work at responding to the assigned overtures. We still have much to do on the biblical, scientific, medical and psychological understanding of "sexual orientation". The above report reflects just a portion of our work and is submitted only as an interim report.

GLOSSARY (SOME TERMS AND DEFINITIONS)

Sexual Orientation: The dominant sexual (erotic) attraction of an individual, developed in early life and generally classified as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

Homosexual: A person whose primary sexual (erotic) attraction is to persons of the same sex. There will also be some degree of emotional, spiritual and intellectual attraction to persons of the opposite sex.

Lesbian/Gay: A homosexual person who defines himself or herself as such.

Heterosexual (Straight): A person whose primary sexual attraction is to persons of the opposite sex. There will also be some degree of emotional, spiritual and intellectual attraction to persons of the same sex.

Bisexual: A person who is sexually attracted to both men and women, although not necessarily at the same time or in the same way.

Queer: An umbrella term that may include lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgenderists and other people who challenge heterosexist boundaries of sexual orientation, sex and gender. The term was historically used as an insult, but is now reclaimed and frequently used as an affirmative political and/or identity statement. It is also used as a broadly inclusive term.

Sexuality: This may be considered on many different levels, including chromosomal, hormonal, organ and tissue structure, external appearance, secondary characteristics (e.g. facial hair or body fat), mode of rearing, social roles undertaken, mode of dressing, reproductive activity etc. Individual societies generally group several of these features into a biological distinction referring to whether a person is female, male or intersexual (historically referred to hermaphrodite).

Gender: The collection of behaviours, personalities, dress, choice of work, and other visible characteristics which the dominant stream of a society traditionally attributes to or associates with biological sex.

Transgender: The umbrella term used to include all persons who cross gender lines including, but not exclusive to, transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, drag kings and cross dressers.

Transsexual: A person born with the anatomic structure of the body of one sex, but who feels and wishes to function as a member of the opposite sex. Some transsexuals choose to undergo hormonal treatment, sexual reassignment surgery, and other cosmetic procedures to change their bodies to match the sex that they feel they really embody. Transsexual men and women traverse the boundary of the sex that they are assigned at birth. There are heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual transsexuals.

Transvestite (Cross Dresser): A person who on occasion deliberately dresses in the clothes traditionally associated with the opposite sex. A person who "cross dresses" does not desire to be the opposite sex, but is fulfilling other needs and desires.

DISCRIMINATORY TERMS

Anti - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer: takes many forms. It exists between and within individuals and across institutions and cultures. It is most commonly referred to as homophobia and heterosexism. It is manifested through the denial of human, legal and social rights and social roles to lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgendered and queer people, and through violence and verbal abuse.

Lesbophobia/Homophobia: The conscious or unconscious hatred and irrational fear of lesbians and gay men. Based in a belief system and set of priorities that asserts heterosexuality is "normal" and superior, and that lesbianism and homosexuality is deviant, abnormal, criminal or sinful. Lesbophobic/homophobic feelings can be described as fear, hatred, disgust, non-acceptance and as a profound difference.

Biphobia: The conscious or unconscious hatred or irrational fear of bisexual men and women, which is experienced in the heterosexual and lesbian and gay communities.

Heterosexism: The assumption by individuals, institutions, and societal customs that everyone is heterosexual may be expressed or assumed and recognized as such or not. It is the belief that the normal, natural, healthy, mature way for humans to bond sexually, affectionately and emotionally is with a partner of the opposite sex. Heterosexism systemically and socially promotes heterosexuality and simultaneously stigmatizes all other sexual orientations (homosexual bisexuality). It is based on the numerically frequent and dominant sexual reaction in our society (heterosexual), without recognizing other sexual orientations.

OVERTURE NO. 15, 1997 (A&P 1997, p. [503](#))

Re: To clarify the roles of homosexual and lesbian people within the Church

WHEREAS, Christ appeared to exclude none who would follow and serve him, and
WHEREAS, recent practice within the Presbyterian Church has been to exclude certain practicing homosexuals from fully serving Christ as ordained ministers in this Church.
THEREFORE, the Session of Pineland Presbyterian Church, Burlington, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 123rd General Assembly, to clarify the limits of the role that homosexual and lesbian people play within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, or to do otherwise as the Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

The Terms of Reference for the Special Committee named by the Moderator re Overture No. 34, 1998 from the Rosedale session, are as follows:

1. To investigate and explore the biblical, theological, pastoral, scientific and medical understanding of the phenomenon commonly called "sexual orientation".
2. That the Special Committee report annually to General Assembly, providing information, reporting progress and inviting discussion and feedback.
3. That the Special Committee consult with persons with relevant expertise and competence.
4. That the Special Committee also be in regular dialogue with the Committee on Church Doctrine, Ministry and Church Vocation and the Clerks of Assembly.
5. In order that the Special Committee be funded appropriately it is asked to present a budget to the Assembly Council for its consideration.

OVERTURE NO. 22, 1998 (A&P 1998, p. [529](#))

Re: To ensure that ongoing medical, psychological and theological discussions on homosexuality and related issues are before the Church

WHEREAS, the issue of the ordination of practising homosexuals has proved to be extremely divisive for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and
WHEREAS, the Commission on the subject appointed by the 123rd General Assembly did not call for action under the Barrier Act, and
WHEREAS, the Commission dealt only with the judicial aspects of the case at St. Andrew's, Lachine, and
WHEREAS, many people across the Church feel that the theological questions raised by the Lachine case remain unsolved,
THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Montreal humbly overtures the Venerable, the 124th General Assembly, to establish a committee, or to direct an existing committee to keep abreast of the medical, psychological and theological discussion of homosexuality and related issues, and report regularly to the Church through its publications, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

In light of the resignation of The Rev. Philip Chiang and because the sexual orientation Committee lacks diversity of ethnicity and sexual orientation, the committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation No. 1 (adopted, p. [39](#))

That the General Assembly appoint to the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation a person of an ethnic minority.

Recommendation No. 2 (defeated, p. [49](#))

That the General Assembly appoint to the Special Committee re Sexual Orientation an openly gay or lesbian person.

Wendy Paterson
Convener

The amendment was defeated.

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