

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE SEXUAL ORIENTATION**  
**(Acts and Proceedings 2003, p. 526-47)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Since the General Assembly meeting in 1997, the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation has studied many issues related to the overture that originally brought our committee into being. That was Overture No. 15, 1997 from the Session of Pineland Church in Burlington, Ontario, which asked us “to clarify the limits of the role that homosexual and lesbian people play within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.” (A&P 1997, p. 503, 19)

In 1998, a second overture, Overture No. 34, 1998 was added to our mandate from the session of Rosedale Presbyterian Church in Toronto (A&P 1998, p. 536, 23-25). The terms of reference for this overture were as follows (A&P 1998, p 54):

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 Vocations 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 from the Presbytery of Montreal was assigned to the Special Committee after being referred to the Committee on Church Doctrine. It was essentially the same as Overture No. 34, 1998 but it added the term “psychological” to the list of areas to be explored. Overture No. 15, 2001 has already been answered at an earlier Assembly. (A&P 2002, p. 470)

The committee has worked diligently and reported faithfully to each meeting of the General Assembly. We have consulted with experts in the various fields. In the biblical field, we heard presentations from Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, Dr. Stephen Farris, Dr. Dorcas Gordon, and Dr. Bradley McLean. We also watched a video offered by Dr. Terrence Donaldson from the Anglican Church of Canada. In the field of theology and ethics: Dr. Arthur Van Seters, Dr. Iain Nicol, and Dr. William Klempa spoke to the committee and we studied a paper written for us by Dr. Joseph McLelland. From a pastoral perspective, we listened to presentations by The Rev. Calvin Brown, The Rev. Cameron Brett, The Rev. John Congram, former editor of The Presbyterian Record, and The Rev. Susan Maybey from the Metropolitan Community Church. In the field of science, medicine and psychology, Dr. Ruthanna Dyer spoke to the committee as did Dr. Steven Atkinson. We reviewed the results of interviews with Dr. Janice Ristock, Dr. Richard Barham, Dr. J.R.M. Smith, and Dr. Michelle Owen. We were constantly in dialogue with The Rev. Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk of General Assembly for guidance and direction on such things as legal matters, correct procedure, and committee needs. The Rev. Susan Shaffer from Ministry and Church Vocations was interviewed about procedures and questions asked at guidance conferences and psychological testing for students for ministry. We shared dinner and a time of dialogue with the Committee on Church Doctrine and one member of our committee was also on the Doctrine Committee. We have had as a consultant to our committee, Dr. Richard Isaac. We also spent time with members of SAGA (St. Andrew’s Gay Association) and ANN (A New Network). Mr. Richard Ford made a presentation to the committee about the sexual orientation study sessions that have been held at St. Giles Church, Sarnia.

When the committee began its work, we requested stories from people within our church, personal stories from the perspective of a homosexual or heterosexual (or family member). We received many contributions from across the country that gave us a framework in which to work. We are grateful to all who contributed. You will not find any of these stories in this final report but they were used in the 2000 report to General Assembly (A&P 2000, p. 483-86) and the study guide. They were most helpful in putting a face to the issues around sexual orientation.

The production of a study guide entitled “Listening...” was a major project undertaken in the fall of 2002, a copy of which was sent to the clerks of session of all the churches. This study guide is intended to promote dialogue and encourage discussion. It is available through the Book Room or on the church’s website.

Now as the final report is completed, we find ourselves with many unanswered questions; questions that you will find throughout this report. We are fully aware that this report will leave many unsatisfied. Those who were hoping for a report with recommendations that would radically change the traditional stance of our denomination will undoubtedly be disappointed. Those who longed to see a deeper entrenchment and reaffirmation of the status quo will likely be frustrated with our efforts, too.

Still, however, we prayerfully submit this document, believing it to be a faithful response to the task we were asked to accomplish. We realized early in our discussions that if any one position were to 'win', the church would inevitably be the loser. We have tried hard to present a balanced report that respects and includes all of God's people. We have also tried to maintain unity within our denomination.

We do not believe this will be or should be the last word spoken on the topic. In fact, we are convinced that dialogue and study must continue. The problems that inevitably arise around discussions of sexual orientation are not going to go away. To ignore them or pretend they do not exist is both foolish and harmful. Our prayer is that this report will be carefully considered, appreciating that it is not intended to support or promote any one side or opinion. Our hope is that we can all live and work together in faithful service to God.

Over the years, the people who have served as members of the committee are Donald Muir, Amanda Currie, Phillip Chiang, Kevin Livingston, Alice Wilson, Andrew Foster, Georgia Cordes, Stewart Gillan, Philip Lee, Dianne Ollerenshaw and Wendy Paterson (Convener).

## **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL**

The committee looked to the scriptures for guidance and authority. As the Shorter Catechism has assured us:

The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

The committee approached the various texts not as proof-texts providing easy answers to all our questions, but rather as in the spirit of Living Faith:

The Bible has been given to us  
by the inspiration of God  
to be the rule of faith and life.  
It is the standard of all doctrine  
by which we must test any word which comes to us  
from church, world, or inner experience.  
We subject to its judgement  
all we believe and do.  
Through the Scriptures  
the Church is bound only to Jesus Christ its King and Head.  
He is the living Word of God  
to whom the written word bears witness. (5.1)

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

## **Biblical Texts Relating to the Subject of Homosexual Behaviour**

In the Old Testament, the following texts are concerned with homosexual acts:

Genesis	19:1-29
Judges	19:22-29; 20:1-7
Deuteronomy	23: 17-18
Leviticus	18:22
Leviticus	20:13

The Genesis and Judges texts are not really germane to our subject as they have to do with violent criminal behaviour, with homosexual rape. And the Deuteronomy passage deals with the subject of temple prostitution, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Both of the Leviticus readings, are from the Holiness Code, Yahweh's command to Israel through Moses, about those ways in which the people of God are to be different from the other nations.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 18: 1-4)

Among the statutes in the Holiness Code is that concerning homosexual behaviour.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

And the penalty for violation of this statute is given in a later chapter.

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

In the New Testament, only Paul deals directly with the subject of homosexuality. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, he lists several categories of wrongdoers which will forbid their practitioners from inheriting the kingdom of God.

Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

It would seem that, although Paul's teaching abandoned the Holiness Code in many respects such as the prohibition of certain foods and certainly in the area of proscribed punishments, he adheres closely to the Code in matters of sexual behaviour. In a similar passage, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, he again catalogues "the Godless and sinful, ... the unholy and profane." The Law, he argues, has been laid down not for innocent persons but rather:

For those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he intrusted to me.

Paul in his letter to the Romans offers a similar list of wrongdoing. Because of their idolatry:

God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way, also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27)

Paul goes on to list:

Evil, covetousness, malice, [those who are] full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (See Romans 1:29-32)

Several comments might be made about these scriptural references.

1. Texts dealing with the subject of homosexuality are sparse. In both covenants much more attention is paid to heterosexual misconduct. In the New Testament, there seems to be much more concern about greed, love of money, lack of compassion for the poor than about sexual misconduct of any kind. This is not to say that sexual concerns are a matter of indifference, but this is not where the priority lies.
2. Even though little is said about homosexual activity, when it is dealt with, it is always in a very negative way.
3. Homosexual practice, however, is not singled out as being a particularly heinous sin in terms of other sins. In the Old Covenant it is not taken more seriously than heterosexual misconduct. In the New Covenant Paul does not highlight homosexual sin, but rather lists it along with adultery, gossip and greed.
4. Whether the authors of these scripture passages were aware of our modern concept of “sexual orientation” is unknown. Whether they recognized the possibility of a long-term, committed, sexual relationship between same sex couples is not known. Whether such modern concepts would have made a difference in their view of the matter remains a question.

### **The Bible on Male-Female Relationships**

It is important to note that both the Old and New Testaments have an extremely positive view of male-female sexuality. In the creation story, we are told that:

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-31)

There is an indication that the two sexes of humanity as complementary to one another compose a complete expression of humanity which is a reflection of the completeness of God.

In a parallel account of the creation, the reason for the creation of woman is for companionship for the man.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”

The man responded with what is undoubtedly one of the earliest love poems:

This at last is bone of my bones,  
and flesh of my flesh;  
This one shall be called woman,  
For out of man this one was taken. (Genesis 2: 18-25)

So, this unique relationship is the Creator’s gift for humanity to address the condition of human loneliness. Jesus, in his teaching on divorce, speaks of this Genesis text in the most positive terms:

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’ and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Matthew 19:4-6)

St. Paul goes so far as to employ the image of marriage between a man and a woman as a metaphor for the mystical union between Christ and the church. He goes to the same creation text and perhaps also recalls Jesus’ commentary on the passage.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:21-33)

### **The Bible on Love and Grace**

The scriptures are also assuring to all people that God’s love is all powerful and inclusive beyond our human understanding. The following are only a few examples from among many. Paul seems to put all believers on a level playing field:

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. (Romans 3:22-27)

And yet in the same passage, Paul makes it clear that he is not lapsing into anti-nomianism:

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:21-31)

And there is Paul's inclusive word in Galatians uniting all believers in Christ:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28-29)

And again in Ephesians there is an affirmation of grace:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

### **Some Further Thoughts Which Arise from the Biblical Study**

#### **On the One Hand**

1. The biblical texts are clear in considering sexual purity to be of utmost importance to Jews and Christians. Sexual impurity of various sorts are seen to be dangerous because it threatens the harmony of the community and the reputation of the community. Sexual impurity is recognized as the typical practice of the gentiles, the world, but the Lord God has provided a better way for the Covenant community.
2. The biblical texts are also relatively clear in including homosexual practices within the catalogue of sexual impurity. The classic texts from Leviticus (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13) specifically forbid male homosexual activity.
3. Paul, in echoes of the Leviticus texts, declares that "the sexually immoral", along with other wicked persons, "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Among the "sexually immoral," he lists, "adulterers, ... male prostitutes ... homosexual offenders." In the letter to the Romans (Romans 1:26, 27) Paul includes female homosexuality in his list of sexual impurities. "Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."
4. The scriptures are extremely positive about a proper sexual relationship between man and woman.

From the beginning (Genesis 1:27), a fundamental, perhaps the fundamental characteristic of humanity is this unique relationship between man and woman. "In the image of God he created him [mankind]; male and female he created them." Jesus himself recalls this text in his teaching on divorce (Matthew 19:4-6): "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." The author of Ephesians employs the unique relationship between man and woman as a metaphor for the unique relationship between Christ and the church. Therefore the sexual relationship between man and woman is given a spiritual dimension (Ephesians 5:25-33): "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word ... In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one has ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the Church, for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the Church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.'"

5. The position of The Presbyterian Church in Canada on this subject is also unambiguous. The 1994 “Statement on Human Sexuality” adopted by the 120th General Assembly (A&P 1994, p. 252-74), re-affirmed the biblical and traditional view that: “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.” In light of this stance, and in recent precedence, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is not prepared to ordain unrepentant practicing homosexuals or to allow public worship services blessing same-sex relationships.

#### On the Other Hand

1. Paul has taught us that (Romans 3: 20-23) “no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight by works of the law ...” and that “there is no distinction [in believers] since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” While this teaching does not justify any sinful act, it certainly does place all believers in the same category in regard to their sins and offences. All are dependent on God’s gracious act of forgiveness through the Cross of Christ.
2. Often homosexual people have been singled out within the church as having committed a particularly heinous sin. While the sins of adultery and fornication have been overlooked or forgiven within the church, homosexuality has become the focal point of moral concern. In one of the same passages in which the Apostle Paul condemns same sex relationships (Romans 1:26-31), he also catalogues a number of offences, some of which have not been taken with much seriousness by our denomination: “They are filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s decree, that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.”
3. In an age of much sexual misconduct, among respectable persons, same-sex unions have become the focus of the church’s concern. In an intemperate condemnation of one sin, the church tends to ignore Jesus’ admonition (Matthew 7:1-5) to “Judge not, that you be not judged ... Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”
4. Many faithful church members are made to feel like second-class members of Christ’s church because of their same-sex unions being unrecognized by the church. Some feel that within their sexual orientation they have chosen a life of commitment to one partner, which should be regarded as the best possible choice given their circumstances.
5. Many creative, dedicated men and women, because of their homosexual practice, are being excluded from the ministry of Word and Sacraments. These persons feel frustrated because they cannot serve in the area in which they would like to serve. At the same time, the church is being deprived of some very talented and faithful servants in the ordained ministry.

#### A Third View

1. Is it possible to suggest that homosexual acts were considered sinful and repulsive in the Holiness Code primarily because they were not on the side of the ‘holy’? In the New Testament, much of what is rejected as contaminated according to the Old Testament laws, is no longer mentioned. Prohibitions such as the eating of shellfish or the wearing of clothing of mixed fibres are examples. But Paul still considers homosexuality unclean. Is it possible that Paul, like many in our own time, did not understand same gender sex and consequently believed that the laws about it were different? It is important to remember as well that Paul lived before the concept of ‘orientation’ was developed. Could Paul, as a man of his day who witnessed the abuses of common sexual practices, have missed the side of homosexuality that is wholesome and loving?
2. 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’?

3. 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?
4. 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?
5. Is it possible to say that we do not have all the answers and likely never will? Other churches and individuals have also made careful and prayerful studies and come to different conclusions about how to interpret God’s word. In all the areas the committee was asked to explore, more work is being done and research carried out. Are we ready to say that it is not a good idea to try to make final conclusions?

## **THE SCIENCES**

### **Introduction**

Part of the mandate of the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation was to investigate and explore the scientific, medical and psychological understanding of the phenomenon commonly called “sexual orientation”. The committee has chosen to combine those areas within one section entitled “The Sciences”, which also includes social science perspectives. Although not practical to include in this final report, the committee’s research did reveal information about the historic development of issues, theories, research and practices up to the present, as well as differing ethnic, cultural and faith perspectives. Some references to these are included in this section.

The committee’s mandate directed it to consult with persons with relevant expertise and competence. Each part of this section consists of summaries that are fairly representative of what was discovered as the current understanding of the issues within the respective fields of expertise. Although not exhaustive in scope, the committee believes that each of the summaries touch on the wide spectrum of issues, beliefs and views which were learned in our many interviews and readings, as well as within our church and society today.

We also understand that many people may agree or disagree with some or all of the content in this section. But the committee has been faithful in endeavouring to share what it has learned from the scientific arena. Hopefully this information will serve to open another window on further education, which will enrich continuing dialogue and understanding of the many issues which are presented.

### **Biological**

The Special Committee on Sexual Orientation interviewed biologist Ruthanna Dyer, Ph.D., in November 1998. At that time she was a course director and is currently an assistant professor at Atkinson Faculty, York University, and is a professor of Health Sciences at Seneca College. The following summary of her presentation includes biological, genetic, medical, sociological, and research information.

#### Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Development is a sequential process based on:

- Genetics cannot provide all the answers; still many unanswered questions regarding human development.
- Internal environment
  - chemical mediators,

- structural relationships.
- External environment
  - physical and chemical factors,
  - social factors.

Only recently have the professionals who focus on these two groupings begun to dialogue.

#### Some Terminology

- Sex: one's reproductive anatomy; biologically male or female.
- Gender: one's function as a sexual being; the view of one's self as masculine or feminine.
- Gender Identity: one's self identity as male or female. Gender identity develops at the same time as a child begins language expression (e.g. "me girl", "you boy"). Counselling later in life to reverse one's self identity as male or female has not been successful.
- Gender Role: the expression of gender identity within society.
- Gender Schema: the mental concept of what constitutes male vs. female. Each individual has their own gender schema. These mental concepts are broadened by one's own maturity, and by societal change (e.g. when males began wearing their hair longer in the 1960s, comments were made about not being able to tell if they were male or female).
- Sexual Orientation: the attraction to a person of the same or different gender. Previously thought to be formed around the time of puberty, mostly based on anecdotal and first person accounts. Not aware of any well-documented studies on the development of sexual orientation comparing gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual populations.

#### Factors Which Influence the Development of Gender Identity include

- Chromosomal Inheritance - The father determines gender.
  - XX - female
  - XY - male
- Genetic Inheritance: The SRY (Sex-determining Region of the Y gene) from the Y chromosome, if active, will cause testes to develop and the embryo will be male. In the absence of a Y chromosome, no SRY gene will be present and the embryo will be female.
- Embryonic Hormones: Six to seven weeks after fertilization the testes produce testosterone. If and how it interacts with receptors on cell membranes will determine the formation of external genitalia.
- External Genitalia: The degree and method of reception of embryonic hormones will determine the clarity or ambiguity of external genitalia for both boys and girls. Ambiguity occurs where external genital development is altered by environmental factors. Before assigning gender/one's sex, chromosome testing and ultrasound should be administered, and assessment of the following:
  - Will reproduction be possible?
  - Which assignment will allow for expression of sexuality?
  - How well will society accept the assignment?
- Programming of the Brain: There doesn't seem to be a relationship between embryonic hormone levels and later development. (It is not ethical to undertake research to alter embryonic hormones in humans; therefore other primates are used. These studies are not directly transferable to humans.)
- Birth and Sex Assignment: A critical point, when the physician/midwife announces the baby's sex and society begins to relate to the child as a boy or a girl.
- Social Factors such as vocalizing, play, and dress penetrate throughout our lives. How the baby is received and treated appears to influence one's gender identity.
- Puberty and Secondary Sexual Characteristics between ages nine and twelve reinforce gender identity.
- Sex Partner: The choice is made of a sex partner with whom to express one's sexuality. Eighty to ninety percent of the population choose the opposite gender schema. If one chooses a sex partner of the same gender schema, it is from their own comfort/clarity in their own gender identity.

Controversy remains over the percentages regarding sexual orientation in the population. There is a continuum of sexual behaviour.

#### What Makes a Scientific Study Valid?

Have acceptable research procedures been established and implemented in this area? Do the results address the intentions of the study? Reporting on studies through the internet and media often is misleading, sensational and inaccurate. The source of research funding (and motives) often has an impact on the outcome, with restrictions on reporting. Always look for corroborative research before accepting results.

Much more research will be done in the next decade regarding sexual orientation. Some preliminary research has been done, but we do not have the answers. Even if and when we do, the information will often be used against others, rather than as a means of increasing social acceptance. Scientific “proofs” are often used to reinforce social stereotypes.

Update - March 2003

Dr. Ruthanna Dyer has noted the increased interest in and speed of research, and the emergence of changing paradigms with respect to sex and gender. She reported that the only change that is significant in scientific research, since her presentation to the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation in 1998, is the increased pressure to identify the genetic basis for sexual orientation. This has resulted from the increased research in genetics arising from the Human Genome Project, and the assumption (as yet unsubstantiated) by some sociobiologists and behaviour psychologists that behaviours are genetic in origin.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL

#### **Sexual Identity: Fixed or a Social Construct**

Science can provide us with valuable psychological/social information and concepts which can be helpful to us as we attempt to understand homosexual identity. In our deliberations, the committee reflected, not only on what it is to be a sexual being, but also on what it may mean to be, or to identify as a homosexual person.

Do those who have a homosexual sexual orientation always consider their sexual orientation to be their primary identity? Do those with a heterosexual sexual orientation consider their heterosexuality to be their primary identity?

In other words, do we human beings think of ourselves only in terms of our sexual orientation? Is that how we think of ourselves, ultimately? Or do we perhaps understand and identify ourselves simply as male or as female, or perhaps as a member of a particular racial or ethnic group? These are important questions to reflect upon as we more thoroughly attempt to understand sexual orientation versus sexual behaviour.

In her paper: *Constructing Identity: The Nature and Meaning of Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Identities*,<sup>1</sup> Ellen Broido asks what for her is a fundamental question: “Is there a difference between engaging in same-gendered sexual relationships, experiencing same-gendered romantic relationships, and identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual?”<sup>2</sup> The paper then sets out a response to this question from two points of view:

1. Citing numerous studies, she posits one theory which says that “some aspects of people are fixed, stable and fundamental to their sense of self”.<sup>3</sup> Those who hold to this theory will look for the root causes of same-gendered desire considering it to be either genetic or environmental, or a combination of both these influences.
2. The second theory posited is that one’s sexual identity, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is a social construct: “Identities are chosen or ‘constructed’ from the models available within a given society or context.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, if a society did not recognize homosexuality or even heterosexuality as possible identities, people would not thus identify themselves. Those who hold to this theory do not look for the root causes of same-gendered desire; rather they will argue that only the meaning of sexual orientation is worthy of study, particularly, “how societies define and grant power to ways of being sexual and forming loving relationships.”<sup>5</sup>

#### **Historical Perspective<sup>6</sup>**

From her research, Broido presents a brief historical view from the social/psychological perspective. There have been same-gender (and other-gender) sexual behaviour for many millennia. However, the concept of using sexuality as a way of framing a person's identity dates only to the 17th century. The first documented use of the word "homosexuality" was in 1869.

In the mid-1800s a homosexual person was considered to be affected in his total being by his homosexuality. It was a time in which a person's particular behaviour was considered to be the fundamental aspect of a person's identity for good or ill. This is why a person's same-gendered sexual "behaviour" was deemed behaviour linked to "constitutional degeneracy" and thus conceived as criminal. Towards the end of the 19th century, homosexual behaviour was then linked with mental illness and thus became the basis for almost all medical and psychological views on homosexuality for much of the following century.

In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its official diagnostic manual. Their review of literature and consultation led the APA to determine that homosexuality no longer meets the criteria for mental illness:

... homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities ... homosexuality is neither mental illness nor a moral depravity. It is simply a way a minority of our population expresses human love and sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

The challenge was made and argued that society had created the role of "homosexual" as a form of social control.

... nor is homosexuality a matter of individual choice. Research suggests that the homosexual orientation is in place very early in the life cycle, possibly even before birth ... Research findings suggest that efforts to repair homosexuals are nothing more than social prejudice garbed in psychological accoutrements.<sup>8</sup>

A question to consider:

The terms "homosexual" and "sexual orientation" are important in terms of identifying sexuality. But for those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual, does an emphasis on these terms lead us to ignore other important aspects of their humanity, e.g., who we are in our vocational life, in our religious life, in our lives as family members, in our lives within a particular racial or ethnic group?

## **SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEWS - 2001**

The Special Committee on Sexual Orientation realized that meeting only twice a year presented a number of challenges. Not the least of these were restrictions on the time, arrangements, locations and regional diversity of additional interviews we would like to conduct. One strategy to gain additional information in between meetings was for individual committee members to personally volunteer to conduct interviews in their respective regions.

The committee had previously agreed to questions that would be uniformly used. The following names were referred from within academic communities to the interviewers:

- Dr. Richard Barham, Ph.D., Human Development & Family Relations, University of Guelph.
- Dr. J.R.M Smith, family physician, currently Medical Director of Nine Circles Community Health Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Dr. Janice Ristock, Ph.D., (Community Psychology), currently Chair of Women's Studies, University of Manitoba.

In 2001, three supplemental interviews were conducted with the above individuals, using the following questions which are highlighted below. The responses were compiled and discussed when the entire committee next met. The following summary outlines the questions and the responses, which were fairly consistent for each question. Names are not attributed where the replies were the same or similar.

### **What is Sexual Orientation?**

Sexual orientation is the innate, instinctual attraction to a person of either the opposite gender, the same gender, or both genders. Invariably the attraction correlates with romantic, emotional and sexual attraction. (Dr. J.R.M. Smith)

Sexual orientation consists of a continuum from homosexuality to bisexuality to heterosexuality. There is fluidity within and between categories. Individuals will seek arrangements in their lives which reflect their sense of who they are. (Dr. Janice Ristock)

Gender itself is not the black and white, all or nothing bi-polar category generally taken for granted. There is the need to distinguish between (biological) sex and (socially constructed) gender, which do not always line up in the way we have been taught to expect (e.g., transgendered and transsexual people). (Dr. Richard Barham)

### **What is Homosexual Orientation?**

Homosexual orientation is the romantic, emotional and sexual attraction to a person of the same gender. (Dr. J.R.M. Smith)

Homosexual orientation identifies persons of the same gender as being the primary and, generally, sustained focus of erotic attraction. (Dr. Richard Barham)

### **Is Sexual Orientation, and in particular Homosexual Orientation... ?**

Genetic or Developmental, or Both?

Both. Although all of the mechanisms are not yet understood, there is quite compelling evidence of there being a biological basis to sexual orientation. Like any behaviour, there will also be environmental and cultural factors which will help shape the particulars (including the timing) of its expression and suppression. (Dr. Richard Barham)

Determined (Given) or a Matter of Choice, or Both?

The primary attraction is a given, and not a matter of choice.

Reversible (Changeable) or Not?

There is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation is reversible. Profound damage can result from attempts to do so. Conversion therapy is not advocated by many medical, psychological and psychiatric associations because it is contrary to professional ethics and acceptable practices. Such therapy is not consistent with the psychological perspective of therapy to accept and empower oneself, and not to deny one's sense of self.

Variable Over Time?

According to some personal accounts and clinical reports, some individuals appear to experience shift in the focus of their sexual orientation over time, within the continuum of sexual orientation. People of all orientations can discover their true orientation over time.

### **What is the incidence of homosexuality in our society?**

Dr. Ristock reported that the general incidence is ten to fifteen percent of the population are gay or lesbian. Dr. Smith noted that there are five to ten percent of males and three to six percent of females whose exclusive orientation is homosexual.

Responding to the above question with precision is always a challenge. It is difficult to assess the number of individuals whose orientation is not near one of the poles on the continuum of sexual orientation. The homophobia widely embedded in our culture has a direct impact on accurate disclosure in surveys. (Dr. Richard Barham)

### **What does the literature in your field say about depression and suicide among gays and lesbians?**

There is evidence of elevated rates of bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression at some points in their lives. More than half will have had thoughts of suicide, and eighteen percent will have attempted suicide. It is difficult to know the percentage for suicides if homosexual orientation was never discussed or disclosed by the individual, or revealed by the family at time of death. (Dr. J.R.M. Smith)

The adolescent to young-adult years are the most dangerous time for gay men to struggle with their sexuality. The likelihood for this to be manifested in the form of disorder, depression and suicide is an alarming three to seven times higher.

### **What does the literature in your field say about celibacy, and the imposition of celibacy?**

Dr. Smith reported that nine to thirteen percent of gay males are celibate. In psychology, Dr. Ristock noted that individuals have the right to be fully expressed, and the imposition of celibacy is viewed as a form of denial and repression of an individual to fully express themselves sexually.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEWS - 2002**

The Special Committee on Sexual Orientation had heard fears expressed based on the perception of a direct correlation between the incidence of pedophilia and homosexuality, and between the incidence of pornography and homosexuality. The committee sought clarification regarding these matters. Once again academic communities were contacted, and the following names were referred:

- Dr. Richard Barham, Ph.D., Human Development & Family Relations, University of Guelph.
- Dr. Michelle Owen, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, University of Winnipeg.
- The following are summaries of two interviews conducted in 2002.

### **Is there any reliable data that indicate the incidence of pedophilia among heterosexual people and among homosexual people? (With Dr. Richard Barham)**

One study (Freund & Watson, 1992) has reported the ratio of hetero-to-homosexual pedophiles as being about 11:1. That is within the approximate population ratio of straight-to-gay men (i.e. the rate of offending for the two groups appears to be much the same). Other studies indicate that, for straight or for gay offenders, the fact that the victim is a child is a greater determinant than the gender of the child. A child's risk of being molested by his or her mother's heterosexual partner is over 100 times greater than by someone who might be identifiable as being homosexual, lesbian or bisexual.

The matter of language and word usage deserves attention in this discussion. Any adult-child sexual interaction is designated as being an instance of *child abuse*, within specific age limits which vary between jurisdictions. They are also all instances of *pedophilia* according to some common uses of the term. At times *child abuse* is labeled as incest (i.e. between family members). Where non-family members are involved, such adult/child sexual interactions are commonly referred to as *child sexual abuse* or, less commonly, as *pedophilia*. There are some who will call all familial cases of child sexual abuse *incest*, and all non-familial cases as *pedophilia*. None of the italicized terms have positive connotations, but the term *pedophilia* is especially ominous. It is often used selectively in debate to have an impact on listeners' attitudes and sympathies.

### **Is there any reliable data that indicate the incidence of pornography among heterosexual people and among homosexual people? (With Dr. Michelle Owen)**

Dr. Owen knew of no reliable data which concluded that the incidence of pornography usage among the heterosexual population was different than the incidence among the homosexual population, or the incidence within our society in general. In her opinion,

- The images and sexual portrayal of women found in various media have permeated our society for decades, and are considered more "socially acceptable" because they appeal to heterosexual males.
- It is easier in our society to access straight/heterosexual pornography than to access gay (male) pornography.
- Heterosexual men are more secretive about and less likely to reveal their usage of pornography than are homosexual men.

### **Conclusion**

"Is there is a genetic link to homosexuality?" is a question which is often asked. It is suggested that if only the research could prove such a link, our understanding would be more clear and subsequent decision-making perhaps "easier". While neither overwhelming nor conclusive, the evidence suggests a biological basis for homosexual orientation, while at the same time recognizing an environmental and social influence.

Some in our church would not have science enter this debate at all, claiming that the only true debate is a biblical one. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the biblical authority has been the committee's primary guide. For Christians the Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of faith, but not the ultimate authority in matters of science. However we need not see science and the Bible as being at odds with one another, but view the relationship as a friendly one.

We know from history that the church at first refused the new astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo. One generation may have a "crystal-clear meaning of scripture", another generation may find that same passage of scripture presents new challenges for understanding and interpretation.

In the words of the scientist and biblical scholar whose collaborative effort has been cited above:

Science is not theology's enemy; they are friends because from time to time science forces Christians to re-examine their interpretive principles and in the process make important new discoveries about the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

## **PASTORAL CARE**

How we live together as a Christian community and how we care for one another all bears witness to Jesus Christ.

At times the issues around homosexual orientation have not always been easy to discuss. Our small committee which represents a microcosm of The Presbyterian Church in Canada has grown and been blessed by the Spirit working among us as a community. Although the road we have travelled together has not always been clear or without difficulties, we have upheld care for one another and respected one another despite our varied views on doctrine. Over the past six years we have agreed on a common language, learned about an issue from different fields of academia, asked deep questions which have led to many more questions, and trusted in the Spirit to guide us and provide us with wisdom. Although many of the readers of this report may be disappointed with our findings and recommendations, we believe the Spirit has been at work among us, speaking to the church.

Fear is an emotion that has been identified around the work of the Special Committee on Sexual Orientation. Throughout the church some have feared the findings of the committee's work: expressing a fear of apostasy, a fear of schism, a fear of discrimination when "breaking the silence" or a fear of vilification when saying what one thinks from the heart, a fear of conflict with church and state, and a fear of opening a plethora of issues around human sexuality that the church would prefer to ignore rather than address.

Examining a moral dilemma within the church is not an easy task. Nancy J. Duff, in a chapter entitled, *How to Discuss Moral Issues Surrounding Homosexuality When You Know You are Right*, points out that people on either side of the debate often talk past each other, although they may argue their own position vehemently trying persuade those who have not yet made up their minds on the subject.<sup>10</sup> More energy is going into developing a winning strategy than listening to the opposing points of view.

Referring to an essay *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill, Duff suggests that those who hold a position of great conviction must listen to their opponents otherwise they may silence a portion or all of the truth, or they may use the truth as a weapon. Duff believes this coincides with the essence of the gospel. "Although there are isolated times when scriptures counsel us to throw out an offender, we are taught by the gospel to disagree in love."<sup>11</sup>

When speaking with the Syrophenician woman, Jesus was challenged to re-evaluate his understanding of inclusivity (Mark 7: 24-30). She caused Jesus to rethink his position and moved him from a stance of excluding to one of including. In a commentary on Mark's gospel, entitled, *Say to This Mountain*, we read, "Oppressed people often have a profound analysis of social situations, and know the paths of justice. People in positions of authority need to heed them."<sup>12</sup> Dialogue is a blessing for the church and the world. Learning to speak about difficult issues can only strengthen the church as the body of Christ. It is a way for the Spirit to speak to the people of God and discern the truth while addressing those moral or social issues with which the church is confronted within its culture and context.

A pastoral concern for our committee is that members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada be able to discuss issues of sexuality without fear or anger, and that in the act of debate, we remember all of us stand under the judgment and the grace of God.

In our interim report in 2000, The Special Committee on Sexual Orientation stated that 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 (A&P 2000, p. 487). No one among us should be held to be unworthy of fellowship. “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” (Romans 2:1)

In the Report of Human Sexuality (6.23) we read (A&P 1994, p. 267),

The Church is called to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supportive 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.

As the church we are to provide pastoral care for one another. Pastoral care takes place within a worshipping community and involves all of us who “are simultaneously saint and sinner, no matter how far we have walked on the road of sanctification...”<sup>13</sup> Can we agree that whatever the race, nationality, gender, social class, employment, vocation, lifestyle, sexual orientation, intelligence, health, appearance, beliefs, attitude, wealth or any other characteristic of a human being does not exclude us from God’s unconditional love?<sup>14</sup> 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.

Obviously our theology and interpretation of scripture also informs our understanding of such themes as incarnation and creation, covenant and community, sin and grace, holiness and obedience, redemption and love, which in turn informs our strategies and method of pastoral care. As a denomination within the Reformed tradition it is important that we wrestle with scripture and that we pray for understanding as we strive to live in unity with the Holy Spirit and one another. While biblical and theological principles inform our pastoral care we must remember that “principles are in the service of building up the body of Christ and not the other way around. The incarnational takes precedence over the philosophical, the real over the ideal. The pastoral emphasis reminds us that we’re not just dealing with disembodied doctrine but with real live individual people with faces and names.”<sup>15</sup>

The reality of providing pastoral care in our time is that it is often short term. “Ministers offering brief pastoral counseling to troubled people need to ignite hope - a hope that recognizes the past, takes action in the present, and moves into the future.”<sup>16</sup> We are called to provide spiritual direction, support, and hospitality to people in need, recognizing people’s strengths while helping them explore options and ways to change, develop and grow.

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?<sup>17</sup>
- 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.”<sup>18</sup> 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 suggest 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.

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 to name a few. Presbyteries should also provide similar pastoral care of their ministers.

The church should involve people wherever they find themselves in the “continuum of sexual identity” (Human Sexuality Report, 6.18) in the loving family of God. They should not be excluded from the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

In Living Faith we are reminded:

All Christians are members both of a human family  
and of the church, the household of God.  
We honour our parents who gave us life,  
and also the church which has nurtured us in the faith. (8.2.1.)

The church is the family of God.  
Here all should be valued for themselves.  
We are one body in Christ:  
together rejoicing when things go well,  
supporting one another in sorrow,  
celebrating the goodness of God  
and the wonder of our redemption. (8.2.6)

The Lord continues his ministry  
in and through the church.  
All Christians are called  
to participate in the ministry of Christ.  
As his body on earth  
we all have gifts to use  
in the church and in the world  
to the glory of Christ, our King and Head. (7.2.1)

In the act of baptism often the congregation will pray as the minister blesses the one being baptized as a “child of God, disciple of Christ, and member of the church”.<sup>20</sup> In this sacrament all who are baptized are united with Christ and with the church and commissioned for service. Together we are invited to share our talents and unique gifts in ministry for the glory of God. Leaders in the church need to equip all the saints by encouraging, respecting, and affirming the variety of gifts with which they have been blessed.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. (Ephesians 4:4-8)

In the covenant of baptism together we promise to support and care for one another in the love of Jesus Christ. Let us continue to build up the body of the Christ as we care for one another regardless of sexual orientation.

## **LEGAL**

The committee consulted with the Clerks of Assembly and, through them, with church solicitors who, in this case, were based in Ontario. We bear in mind that Canadian constitutional responsibilities have resulted in some differences in human rights legislation in each of the provinces and territories and that there are both federal and provincial areas of human rights law.

Concerning denial of employment based on sexual practices or on sexual orientation, there is as yet no reported case of a direct challenge to the doctrine and practice of a religious institution based on human rights legislation as written and as further interpreted by the courts. The area of human rights and sexual orientation is one of active ongoing legal review by the courts and legislatures, for example in the recent British Columbia school board case in the Supreme Court of Canada (*Trinity Western University vs. British Columbia College of Teachers* (2001) 1 S. C. R. 772). The courts attempt to balance the charter principles of protection of religious freedom and the prevention of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The courts would analyze the nature of an employed position within The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its basis in church doctrine and practice. If adherence to church doctrine is not a substantial relevant concern in the employment position, employment cannot be denied based on sexual orientation or sexual practice. To ground a valid discrimination based on sexual orientation or on sexual practice, there must be a substantial doctrinal element in the employed position. (The doctrine must be significantly relevant to the employment position in question.) Thus, a custodian or an office worker should not be subject to exclusion from church employment. Moreover, the doctrine must be clearly stated and properly enacted. It should be consistent within the whole church and consistent with The Presbyterian Church in Canada faith and belief structure. It should be uniformly and not selectively applied, and applied with a fair process. The application process should be based on good evidence. We are advised that where these criteria are met, doctrine relevant to homosexual practice and ordination may arguably be supported in the courts.

For example, an unmarried heterosexual person in a sexual relationship should be treated on the same basis as an unmarried homosexual person in a sexual relationship.

Once employed, benefits cannot be denied to a homosexual person except to the extent that they are validly restricted by a third party benefit provider.

We note that the definition and procedures around marriage in the civil marriage service are currently also under active review.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Summary**

The committee members brought many different understandings, experiences and viewpoints to the study and discussions. However, the conclusions represent consensus rather than compromise. No principles had to be yielded and no doctrine had to be re-interpreted to bring us to the point at which we concluded our work with broad agreement among the Committee members. The area of agreement still encompasses a variety of understandings, but represents a suitable place at which to pause and take stock of progress in the church’s study of this topic.

To be faithful to the two principal overtures to which we responded, the committee used many resources, both scriptural and secular, but the focus was fixed firmly on biblical authority. We were guided by the words of the preamble to the ordination of ministers and elders, relying on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit while we listened to the many voices that speak on this subject.

In the committee's study guide for congregations, entitled, *Listening...* we noted our aim that "the discussion and discernment process should not force an answer before its time."<sup>21</sup> It became obvious to the committee members from an early stage that any definitive recommendation concerning the roles of homosexual people in the church would be divisive, regardless of the direction taken. The committee believes that the time has not yet come for that answer. We also believe, and recommend, that the discussion should continue beyond the term of the present committee, with the prayer that the material we have collected and the conclusions we have reached in the course of our work will help in the church's continuing studies.

Our sources of information and wisdom begin and end with the Bible, and include many scholars, church members, clergy and scientists.

The committee has been criticized for not hearing sufficient evidence from groups who advocate conversion programs. We have listened to, but have not used material from organizations that have not supported their positions with scriptural or scientific evidence. Such evidence would have enabled us to consider them in the same spirit of enquiry that we have applied to other areas of the study.

A challenge faced by the committee was to understand and relate the contexts of this topic to the times of the Old Testament writers, the New Testament writers, and to the present time. We saw in the New Testament a lessening of the harshness of the Old Testament laws, and we believe that nearly two thousand more years of biblical and theological scholarship, together with the evolution of science, have brought greater insight to our understanding of human sexuality and humanity's relationship with God. In facing this challenge we have taken the centuries-old approach that the church is led by the scriptures and enlightened by science.

The biblical texts relating to homosexuality must be read carefully, and most importantly, in their proper contexts, in order to understand their intent. Some texts consider sexual crime and abuse; some reflect contemporary morality; while others concern the sense of order believed necessary to maintain a stable and continuing society. The concept of sexual orientation as we now understand it appears not to have been known to the biblical writers, but we cannot say this with absolute certainty from our reading of the scriptures. A formal definition of homosexuality does not appear in the scientific literature until the late 19th century.

The central issue from the outset of this work has been the concept and understanding of sin. We have considered the words of Jesus in his statement (Mark 10: 2-12) that one who divorces and remarries commits the sin of adultery. The church has long accepted and welcomed such people at all levels of membership and service, believing them to be repentant and forgiven sinners under God's law. Are we able to accept that this state is reached when they commit themselves to remain loving and faithful to their new partners? The reality of the failure of marriages, for many reasons, is a fact that the church has come to understand well, and with compassion.

Can we now accept that, based on the considerable body of evidence presented to us, sexual orientation is the characteristic that governs sexual activity? If this is true, is it now reasonable to believe that committed and enduring love can and does exist between people of the same sex? And if this is also true, can we go on to say that their sinfulness under God's law is no less amenable to repentance and forgiveness through God's grace than that of divorced and remarried people?

The above statement, while based on the present doctrine of the church, might invite a counter argument. This could be that the loving, committed homosexual person, in expressing fidelity to a partner, is not sinful in expressing that love and therefore feels no reason to repent of it. By the fact of not deliberately and perversely departing from what is now widely believed to be an innate characteristic, does the homosexual person no more sin against God's will for his created order than do those living the biblical norm of heterosexual marriage?

In considering these two positions, we must take care to understand the differences between established doctrine and a view that the church has not accepted. The committee is well aware that the propositions set out in the preceding

paragraphs raise further questions that will sustain this debate rather than bring it to a close. However, we believe that it would be beneficial to focus further study on this area.

The question we must now ask as a result of reaching this position is: “Is the faithful, sinful, loving homosexual person therefore no less a person in God’s sight than the faithful, sinful, loving heterosexual person?” If so, can we now say with conviction that we are not a community divided by acceptance or rejection based on the expression of our sexuality? Can we now say with confidence that we are whole, the indivisible Body of Christ?

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”<sup>22</sup> (Luke 18:9-14)

### **Scientific, psychological and medical; pastoral, theological and biblical understanding of sexuality**

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.

The scientific evidence indicates that sexual attraction and activity depend predominantly on a person’s place on the spectrum of sexual orientation. The orientation of those at the extremes of the spectrum appears to be well defined and unlikely to change significantly, and their sexual activity - heterosexual or homosexual - will be similarly well defined.

The evidence of experience and the opinion of specialists indicates that for those at the centre of the spectrum, whose orientation is less clearly defined, an element of choice in sexual activity may exist. Their orientation may be unclear to them, and their sexual preferences may change as their lives continue to unfold.

We have come to understand that it is never appropriate to refer to sexual orientation as a “lifestyle choice”. The scientific evidence shows this description to be inaccurate, and homosexual people who have responded to the committee find it to be an offensive and demeaning term, indicating an absence of understanding of the meaning of sexual orientation on the part of those who use it. 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, and it affects every one of us to some degree.

As we discussed above, the clarity of sexual orientation evidently varies, and in some cases, is ambiguous. Where such ambiguity occurs, the evidence does not lead us to believe that it can safely be interpreted as presenting a general case for the implementation of ‘conversion’ programs.

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.

### **The roles of homosexual people in the church**

Our reading of the scriptures leaves no doubt that the heterosexual union was considered to be the norm under God's laws as they were received by the community of the faithful. But is this union exclusive of all others? How does it relate to our understanding and acceptance of the undeniable diversity that we see among the creation? What is the role of those who are created to be different? How does their orientation affect the way in which they may serve God and God's people?

We open up these texts and believe we have discerned their meanings, but time and cultural changes slowly obscure their meanings from us. Can we accept that this is a continuing process, and that they must be reopened with fresh eyes and minds for succeeding ages to understand them?

It is widely accepted that homosexual people hold office in the church. "Neither scripture nor Church prohibits ordination on the basis of one's sexual attraction to others, whether homosexual or heterosexual" (A&P 1996, p. 444). On the basis of a precedent derived from an understanding of scriptural authority, a person described as a "self avowed and practising homosexual" (A&P 1996, p. 444) may be refused ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We have learned that others, while in the process of preparing for the ministry, have declared their homosexual orientation and have been advised to withdraw or to transfer to another denomination. The reasoning has been that such a person contravenes the currently accepted standards and practice of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and is therefore not acceptable as a minister of Word and Sacraments. We infer that such people are considered to be unrepentant sinners. However, we must take great care in our understanding and use of the word 'unrepentant' when it is used in judgment against others.

At present, the church appears to be allowed under civil law - within certain limits - to question students for the ministry regarding their sexual orientation and activity, based on the belief that their lives should reflect the present standards and practice of the church in its acceptance of candidates for ordination. This is supported by legal opinion but has not been tested by the courts. It is to be noted that 'standards' do not necessarily mean the laws of the church as enacted by General Assemblies.

Based on current legal advice obtained at the request of the committee, the Principal Clerk of Assembly offered the following interpretation regarding the matter of inquiring into sexual orientation and practice during the candidacy process:

... questions related to sexual orientation and practice are likely legally permitted only when the church is sure that a clear requirement for ordination is adherence to a certain behaviour and that behaviour is clearly based on our theological beliefs. If a presbytery (when dealing with candidates for ministry) is consistent in applying this theological framework, then it is fair to expect those becoming part of the ordained clergy to adhere and thus the necessary questions can be asked.

The church has been very careful to draw the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity. A celibate homosexual minister or member of the Order of Diaconal Ministries may still be ordained/designated under the present laws and practice of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

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.

We pray that we have been faithful to God in listening to his word throughout our task. Let us close by observing that the basis for any study of, and by, God's people is surely Genesis 1:27: So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

**Recommendations No. 1** (adopted, p. 40)

That this report be referred to the Life and Mission Agency, the Committee on Theological Education and the colleges for study and use in educational resources of the church.

**Recommendation No. 2** (adopted, p. 43)

That the Life and Mission Agency, Committee on Theological Education, and the colleges be asked to continue to study and/or conduct research on questions of human sexuality.

**Recommendation No. 3** (adopted, p. 43)

That Life and Mission Agency be urged to ask Education for Discipleship to provide educational resources for congregations regarding human sexuality

**Recommendation No. 4** (defeated, p. 43)

That congregations and sessions be encouraged to use the study guide entitled *Listening...* and to return the questionnaire to The Rev. Wendy Paterson, 3200 Woodland Ave., Windsor, ON, N9E 1Z5, for compilation of statistics. (*Listening...* is available on the church web site or through the Book Room.)

**Recommendation No. 5** (amended and adopted, p. 44)

That congregations, presbyteries and their ministries be urged to be and to create safe spaces in which people of differing sexual orientations, and with differing views on sexual orientation, may encounter each other in prayer, story-telling, and truth-telling in a spirit of love, toward mutual understanding and Christian community.

**Recommendation No. 6** (adopted, p. 44)

That the above be the responses to Overture No. 15, 1997, Overture No. 34, 1998, and Overture No. 22, 1998.

**Recommendation No. 7** (amended and adopted, p. 45)

That the committee be discharged.

## Endnotes

1. Broido, Ellen M., "Constructing Identity: The Nature and Meaning of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities", in *Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients*, Ruperto M. Perez, Kurt A. DeBord, Kathleen J. Bieschke, Eds., American Psychological Association, 2000.
2. Ibid., p. 14.
3. Ibid., p. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 16.
5. Ibid., p. 17.
6. Ibid., p. 17-19.
7. cited in Bellis, Alice Ogden and Hufford, Terry L., *Science Scripture and Homosexuality*, The Pilgrim Press, 2002, p. 42.
8. Ibid., p. 43.
9. Ibid., p. 77.
10. Nancy J. Duff, "How to Discuss Moral Issues Surrounding Homosexuality When You Know You are Right, within Homosexuality and Christian Community", Choon-Leong Seow, ed., p. 145.
11. Ibid., p. 145.
12. Ched Myers, Marie Dennis, Joesph Nangle, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Stuart Taylor, ed. by Karen Lattea, *Say to This Mountain Mark's Story of Discipleship*, p. 85.
13. Howard W. Stone, "The Changing Times: A Case for Brief Pastoral Counseling within Strategies For Brief Pastoral Counseling", Howard W. Stone, ed., p. 15.
14. Cameron Brett, "A Pastoral Response to the Special Committee Re: Rosedale Overture", published in A New Network, The bulletin of A New Network within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, June 2001.
15. Andrew Lester and Howard W. Stone, "Helping Parishoners Envision the Future within Strategies For Brief Pastoral Counseling", Howard W. Stone, ed., p. 58.
16. A.K.M. Adam, "Disciples Together, Constantly within Homosexuality and Christian Community", Choon-Leong Seow, ed., p. 123.

17. Jan James, "The Power of Valuing in Brief Pastoral Counseling, within Strategies For Brief Pastoral Counseling", Howard W. Stone, ed., p. 23.
18. What We Wish We Had Known, Breaking the Silence, Moving Toward Understanding, A Resource for Individuals and Families, First Tuesday Group The Presbyterian Church Mt. Kisco, New York, p. 20.
19. Ontario Association of Social Workers' Statement of Principles on Promoting Equity For Lesbians and Gays, February 25, 1995, p. 2.
20. The Book of Common Worship, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1991, p. 130.
21. *Listening... Understanding Human Sexuality*, published by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, January 2003.
22. New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House.

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Wendy Paterson  
Convener

### **Amended Recommendation No. 5 (p. 44)**

That congregations, presbyteries and their ministries be urged to be and to create safe spaces in which people of differing sexual orientations, and with differing views on sexual orientation, may encounter each other in prayer, bible study, story-telling, and truth-telling in a spirit of love, toward mutual understanding and Christian community.

### **Amended Recommendation No. 7 (p. 44-45)**

That the committee be discharged with the thanks of the court.