

# Guide to Understanding Reports about Sexuality

For commissioners to the  
2017 General Assembly



## Who can give me more information at GA?

### Convenors of Committees:

- The Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand, Convener of the Committee on Church Doctrine
- The Rev. Dr. Tom Billard, Convener of the Life and Mission Agency Committee

### Staff

- Stephen Allen, Associate Secretary of the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries)
- The Rev. Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk of the General Assembly
- Katharine Masterton, Program Coordinator, Justice Ministries
- The Rev. Don Muir, Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly
- The Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald, General Secretary of the Life and Mission Agency

This resource has been prepared for commissioners to the General Assembly (2017) through the cooperation of the Life and Mission Agency and the Committee on Church Doctrine. It is meant to help prepare commissioners for discussion about the reports that respond to overtures about sexuality.

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## Abbreviations

CCD: The Committee on Church Doctrine  
 GA: General Assembly  
 LGBTQ: people of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community  
 LMA: Life and Mission Agency  
 PCC: The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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## Where have we been?

- 1969 GA supports proposed federal legislation that decriminalizes homosexual activity
- 1994 GA receives a report with a statement on homosexuality submitted by the CCD
- 1997 GA appoints a committee to clarify the roles of homosexual and lesbian persons in the church. Interim reports are presented to each assembly from 1998 to 2002.
- 2003 The final report of the Committee appointed in 1997 is received by the GA.
- 2015 23 overtures on sexuality received by GA and referred to CCD and/or the LMA.  
GA commissioners participate in facilitated small group discussions at Assembly. GA instructs the CCD and LMA to jointly prepare a study guide on human sexuality. This was titled “Body, Mind and Soul,” published October 31, 2015.
- 2016 Four overtures on sexuality are received by the GA and referred to the LMA and/or CCD.  
A summary of feedback from the church on sexuality is prepared by the LMA and adopted by GA. CCD and LMA meet several times as both bodies prepare responses to the overtures in 2016.

## Why is the church spending so much time talking about sexuality?

In 2015, the PCC began to reexamine the matter of sexuality and marriage as a result of overtures submitted to the GA by congregations and presbyteries across the country. The PCC has received significantly more overtures about sexuality than any other in its history, except the ordination of women. The overtures that initiated the discussion we are now having had various, different and competing requests in their prayers.

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## Who responded to the overtures?

The responses to the overtures have been written and submitted by the CCD and by the LMA. The reports of these committees will be presented by The Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand (CCD) and the Rev. Dr. Tom Billard (LMA).

## Where can I find the response to the overtures?

This year, there are three responses to the overtures in the book of reports. The recommendations for all reports about sexuality are found on pages 20.1.1 – 20.1.2. The report submitted jointly by the CCD and the LMA begins on 20.1.3 and ends on 20.1.6. The report from the CCD is found at 20.1.6 – 20.1.64. The report of the LMA is at 20.1.64 – 20.1.75.

## What is in each of the reports?

### The joint report

The joint report is found on pages 20.1.3 – 20.1.6. The LMA and CCD submitted this report jointly. The joint report covers three topics:

1. How the overtures were referred by the GA since 2015
2. The history of the consultation between the CCD and the LMA.
3. Repentance of Homophobia: the LMA and the CCD recognize that the church has failed to fulfill the resolution “to listen to and share the very real pain of homosexuals and their families” that was adopted by the PCC in 1994 (see page 267 of the 1994 Acts and Proceedings) and failed in its call “to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supportive community” (6:23, A&P 1994, 267).

### What is an overture?

An overture is a proposal or request submitted by a lower court (or by a member or members of the court) seeking the enactment of a law, rule or some action.  
See section 67 of the Book of Forms.

The joint report has recommendations that invite the church to acknowledge its homophobia, to listen to the voices of LGBTQ people in the church and eventually consider an appropriate response, such as a confession, apology and/or other appropriate responses.

**Other documents about sexuality**

Other documents about sexuality created by the PCC can be found at [presbyterian.ca/sexuality](http://presbyterian.ca/sexuality)

**Descriptions of the separate reports submitted by the LMA and the CCD to GA**

Both the LMA and the CCD reports review and reference the Bible carefully and acknowledge the authority of the scriptures and demonstrate a deep desire to faithfully interpret them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both reports ask the church to continue to study the issue of marriage and same sex couples in the year ahead.

There are differences in approach between the reports. The CCD believes that the PCC needs to further consider scriptural arguments for maintaining our current understanding of marriage and for changing that understanding.

Based on a scriptural and theological study, the LMA presents a proposal that moves towards greater inclusion. These differences are not mutually exclusive. Commissioners do not necessarily need to choose between the CCD or LMA approaches.

**CCD**

The report from the CCD begins on page 20.1.6 and has two main components with a number of secondary recommendations. There are two substantive biblical and theological treatments seeking clarity on what the Bible says about marriage. One finds that the subordinate standards are substantially correct in defining marriage as between a man and a woman. The other argues that scripture presents a model of covenantal relationship that same sex individuals might participate in as well as heterosexual couples. A short document follows that aims to help commissioners and the PCC consider these two arguments.

**LMA**

The report from the LMA begins on page 20.1.64 with a review of the biblical material before moving on to discuss the arc of the gospel ministry as taught and lived by Christ. Then the report considers the church's decisions on similar matters in the past. The report recommends that the GA ask the church to study the definition of marriage in the year ahead to determine if it wishes to make any changes or not. The report also recommends that the GA allow ministers who feel that it is pastorally appropriate to bless marriages between two people of the same sex who have been married by civil authorities.

**Why are there three responses to the overtures?**

Since 2015, overtures have been referred in the following ways:

- 13 overtures to both CCD and LMA
- 3 overtures to CCD in consultation with LMA (Justice)
- 10 overtures to CCD alone
- 2 overtures to LMA (Justice)

The commissioners of the GA have requested that both the CCD and the LMA (Justice) write responses to the overtures for the GA to consider.

**Did the committees work together?**

Yes. Members of the committees consulted regularly during the past year, met together and shared documents. The two groups cooperated to create the joint report and will report together. Additionally, the two bodies cooperated in 2015 to create a process of discussion for GA and this year they collaborated to help commissioners understand the reports and process by offering question-and-answer opportunities and working toward presenting their reports together.

**How can I get a copy of *Body, Mind and Soul*?**

You can download and read *Body, Mind and Soul* at [presbyterian.ca/body-mind-soul](http://presbyterian.ca/body-mind-soul)

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## Did the committees consult with people in the church?

Yes. Both bodies received and read feedback submitted by over 600 people, sessions, groups and courts across the church. The committees participated in wider conversations and consultations with people in the church. Additionally, the members of each committee are named by the GA and are from congregations across the country.

## Who decides what happens next?

Commissioners of the GA pray, study, ask questions and discern together the mind of Christ and the best way forward for the church.

## How has the church been prepared for the discussion?

In 2015, the commissioners of the GA requested that the CCD and LMA create a study document to support congregations and courts of the church as they studied the topic of sexuality. The study document entitled *Body, Mind and Soul* has been available since October 2015, and both the LMA and the CCD have received and read over 600 pieces of feedback from the church about sexuality. Funds were made available to every presbytery to provide discussions and educational events.

### Pastoral and Spiritual Care

Some of the conversations about sexuality may be difficult. There will be opportunities for prayer and chaplains will be identified and available at GA to provide support.

## How will commissioners be further equipped to understand the contents of the report and the process at GA?

There will also be casual question-and-answer forums at GA on Monday at lunchtime and Tuesday during breakfast. And there will be lots of opportunities to ask questions, discuss the reports, debate and propose ways forward during the Assembly.

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## How will the reports be dealt with at GA?

The reports from the LMA and the CCD about sexuality will be presented together. The moderator, clerks of GA, conveners of CCD and the LMA have worked together to propose ways of presenting the reports and recommendations that will make things as easy and clear as possible for commissioners. Recommendations will be grouped together in ways that make sense. For example, recommendations 3 and 10 are very similar and will appear on the docket together. Notwithstanding any other decisions, actions and proposals of the GA, the LMA and CCD will propose that recommendations be considered in the following order:

- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| a. Rec 3, 10 and 6     | d. Rec 11, 12 and 13 |
| b. Rec 1 and 2         | e. Rec 7 and 8       |
| c. Rec 4, 5, 14 and 15 | f. Rec 9 and 16      |

## Covenantal pledges for discussions about issues of sexuality

Adapted in part from Guidelines for Discussion produced by the Human Sexuality Task Force, Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia

- We acknowledge that the full range of issues of human sexuality exists within the church;
- We acknowledge that gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer persons (as well as members of other sexual minorities\*) are full and faithful members of the Church;
- We will always assume that gay or lesbian persons (or members of other sexual minorities\*) are present;
- While we may disagree on issues, we will use language which respects the dignity and worth of others and the truth of their lives;
- We will respect the right of people to 'name' themselves and their experience;
- We will only ask questions that we would be prepared to respond to ourselves;
- We will respect people's privacy;
- We will practice confidentiality;
- We will respect people's integrity as followers of Jesus;
- We will be mindful and respectful of time.

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## Recommendations from Reports

The following two recommendations come from the report submitted jointly by the LMA and the CCD

### Recommendation No. 1

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada repent of homophobia and hypocrisy by establishing a special committee to: 1) create a safe and respectful environment in which LGBTQ people can tell stories of harm done to them; 2) listen to the stories told by LGBTQ people; 3) draft an appropriate response regarding homophobia within the denomination; 4) name concrete actions that the General Assembly consider implementing; and 5) report to a future General Assembly within the next 3 years. (see p. 20.1.6)

### Recommendation No. 2

That the terms of reference for the special committee be formulated in consultation with the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries). (see p. 20.1.6)

The following recommendations are proposed by the CCD

### Recommendation No. 3

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups “seek the peace and unity of Christ among [our] people and throughout the Holy Catholic Church” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it discerns the mind of Christ in the matter of sexuality before the church. (see p. 20.1.7)

### Recommendation No. 4

That the documents “The Historic Argument Concerning Human Sexuality” and “What the Bible teaches on Covenanted Monogamous Same-sex Relationships” be commended to the agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for study and response to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the General Assembly Office by January 31, 2018. (see p. 20.1.62)

### Recommendation No. 5

That the document “Where from Here?” be sent to the agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees, groups and other bodies of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for study and report back to the Committee on Church Doctrine by January 31, 2018. (see p. 20.1.62)

### Recommendation No. 6

That the above be the response to Overture No. 7, 2017 re to table amendments on same-sex marriage for ten years. (see p. 20.1.63) Sexuality Overtures, Joint Report (cont'd) – 2017 Page 20.1.2

### Recommendation No. 7

That the Committee on Church Doctrine undertake a thorough study of the nature of the unity of the church and report to the General Assembly 2018. (see p. 20.1.63)

### Recommendation No. 8

That the above recommendation be an interim response to Overture No. 6, 2017 re legislation re congregations wishing to leave the denomination. (see p. 20.1.63)

### Recommendation No. 9

That the above report be an interim response to Overture Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 35, 2015; and grant permission to report on the various matters raised in these overtures on the above timeline given. (see p. 20.1.64)

The following recommendations come from the LMA report

### Recommendation No. 10

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups seek the unity of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it discerns the mind of Christ in the matter of sexuality before the church. (see p. 20.1.73)

### Recommendation No. 11

That clergy in The Presbyterian Church in Canada be permitted for pastoral reasons to bless same sex marriages conducted by civil authorities. (see p. 20.1.73)

### Recommendation No. 12

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirm the freedom of conscience and action of clergy who do not wish to bless same sex civil marriages conducted by civil authorities. (see p. 20.1.73)

### Recommendation No. 13

That the Life and Mission Agency prepare orders of worship for the blessing of same sex marriages conducted by civil authorities. (see p. 20.1.73)

### Recommendation No. 14

That the following recommendation and the related portions of the above report be sent to sessions, presbyteries and synods for study and report back to the Life and Mission Agency by January 31, 2018 for consideration by the 144th General Assembly (2018). That being in a same sex civil marriage shall not be a reason to bar any person from candidacy or ordination as a minister of Word and Sacraments, elder, or designation of a diaconal minister. (see p. 20.1.73)

### Recommendation No. 15

That the following proposed change to the definition of marriage and the related portions of the above report be sent to sessions, presbyteries, and synods for study and report back to the Life and Mission Agency by January 31, 2018 for consideration by the 144th General Assembly (2018). Christian marriage is a union in Christ whereby two individuals, regardless of gender, become one in the sight of God. (see p. 20.1.73)

### Recommendation No. 16

That this report be the response to overtures: 4(2015); 5(2015); 13(2016); 15(2015); 15(2016); 21(2015); 21(2016); 23(2015); 24(2015); 26(2015); 29(2015); 30(2015); 31(2015); 32(2015); 33(2015); 35(2015). (see p. 20.1.73)