

The Presbyterian Church in Canada L'Église presbytérienne au Canada



MODERATOR OF THE 2017 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Peter Bush

August 28, 2017

TO: Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and colleges of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

FROM: Committee on Church Doctrine and Life and Mission Agency

RE: Reports on Sexuality Referred for Study and Report

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to study the matter of sexuality. This letter provides an update on the process so far, and offers support as the church studies the reports referred by the General Assembly for further study this year.

The documents sent for study and report by the General Assembly to sessions, presbyteries, synods and colleges are sizable and working with them may be daunting. We hope the information and offers of assistance in this letter will help courts and colleges as they prepare their responses.

Why are we talking about sexuality?

In 2015, The Presbyterian Church in Canada began re-examining the matter of sexuality and marriage as a result of overtures submitted to the General Assembly by courts of the church. The overtures that initiated the continuation of the discussions contained a variety of different and competing requests.

Who responded to the overtures?

Since 2015, General Assemblies referred the overtures to the Committee on Church Doctrine (CCD) and to the Life and Mission Agency (LMA). The two bodies consulted frequently since 2015 and have met together periodically to consult.

Who decided what would happen with the responses to the overtures?

The reports of the two committees were accepted and discussed by the commissioners of the General Assembly in June 2017. Together, the commissioners determined the next actions the church should take in its discernment.

What did the General Assembly decide?

The General Assembly referred sections of the reports written by the LMA and CCD to sessions, presbyteries, synods and the colleges of the church for study and report by January 31, 2018.

What is in the reports?

The reports of both the CCD and the LMA acknowledge the authority of the scriptures and make a careful review and study of the Bible. The reports demonstrate a deep desire to faithfully interpret the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the church today.

The report from the CCD

The report from the CCD has two substantive biblical and theological treatments of the topic 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 couples might participate in as well as heterosexual couples. "The Way Ahead" is a document that should help courts navigate and imagine some of the potential implications of these two documents.

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall and The Rev. Donald Muir

The report from the LMA

The report from the LMA begins with a review of the biblical material before moving on to discuss the arc of the gospel ministry as taught and lived by Christ. The report then considers the church's decisions on similar matters in the past. The report concludes with an invitation for the church to consider changes to its current practice regarding same-sex unions.

Each of the reports in this package is being translated into Korean and will be available online at presbyterian.ca/referrals.

What happens next?

Sessions, presbyteries, synods and colleges will study the documents and report their impressions and reflections to the LMA and CCD to consider as part of their future discernment. The two committees will continue to consult and cooperate with each other to prepare reports for the 2018 General Assembly.

How do the courts and colleges of the church submit their responses?

The committees will receive and consider all responses from the colleges and courts of the church in any format that is submitted by January 31, 2018. The CCD has created a survey that will be available in the fall for the courts and colleges to use. The survey format helps the CCD and the LMA respond wisely and with precision because it includes standardized questions. The survey will also have sections for open-ended comments to capture all responses. Please send all responses to survey@presbyterian.ca.

Is there support during the period of study?

The CCD and the LMA will host online consultations in the fall of 2017 to help equip courts and colleges of the church as they plan discussions. A schedule of online consultations will be published on the PCC website and Facebook page, and sent to clerks of presbyteries for wider circulation to sessions.

Additional documents related to sexuality that can support conversations about sexuality are available at presbyterian.ca/sexuality.

Two years ago, the LMA offered up to \$1,000 to each presbytery to support study on this matter. Funds are still available to presbyteries that have not yet requested them for this purpose.

Please submit questions or requests for further clarification and information to survey@presbyterian.ca.

The General Assembly adopted two recommendations this year that urged the church to seek the unity of Christ through 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. We pray that the courts and colleges of the church feel a strong sense of God's presence, the leading of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of Christ in this time of study and discernment.

In Christ,

The Committee on Church Doctrine

The Life and Mission Agency