



MODERATOR OF THE 2017 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Peter Bush

August 24, 2017

To the people of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ,

The 2017 General Assembly sent a number of reports to be discussed and reflected on by presbyteries, sessions, congregations, and committees in church. The reports deal with important matters including human sexuality, gender identity, and death and dying. All of which are challenging to talk about.

I pray for the church as these conversations take place. I ask two things of the people of the church during the coming months as they engage in these conversations.

First, that we all would be much in prayer: Praying the God of wisdom and discernment would guide our listening and our speaking; Praying that in the midst of what may seem like noise and argument the Holy Spirit will be heard; and Praying that we would remember all glory and honour and praise belongs to Jesus Christ.

Second, I hope the church might find the following a useful invitation to how we will speak and listen in presbyteries, sessions, congregations, and committees as these important matters are discussed and reflected upon.

1. All those participating in these conversations are part of the church of Jesus Christ, part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We are family together, and we are to treat each other as such. The writer of I Timothy drove this point home when he advised Timothy to treat those in church who were older than Timothy as fathers and mothers, and those Timothy's age and younger as sisters and brothers. When we speak, we are speaking to our spiritual fathers and mothers, our spiritual sisters and brothers.
2. We are invited to exercise humility. We are finite, flawed beings with a history of making serious mistakes – especially when it comes to complex and emotional subjects. We are called to enter these conversations with humble spirits. We are invited to reflect on Jesus' criticism of religious people who in their arrogance were unable to see spiritual truth. Humility causes us to recognize our own need for the redeeming, forgiving love of Jesus Christ.
3. We are invited to avoid using dismissive words and phrases. It may feel good to score rhetorical points and get high fives from "your side," but doing so leads to polarized discussions. These words range from loaded ones like "heretic" and "fundamentalist" to the seemingly innocent but equally loaded word, "they". We, Canadian Presbyterians, have a unique way of shutting down any argument – we simply say the other side is following "a divisive course" – it is our code word for saying "They (whoever "they" is) are not worthy of respect."
4. The conversations will be about important matters, about which people feel deeply and have reflected upon seriously. In such a context ideas and opinions we disagree with will be voiced. It is not the place of the church to shield you from ideas and opinions you find unwelcome, uncomfortable, or disagreeable. Just because an idea is hard to deal with does not mean the idea should not be expressed, if it is spoken in appropriate language.

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

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May God grant The Presbyterian Church in Canada and each of us the grace and insight the church and we need to faithfully do the work we have been called to do.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Bush". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter Bush
Moderator
2017 General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada